



## The Effect of Inclusive Leadership on Student Participation and Retention in Distance Higher Education Programs

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### ABSTRACT:

Distance higher education (PJJ) has become an increasingly popular option for many people, especially for those who do not have access to traditional higher education. This research aims to analyze the influence of inclusive leadership on student participation in the PJJ program. This research uses quantitative methods with a survey approach. Data was collected through surveys using questionnaires and literature studies. The data that has been collected is then analyzed using the path coefficient test with SEM PLS. The research results show that inclusive leadership has a positive effect on student participation in distance higher education programs with a P value ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ). In addition, inclusive leadership has a positive effect on student retention in distance higher education programs with a P value of P ( $0.000 < 0.05$ ). Students who feel listened to and appreciated by leaders tend to be more actively involved in academic activities. Additionally, students who feel support and inclusion from leaders are more likely to remain enrolled and complete the program.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Leadership, Participation, Retention, Students, Distance Higher Education

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### INTRODUCTION

Learning continues to develop over time (Alexander, 2001; Mintii et al., 2021), included in the learning model applied in higher education (Taylor, 1994). Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has forced the learning system to make adjustments (Bhavya Bhasin et al., 2021; Hassan, 2022). One form of adjustment is the implementation of online learning (Maatuk et al., 2022). Basically, the principle of online learning is distance learning (PJJ) (Bernard et al., 2000); Supriadin & Sakti, 2021). PJJ is an educational system where the learning process is carried out without requiring the physical presence of students on campus continuously (Firat & Bozkurt, 2020). PJJ allows students to access learning materials (Zamari et al., 2012),

interact with lecturers, and take exams from different locations (Singh et al., 2020), often through digital platforms and communication technology (Widyastuti, 2021).

The Director General of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Nizam, stated that 98 percent of universities throughout Indonesia have implemented online learning. A survey conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture on 237,193 respondents out of a total of 8,325,013 students, based on the Higher Education Database (PPDiikti), showed that 13.84 percent of students rated the quality of online lectures as very good, 45.56 percent rated it as good, 23.54 percent rated it as mediocre, 10.95 percent rated it bad, and 2.97 percent rated it very bad (CNN, 2020).

The main challenge in distance education (PJJ) is the low level of student participation and retention (Fisher & Baird, 2005). Participation Is A person's involvement in a situation, either mentally, mentally, emotionally, or emotionally, which encourages him to contribute to efforts to achieve predetermined goals and take responsibility for activities to achieve those goals (Padilla Rodriguez et al., 2020) ; Panjaitan, 2018). Meanwhile, student retention is the ability of an educational institution to retain students to remain enrolled and continue their studies until they complete the academic program they follow (Mulyana & Ayuni, 2014).

Many PJJ students feel isolated and less motivated to complete their study programs (California, 2016). Factors such as lack of social interaction, difficulty in accessing learning materials, and Limitations support and guidance from Tutor often causes students to have difficulty in maintaining their involvement in the learning process (Radovan, 2011). As a result, many college students do not successfully complete their programs, leading to low retention rates in distance education programs (Goulimaris, 2015).

One of the efforts to overcome these challenges is with exclusive leadership. Exclusive leadership is a leadership style that tends to limit the participation and involvement of team or organization members in decision-making and work processes (Mousa & Ayoubi, 2019). Leaders with this style often rely on their own authority (Adapa & Sheridan, 2018) and make decisions centrally without involving input from team members (Putra, 2019).

The novelty of this research is from the research subject, namely students in distance higher education programs who have never been researched before in terms of the influence of inclusive leadership on participation and retention. This study enriches the literature on inclusive leadership by providing empirical evidence of its influence on student participation and retention in the context of distance higher education, which can be the basis for further theoretical development in this area. This study aims to analyze the influence of inclusive leadership on student participation in the PJJ program.

