

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AS A STRATEGIC CHOICE FOR CADRE DEVELOPMENT TO REVITALIZE TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF ASPEK INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the formulation and implementation of an organisation's strategic choices in improving the quality of human resources in a structured manner, based on a case study of the Indonesian Trade Union Association (ASPEK). The changing landscape of industrial relations in the modern industrial era has required trade union organisations to transform from a confrontational approach towards the sustainable strengthening of human resource capacity. By adopting *Strategic Choice Theory* as the primary analytical framework, this study analyzes how the Indonesian Trade Union Association (ASPEK Indonesia) utilizes its strategic autonomy to respond to the challenges of automation and changes in the world of work through the management of cadre training. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, research data was collected through in-depth interviews with senior union leaders and practitioners, participatory observation of training activities, analysis of official organizational documents, and supporting data on membership characteristics. The main findings of the research indicate that the organisation's cadre development strategy operates synergistically across three decision-making levels: the *strategic level*, where leadership sets competency-based policy directions and allocates investment for digital schools; the *functional level*, which translates these policies into thematic training programs, competency certification, and the digitalization of governance; and the *workplace level*, which implements inclusive mentoring and egalitarian social dialogue at company level. This study concludes that educational management serves as a core strategic choice for ASPEK Indonesia to maintain relevance, enhance professionalism, and strengthen collective bargaining capacity and strategic partnerships amidst labour market dynamics.

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INTRODUCTION

As we enter the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the transition toward Society 5.0, the world of work faces multidimensional pressures for transformation. Automation, artificial intelligence, and the digitization of the service sector have altered the competency requirements demanded of workers, while at the same time workers' collective bargaining power at the company level tends to weaken. Data from the Ministry of Manpower show a 23% decline in industrial relations disputes resolved through bipartite mechanisms over the past three years, an indication that conventional dialogue mechanisms are increasingly losing their effectiveness amid rapidly changing labor

(Kemnaker RI, 2025). This phenomenon is exacerbated by the proliferation of gig economy-based work arrangements and “partner” status, which blur the boundaries of conventional labor law protections. In this context, the expectations of union members have shifted. Demands no longer revolve exclusively around the issue of the minimum wage but have expanded to include the need for skills enhancement (upskilling and reskilling), career sustainability, and labor protection in the digital age (Al Ayubbi, 2024). Emphasizes that leadership and institutional support are prerequisites for enhancing workforce skills in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, as business pressures alone are insufficient to drive workforce readiness without coordinated institutional initiatives. Within this framework, labor unions are called upon to play a dual role: as representatives of workers’ collective interests and as strategic partners in human resource development (Vong, 2025).

Regulatory-wise, the existence of labor unions in Indonesia is protected by Law No. 21 of 2000 on Labor Unions, which provides a legal framework for workers to engage in negotiations, dialogue, and discussions with employers to achieve mutual well-being (Al Ayubbi, 2024). However, in the dominant public perception, labor unions are still often viewed as synonymous with confrontational advocacy, demonstrations, and strikes. In fact, according to Strategic Choice Theory developed by Kochan, Katz, and McKersie (Kochan, 1986), an organization possesses the autonomy (discretion) to determine its direction and make strategic decisions that are not entirely dictated by external environmental pressures. The core argument of this theory is that actors within the industrial relations system, including labor unions, are active agents and not merely objects driven by structural forces (Freege, 2003).

It is this phenomenon that makes the Indonesian Trade Union Association (ASPEK Indonesia) an interesting subject for study. ASPEK Indonesia, as a national federation of service-sector trade unions established on November 11, 1998, and officially transformed into a confederation on May 1, 2025, explicitly prioritizes the enhancement of workforce quality as a key institutional program. ASPEK Indonesia’s 2024 National Working Meeting emphasized the strengthening of workers’ human resource capacity as an organizational strategy, with 40% of the total ILO budget allocated to education and leadership development programs. This policy is relatively unpopular within the tradition of the labor movement, as it diverts a significant portion of the organization’s resources from mass actions toward long-term educational investments. This choice represents a paradigm shift from mass-based unionism toward competency-based unionism, which, within the framework of strategic management, can be understood as a form of planned managerial leadership development (DPP ASPEK Indonesia, 2012).

Academic studies on trade union organisations in Indonesia have so far been dominated by topics relating to labour disputes, dismissals and wage policies (Yulianti, 2024; Suwito, 2004; Wilmers, 2017) examines the strategic role of trade unions in protecting workers’ rights and welfare, or merely reviews the problems faced by agricultural and mining workers’ unions, as previously discussed by Baihaqi (Ahmad Fauzan, 2026), but has not yet addressed the dimension of educational management as a strategic instrument. Research specifically analysing the rationale behind the selection of educational and leadership development strategies within trade union organisations—particularly through a multilevel strategic decision-making approach—remains very limited. Much of the human resource management literature also focuses on HR management in profit-oriented companies, whereas non-profit organisations such as trade unions present their own complexities in HR management that require separate analysis (Chandler, 1962).

Based on this background, this article aims to analyze ASPEK Indonesia’s educational management in enhancing the quality of its workforce using Strategic Choice Theory as an analytical framework. Specifically, this study seeks to answer three questions: (1) How does ASPEK Indonesia formulate strategic choices for enhancing human resource quality at the strategic level (top leadership)?; (2) How are these choices translated into concrete programs at the functional level?; and (3) What are the implementation and tangible impacts of these strategies at the workplace level, in direct interaction with members? The novelty of this article lies in the application of the three-level framework of Strategic Choice Theory to a nonprofit organization based on voluntary membership—a subject that has rarely been empirically studied compared to its application to management-union relations at the corporate level.

Theoretically, Strategic Choice Theory emerged as a critical response to the dominance of John Dunlop’s systems theory (Dunlop, 1971), which viewed industrial relations as a system whose output—namely, a “web of rules”—is determined primarily by contextual factors such as technology, the labor market, and the distribution of power in society. Within Dunlop’s framework, actors tend to react to environmental pressures. Kochan, Katz, and McKersie (Kochan, 1986) challenged this deterministic assumption by demonstrating that significant variations among organizations—even those under similar market pressures—can only be explained by differences in the strategic choices made by the actors. The three decision-making levels in this framework—strategic, functional, and workplace—are not arranged in a

unidirectional hierarchy but rather exhibit reciprocal dynamics: decisions at the upper levels shape the range of options at lower levels, while pressures from lower levels can also drive shifts in orientation at the upper levels.

Although the original formulation of Strategic Choice Theory was designed to analyze industrial relations systems at the macro level—specifically, the strategic choices of the three main actors (management, labor unions, and the government)—a number of researchers following Kochan have expanded this framework to analyze the internal strategies of labor unions (union strategy), particularly in studies of union revitalization (Freege, 2003). In this expansion, the strategic level refers to the movement's orientation and the union leadership's vision; the functional level refers to the union's concrete programs; and the workplace level refers to organizing practices and direct support on the ground. This expanded application is well-justified, as Kochan, Katz, and McKersie themselves acknowledge that labor unions possess genuine strategic autonomy—they are not merely passive reactors to management pressure. From a strategic management perspective, Chandler (Chandler, 1962) further emphasizes that strategy is fundamentally a long-term choice made by organizational leaders to respond to a changing environment, without limiting its scope to profit-oriented organizations alone. Building on this theoretical foundation, this article examines educational management as the subject of strategic choice analysis within the ASPEK Indonesia organization, assuming that choices regarding education and leadership development reflect the organization's agency, rather than merely being passive responses to regulatory pressures or labor market forces.