## RESEARCH METHODS

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This study uses a quantitative method with a survey approach. The quantitative method is a research approach that uses numerical data and statistical techniques to test hypotheses and answer research questions. The main goal of this method is to measure the three variables and analyze the relationship between the variables objectively and measurably (Haig & Haigm 2018). Data was collected through surveys using questionnaires and literature studies. The population of this study is all PJJ students in Indonesia. The sample of this study was 99 PJJ students who were randomly selected. The collected data was then analyzed using a path coefficient test with SEM PLS. Based on this description, the researcher has a hypothetical design:

H1: There is a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and student participation in the PJJ program.

H2: There is a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and student retention in the PJJ program.

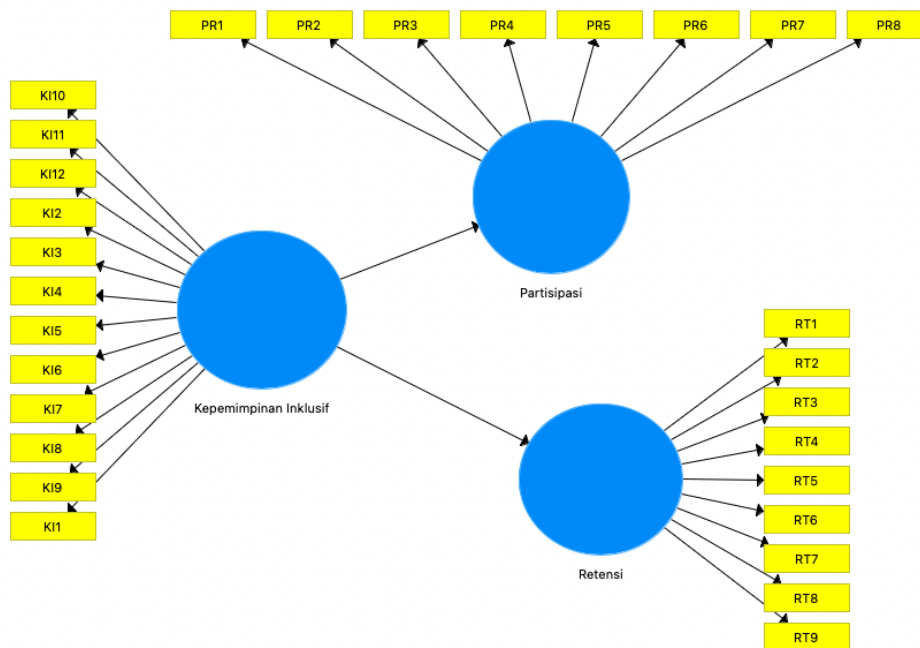


Figure 1. Research Outline

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The Outer Model is a part of the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis that is used to measure the relationship between latent variables (constructs) and the indicators that

measure them. This model focuses on the validity and reliability of these indicators in measuring the intended construct.