Academically, this article is expected to contribute to two fields. First, in the field of strategic management of nonprofit organizations, by enriching the literature on the application of a multi-layered decision-making frameworks in voluntary membership-based organizations. Second, in the field of industrial relations studies in Indonesia, by providing a new empirical basis on how labor federations respond to the Industry 4.0 transition through education, rather than solely through confrontation. In practical terms, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for the leadership of ASPEK Indonesia and other labor union organizations in designing more measurable leadership development policies, as well as to provide input for government and business stakeholders in formulating collaborative efforts to strengthen workforce competencies—efforts that involve labor unions as strategic partners, rather than merely as parties to be consulted only after a conflict has arisen.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design, which was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore in depth and within context how ASPEK Indonesia implements its strategy for strengthening human resource quality. The qualitative approach aligns with Creswell's (Creswell, 2008), view that this method is used to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to social issues. The case study design was chosen because this research focuses on a single unit of analysis—namely, the ASPEK Indonesia organization—thereby enabling a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study (Denzin, 2018).

The research subject is ASPEK Indonesia as the national confederation of service sector labor unions, while the research object is the implementation of ASPEK Indonesia's strategic choices in enhancing the quality of its workforce, analyzed at three levels: strategic, functional, and workplace. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, taking into account their structural positions and direct involvement in both the formulation and implementation of HR strengthening policies. The research informants consisted of ASPEK Indonesia's top leadership (the President and Secretary-General), representatives of member labor unions, and labor union practitioners with extensive experience in organizing.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques, namely: (1) in-depth interviews with key informants to explore the meanings and rationales behind HR strengthening policies; (2) participatory observation of education and training (Diklat) activities, plenary meetings, and the organization's digital activities across various channels, including its official website and social media; and (3) document analysis, covering the Articles of Association/Bylaws, the 2022–2027 Strategic Plan (Renstra), Central Executive Board (DPP) Decisions, and the minutes of the 8th ASPEK Indonesia Congress. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and methodological triangulation, namely by comparing interview results with field observations and the organization's official documents (ASPEK, 16 Mei 2026; DPP ASPEK, 2022).

To supplement the primary data, this study also utilized secondary data in the form of a summary of membership characteristics for 103 labor unions affiliated with ASPEK Indonesia (a total of 28,082 members, as of July 2026), which includes information on members' educational backgrounds by union and by industrial sector (ASPEK, 16 Mei

2026). This data was used to strengthen the interpretation of ASPEK Indonesia's strategic choices in designing a tiered leadership development program tailored to the characteristics of its membership base. The data analysis technique followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (Miles, 2014), which consists of four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification. Data reduction was conducted by organizing the raw data into the three-level categories of Strategic Choice Theory (strategic, functional, workplace), thereby facilitating the presentation of the form of narratives and strategic choice matrix tables. Conclusions were drawn inductively while consistently cross-verifying data from interviews, observations, and documents throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile and Membership Base of ASPEK Indonesia

Between 1996 and 1998, South-East Asia—and Indonesia in particular—entered a period of economic crisis and political instability, culminating in the 1999 reforms in Indonesia. Amid this period of transition, new organisations began to emerge, such as trade unions in Indonesia (Rizkinta, 2025). ASPEK Indonesia is a national federation of service sector labor unions that was established on November 11, 1998, with its first congress held on February 10, 1999. Under the slogan “United, Struggling, Prosperous,” ASPEK Indonesia has been affiliated with UNI Global Union, headquartered in Nyon, Switzerland, since March 1999. The organization has built its vision and mission on the SIDURE principles (Solidarity, Independence, Democracy, Unity, Responsibility, and Equality), and has established partnerships with employers based on four core foundations: mutual understanding, mutual respect, mutual trust, and mutual benefit, in order to achieve win-win solutions through collective bargaining in a healthy and constructive dialogue (DPP ASPEK Indonesia, 2012).

On May 1, 2025, ASPEK Indonesia officially transformed into a confederation, representing more than 71,000 workers from dozens of company-level labor unions across the private sector and state-owned enterprises (SOEs), including banking, telecommunications, retail, postal and logistics, pharmaceuticals and healthcare, and mass media. The organization's power structure designates the National Congress as the highest decision-making forum, which involves top leadership (President/Chairperson, Secretary-General, and Treasurer) along with strategic divisions within the central executive board, as well as supporting structures such as Regional Leadership Councils (DPW), District Leadership Councils (DPD), union branches, and members. This tiered structural configuration serves as an institutional prerequisite for ASPEK Indonesia to implement a coordinated cadre development policy from the central level down to the company level (ASPEK, 16 Mei 2026; Rusdi, 2026).

ASPEK Indonesia's Educational Management

Data on the membership characteristics of ASPEK Indonesia's 103 member labor unions (28,082 members, as of May 2026) reveal a pattern that is not entirely linear between the number of unions and the number of members. In terms of the number of unions, 60 out of 103 unions (58.3%) have members with an average educational level of high school (SMA/SMK), while 43 unions (41.7%) are composed of members with bachelor's degrees. However, in terms of membership numbers, the composition is much more balanced: 14,896 people (53.0%) have a high school or vocational school education, and 13,186 people (47.0%) hold a bachelor's degree. Table 1 summarizes this composition.

Table 1. Educational Composition of ASPEK Indonesia Members (103 Unions, 28,082 Members)

No.	Unit of Analysis	High School/Vocational School Level	Bachelor's Degree	Total
1.	Number of Unions	60 unions (58.3%)	43 unions (41.7%)	103 unions
2.	Number of members	14,896 people (53.0%)	13,186 people (47.0%)	28,082

Source: ASPEK Indonesia's internal membership data, processed (ASPEK, 16 Mei 2026)

These findings indicate that ASPEK Indonesia is not a labor organization that is homogeneous in terms of educational background, but rather a confederation that unites two distinct segments of the workforce: front-line/operational workers with a high school or vocational school background, and administrative/professional workers with a bachelor's degree. This differs from the general perception of labor confederations in Indonesia, which are typically associated with a base of factory/manufacturing workers with a secondary education. Further analysis shows

that this educational divide is strongly correlated with the industrial sector, not merely the size of the union. The bachelor's degree-based cluster is dominated by sectors that require high formal qualifications, such as telecommunications, banking, insurance/state-owned service enterprises, and hospitals, while the high school/vocational school-based cluster is dominated by labor-intensive and operational sectors such as security (outsourcing), retail/hypermarkets, hospitality, logistics, and real estate (Rusdi, 2026).

These educational differences do not reflect the quality of the cadres but rather the structure of Indonesia's labor market as represented by ASPEK Indonesia: the modern service sector requires recruitment based on bachelor's degrees, whereas the labor-intensive service sector is structurally staffed by high school/vocational school graduates. In other words, the educational composition of ASPEK Indonesia's members is a function of which unions have successfully organized workers, not solely the result of the organization's own membership recruitment strategy. The implications are strategic in three respects. First, the presence of nearly half of the members with bachelor's degrees provides ASPEK Indonesia with the human capital needed for advocacy issues requiring high levels of legal and administrative literacy, such as Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) negotiations, labor litigation, and sectoral wage policies. Second, the actual mass base remains centered on workers with a secondary education (53%), a group that is structurally more vulnerable to layoffs, outsourcing, and contract work systems. Third, the concentration of power within a handful of large unions across educational backgrounds indicates that the confederation's bargaining power is effectively centered on these major union hubs, rather than being evenly distributed across its 103 member units (ASPEK, 16 Mei 2026; Rusdi, 2026).

These three findings provide the empirical basis for why ASPEK Indonesia's cadre development agenda cannot be designed uniformly. The educational approach for cadres with a high school or vocational school background needs to place greater emphasis on literacy regarding basic labor rights and field organizational skills, while cadres with a bachelor's degree are better prepared to be guided toward roles in policy advocacy, corporate-level negotiations, and legal representation. It is this need for tiered cadre development that ASPEK Indonesia subsequently translates into strategic choices at the three levels of analysis in Strategic Choice Theory, as outlined in the following subsection.

Strategic Choice Theory, developed by (Kochan, 1986), posits that an organization's strategic decisions in industrial relations are not solely determined by environmental conditions (environmental determinism), but rather arise from the active choices of actors at three dynamically interconnected levels: the strategic level, the functional level, and the workplace level. The findings of this study indicate that ASPEK Indonesia's managerial succession planning can be coherently mapped across these three levels, as emphasized by the Secretary-General of ASPEK Indonesia in an interview: "In the past, labor unions were known as 'protest organizers,' but now it's different—we conduct capacity-building, training, and the channels for dialogue are increasingly open; it's not always about demands or confrontation—instead, we can 'sit down together' to address various labor issues" (Djati, 2026).