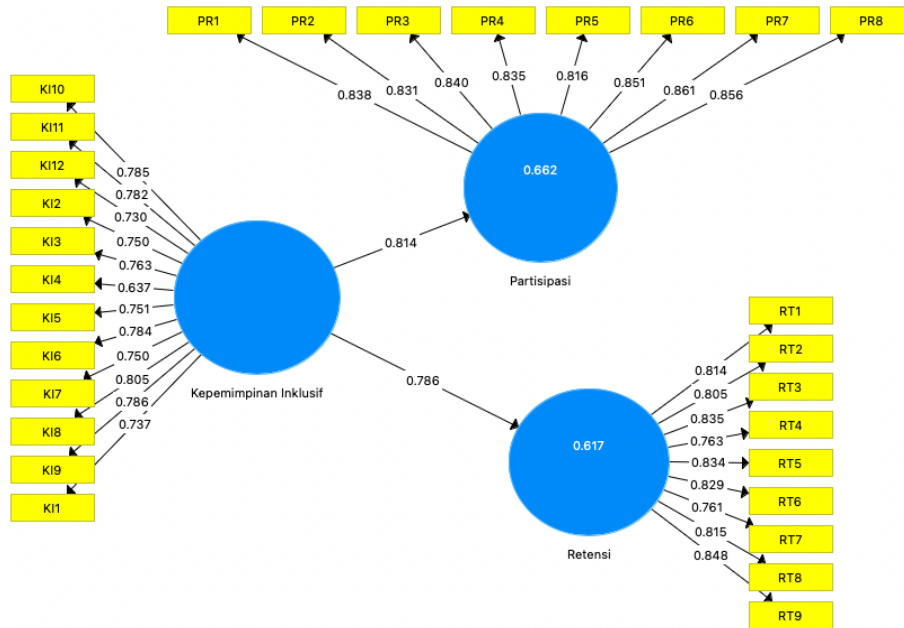


Figure 2. Output Outer Model

Based on data processing with SEM-PLS 3.0 Professional, the following outer model values are produced:

Table 1. Outer Loading			
	Inclusive Leadership	Partisipasi	Retention
KI10	0,785		
KI11	0,782		
KI12	0,730		
KI2	0,750		
KI3	0,763		
KI4	0,637		
KI5	0,751		
KI6	0,784		
KI7	0,750		
KI8	0,805		
KI9	0,786		
KI1	0,737		

PR1	0,838
PR2	0,831
PR3	0,840
PR4	0,835
PR5	0,816
PR6	0,851
PR7	0,861
PR8	0,856
RT1	0,814
RT2	0,805
RT3	0,835
RT4	0,763
RT5	0,834
RT6	0,829
RT7	0,761
RT8	0,815
RT9	0,848

Table 1 shows that the outer loading values of all indicators in the variables of inclusive leadership, participation, and retention have reached values above the critical limit, which is > 0.5. A high loading factor value indicates a strong relationship between the indicator and the latent variable being measured.

**Table 2. Average Variances Extracted**

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Inclusive Leadership	0,572
Partisipasi	0,707
Retention	0,660

In table 2, the AVE value is also above 0.5, and the cross loading value shows that the correlation between the construct and the indicator in the measure variable is greater than the correlation between the construct and other indicators. So it can be concluded that all indicators used in this study have met the criteria of discriminant and convergent validity, so they are declared valid.

**Table 3. Validity of Discrimination**

Inclusive	Partisipasi	Retention
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<b>Leadership</b>			
<b>Inclusive Leadership</b>	0,756		
<b>Partisipasi</b>	0,814	0,841	
<b>Retention</b>	0,786	0,825	0,812

Based on table 3 above, it can be seen that all indicators that make up each variable in this study have met the validity of discrimination. This is shown by the cross loading value which shows that the correlation value between the construct and its indicator is greater than the correlation value between the construct and other indicators.

**Table 4. Composite Reliability**

	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Composite Reliability</b>
<b>Inclusive Leadership</b>	0,931	0,941
<b>Partisipasi</b>	0,941	0,951
<b>Retention</b>	0,935	0,946

Based on the results of the calculations in table 4, it is known that all Cronbach's Alpha values are above 0.60 (CA > 0.60) and all Composite Reliability values are also above 0.70 (CR > 0.70). Thus, it can be concluded that all the constructs in this study have good reliability and are declared reliable.

**Model Struktural (Inner Model)**

The Structural Model (Inner Model) is a part of the structural equation model analysis (SEM) that is used to assess the relationship between latent constructs (latent variables) in research. The structural model focuses on how these latent variables interact with each other or affect each other based on a hypothesis that has been formulated.

**Table 5. R-Square**

	<b>R Square</b>	<b>R Square Adjusted</b>
<b>Partisipasi</b>	0,662	0,659
<b>Retention</b>	0,617	0,613

Based on the results of the R-Square calculation shown in Table 5, it is known that the Inclusive Leadership variable has an influence on the participation variable by 66.2%. In addition, Inclusive Leadership also has an influence on the retention variable by 61.7%. The rest is influenced by other variables outside the research that has been conducted.