At the strategic level, ASPEK Indonesia's top leadership makes long-term decisions that determine the organization's direction and fundamental philosophy. Research findings confirm that ASPEK Indonesia decided to reorient itself from a mass-based organization to a competency-based union to address the challenges of Industry 4.0. This decision was concretely implemented through amendments to the Articles of Association and Bylaws at the 8th Congress in 2024, which expanded the definition of membership to include digital platform workers, as well as through DPP Decree No. 12/2024, which allocated 40% of ILO funds for the establishment of the Digital Union School and the formation of ASPEK's educational institutions and leadership development programs (Rusdi, 2026). Table 2 summarizes the strategic choices at this level.

Table 2. ASPEK Indonesia's Strategic Choices at the Strategic Level

No.	Strategic Choices	Rationality (Strategic Choice)	Implementation
1.	Repositioning the membership base	Aligning HR structure and incentives with the digital era	Amendment of the Articles of Association and Bylaws at the 8th Congress (2024); establishment of a platform workers' department
2.	Investment in quality-based leadership	Addressing the digital literacy gaps among officers and members	DPP Decree No. 12/2024: 40% of from the ILO for the Digital Union School

	development		
3.	Intellectual Legitimacy	Correcting the union's image as "protesters"	Campaigns for personal and social awareness and dialogue
4.	Incentives for competent human resources	Lack of protection and recognition for competent workers	Guidelines for awarding rewards/bonuses to high-performing workers

Source: Compiled from interview results and ASPEK Indonesia DPP decree documents (DPP ASPEK, 2022).

The data in Table 2 show that ASPEK Indonesia's strategic choices are not merely a reaction to external pressures, but rather the result of a deliberate environmental assessment of the opportunities and threats posed by the Job Creation Law, technological advancements, and the demographic shift of members toward Generation Z. The researcher observed the risk of resistance from the membership base, which still measures the union's strength by the size of its membership, alongside the challenge of sustaining funding for the Digital Union School program, which remains dependent on support from international institutions such as the ILO. This aligns with the statement by the President of ASPEK Indonesia that strengthening self-reliance in funding is a prerequisite for conducting more intensive training in the future.

Functional Level: Translating Policy into Concrete Cadre Development Programs

The functional level serves as a bridge between the leadership's strategic orientation and concrete implementation on the ground—the point where "strategy meets structure" (Vong, 2025; Kochan, 1986). At this level, ASPEK Indonesia translates its strategic choices into six clusters of education and training programs conducted on a regular basis, namely: (1) training on the rights of young workers and women workers, organized in collaboration with UNI Global Union, covering organizing, teamwork, and the development of action plans; (2) "just transition" negotiation training related to Collective Bargaining Agreements, covering wage arrangements, overtime compensation, social security, leave, and termination of employment; (3) Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) training conducted in collaboration with the Department of Labor, Hiperkes, and civil society organizations as a low-risk, high-impact strategy; (4) training on industrial relations dispute resolution, covering bipartite simulations and negotiation techniques; (5) strategies for international cooperation with UNI Global Union and Japan's UA ZENSEN for knowledge transfer; and (6) strategies for digital literacy and technology through the organization's official online channels.

The paradigm shift at this level is evident in the changes to leadership criteria: whereas previously the requirement to become a leader was simply to be "vocal" in speeches, the organization now mandates training certificates as a standard for leadership quality. The President of ASPEK Indonesia emphasized that the organization's new direction is toward having fewer members who high levels of commitment and competence. Table 3 summarizes the strategic policy choices at the functional level along with their successful outcomes.