**Table 6. Path Coefficients**

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values
<b>Inclusive Leadership -&gt; Participation</b>	0,814	0,798	0,099	8,189	0,000
<b>Inclusive Leadership -&gt; Retention</b>	0,786	0,779	0,098	8,036	0,000

The Path Coefficients test will be a reference for conducting a hypothesis test in this study with the criteria that have been explained, namely the hypothesis is accepted if the value is  $P < 0.05$ , while the hypothesis is rejected if the value in the P column  $> 0.05$ . The results of testing the hypothesis proposed in this study are as follows:

1. H1: Inclusive leadership has a positive effect on student participation in distance higher education programs with a t-statistical value of 8.189 and a P value of 0.000, which means  $P < 0.05$ , which means the hypothesis is accepted.
2. H2: Inclusive leadership has a positive effect on student retention in distance higher education programs with a t-statistical value of 8.036 and a P value of 0.000, which means a  $P < 0.05$ , which means the hypothesis is accepted.

## Discussion

### ***Inclusive Leadership has an effect on student participation***

The results of the study showed that inclusive leadership had an effect on student participation in the distance education program with a t-statistical value of 8.189 and a P value of 0.000 which means  $P < 0.05$ , which means the hypothesis was accepted. Inclusive leadership plays an important role in increasing student participation in distance higher education programs. Inclusive leaders create an open, welcoming, and supportive learning environment for all students, regardless of their background. This encourages students to participate more actively in the learning process. Additionally, inclusive leadership also ensures that every student feels valued and listened to, which in turn increases their motivation to engage more deeply. Previous research by (Rawat et al., 2021) found that inclusive leadership helps create worker participation, and engagement can lead employees to better performance. Another study by (Carmeli et al., 2010) shows that inclusive leadership is positively related to psychological safety, which in turn gives rise to employee involvement in creative work.

### ***Inclusive Leadership Affects Student Retention***

The results of the study showed that Inclusive leadership had an effect on student retention in the distance education program with a t-statistical value of 8,036, and a P value of 0.000 which means  $P < 0.05$  which means the hypothesis is accepted. Inclusive leadership has a significant impact on student retention in distance higher education programs. Inclusive leaders seek to create an environment that is supportive, respects diversity and cares about the

individual needs of each student. Students feel more valued and motivated to continue their studies. Inclusive leadership also provides the emotional and academic support students need to overcome the challenges they face in distance learning. Additionally, by ensuring that all students feel welcome and have equal access to educational resources, inclusive leadership helps reduce dropout rates and increase retention rates. Previous research by (Yasin et al., 2023) shows that inclusive leadership positively influences the alignment of leaders' goals, which in turn positively influences organizational commitment. Furthermore, organizational commitment has a negative influence on the intention to move. In addition, these results provide support for the mediating effect of follower-leader goal alignment on the relationship between inclusive leadership and organizational commitment, and the mediating effect of organizational commitment on the relationship between follower-leader goal alignment and moving intention.

## CONCLUSION

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The results showed that inclusive leadership had a significant positive influence on student participation in distance higher education programs, with a P value of 0.000 which was smaller than 0.05. In addition, inclusive leadership also has a positive effect on student retention in the program, with a P value of 0.000, smaller than 0.05. Students who feel listened to and valued by leaders tend to be more actively involved in academic activities. In addition, students who feel support and inclusion from leaders are more likely to stay enrolled and complete their educational programs.

Future studies may explore the role of moderation and mediation variables in the relationship between inclusive leadership and student participation and retention. Variables such as intrinsic motivation, academic engagement, and social support can provide a more comprehensive understanding. Further research can examine the long-term effects of inclusive leadership on student participation and retention. Longitudinal studies will help understand how the effects of inclusive leadership develop over time and how this impacts long-term academic success.

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