Table 3. ASPEK Indonesia's Strategic Policy Choices at the Functional Level

No.	HR Issues/Weaknesses	Policy Choice	Program Implementation
1.	Gen-Z apathy and the older leadership's lack of tech proficiency	Digitization of membership administration	Recruitment of 50 digital administrators across various DPCs; weekly database updates
2.	Image as a "union of protesters"	Digital curriculum and legitimacy through content	"Digital Union School" module, "Content Creator Class" program, ASPEK + Ministry of Manpower/BNSP certification
3.	Widespread criminalization of workers	Mediation and preventive support	Daycare facilities for working mothers; formation of an anti-criminalization task force

Source: Compiled from interview results, program documentation, and field observations (Djati, 2026) (Rusdi, 2026).

Findings at the functional level confirm the thesis of Kochan, Katz, and McKersie that this level is the operational level most critical to the success of the strategy. Without the courage of functional-level personnel to overhaul outdated assumptions, the quality of ASPEK Indonesia's human resources risks remaining dominated by tech-illiterate senior staff, while simultaneously holding little appeal for Generation Z to join. Thus, the enhancement of human resource quality at this level stems not merely from external pressure but from the organization's critical awareness of the need for continuous development.

Workplace Level: Inclusive Mentoring and On-the-Job Feedback

The workplace level is the operational point where policies and programs directly engage with members, while also serving as a crucial source of feedback for policy adjustments at higher levels (Freege, 2003; Kochan, 1986). Research findings indicate that ASPEK Indonesia's approach at this level is informal, flexible, and egalitarian. As stated by the President of ASPEK Indonesia in an interview: "ASPEK, as a labor union, must have strength and a distinctive characteristic, namely prioritizing social dialogue. Dialogue should not wait until a conflict arises. In this dialogue process, use it as a means to mediate conflicts, maintain a positive atmosphere, sit on an equal footing, and be willing to listen to one another, so that conflicts can be reduced."

A personal approach to negotiation support is a hallmark of the capacity-building strategy through structural cadre development, which is implemented via regular plenary meetings at both the regional and branch leadership levels. Through this approach, ASPEK Indonesia trains leadership personnel to understand both the organization and its member recruitment patterns, thereby fostering a sustainable pool of higher-quality union members. The effectiveness of this strategy at the workplace level heavily depends on cross-level collaboration, as strategic decisions are not made solely through a top-down approach but are also shaped by the roles of field stakeholders and digital administrators in creating a warm and member-friendly organizational climate. Before further examining the managerial implications of the above findings, it is important to clarify the theoretical position regarding the role of labor unions themselves as institutions. Freeman and Medoff assert that labor unions function as the primary mechanism for channeling the (collective voice) of workers (Medoff, 1984). Through the collective strength of the union, workers can communicate their preferences and grievances to management more effectively than they could individually, given the "public goods problem" associated with expressing individual preferences in the workplace. In the Indonesian context, this role has proven relevant, for example, during periods of significant minimum wage increases, where labor unions played a crucial role in ensuring the implementation of these increases across various sectors, even though small-scale companies often face different adjustment challenges than large companies (Djati, 2026; Bennett, 2007).

It is this function of channelling the collective voice that ASPEK Indonesia has expanded in meaning—from merely a channel for conveying normative demands (wages, working hours, layoffs) to a channel for addressing members' needs for competency development. In other words, ASPEK Indonesia reinterprets the "collective voice" not only as an instrument of distributive negotiation (competing for the allocation of fixed resources between workers and employers) but also as an instrument of integrative negotiation that fosters the creation of shared value through increased productivity and workforce competencies. This reinterpretation aligns with the perspectives in the realm of workers' social welfare, who highlight that the challenges of the world of work are not limited to low wages but also include a lack of career development opportunities and the absence of job security (Fitriyah., 2019). On this basis, labor union organizations such as ASPEK Indonesia are called upon to play a strategic role in strengthening the quality of human resources, including the simultaneous enhancement of workers' hard and soft skills.

To strengthen the mapping of strategic options, this study also identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of ASPEK Indonesia's educational management. In terms of strengths, ASPEK Indonesia has a strong international network through its affiliation with UNI Global Union and its partnership with UA ZENSEN Japan, a membership base that is relatively balanced in terms of educational background (nearly 50:50 between high school/vocational school graduates and college graduates), as well as an institutional commitment explicitly outlined in the 2022–2027 Strategic Plan. In terms of weaknesses, the utilization of digital channels remains suboptimal, as reflected in the still-limited number of followers on official social media accounts, as well as the reliance of the Digital Union School program's funding on support from international donor agencies, which may not be sustainable (DPP ASPEK, 2022).

In terms of opportunities, ASPEK Indonesia's transformation into a confederation by 2025 opens the door to

expanding its membership base into the digital platform worker sector, while the need for national competency certification (BNSP) and government programs such as Prakerja and BPVP/BLK presents opportunities for synergistic “link and match” initiatives that complement the roles of ASPEK Indonesia and the government. In terms of threats, the risk of internal resistance from the membership base—which still measures a union’s strength by the size of its membership—remains a concern, alongside the threat of Generation Z’s apathy toward conventional union membership and competition among labor federations vying for influence and members following the implementation of union pluralism under Law No. 21 of 2000 (Kemnaker RI, 2025).

Overall, the research findings indicate that educational management implemented through strategic programs is a key factor in the sustainability of ASPEK Indonesia as a modern labor union organization. Human resource management within a labor union organization cannot be conducted in a sporadic or purely administrative manner; rather, it must be given space as an integral part of the organization’s strategic management. ASPEK Indonesia has tangibly shifted the orientation of its organizational management from a reactive, figure-based approach toward a strategic approach grounded in systems, competencies, and the democratic and structured regeneration of leadership. The managerial implications of these findings can be summarized in four points. First, the implementation of education and training in synergy with international institutions serves as ASPEK Indonesia’s core (lighthouse) strategy, integrating educational, leadership development, and competency agendas into the organization’s strategic planning on a sustainable basis. Second, the transformation from a figure-based organization to a system-based organization (organizational sustainability) is reflected in the development of a more structured system for leadership development, knowledge transfer, and leadership renewal. Third, strengthening workers’ competencies in occupational safety and health (OSH), public speaking, and advocacy enhances the organization’s bargaining position in industrial relations. Fourth, the strengthening of social capital through trust among members also enhances solidarity, participation, and networks of cooperation among both union officials and members (Rusdi, 2026; Djati, 2026).

Theoretically, these findings support the argument by Frege and Kelly (2003) that the Strategic Choice Theory framework is relevant for analyzing the internal strategies of labor unions (union strategy), particularly in studies of union revitalization (Freege, 2003). ASPEK Indonesia demonstrates that educational management is not merely a supplementary administrative activity but a strategic choice that reflects the organization’s autonomy in responding to the dynamics of the industrial environment without being trapped in environmental determinism—as criticized by Kochan (Kochan, 1986) regarding Dunlop (Dunlop, 1971) systems theory framework. Thus, ASPEK Indonesia’s leadership development serves as an empirical precedent demonstrating that labor union organizations in developing countries—with a hybrid labor market characterized by a mix of the modern formal sector and labor-intensive service sectors—can formulate tiered and context-specific human resource strengthening strategies, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach to leadership development for all members.

Compared to previous research, the findings of this article reveal a significant shift in the focus of the study. Anggraini (Anggraini, 2023) and Suwito (Suwito, 2004) primarily positioned labor unions as actors in resolving labor disputes and fostering industrial relations in general, without specifically examining educational management as a strategic instrument. Ferdian (Ferdian, 2025) does highlight the strategic role of labor unions in protecting workers’ rights and welfare; however, his analysis does not position education and cadre development as the primary units of analysis examined through a multi-layered strategic management framework.

To prevent ongoing industrial relations disputes at the city level, ASPEK places emphasis on formal mediation mechanisms, in contrast to this article, which highlights how education functions as a preventative and structural conflict prevention strategy, rather than merely a reactive response to individual cases. This shift in emphasis makes a new contribution to the body of research on industrial relations in Indonesia, namely that the management of education within trade union organisations can be analysed on a par with human resource management in non-profit organisations, using the multi-layered strategic decision-making framework commonly employed in corporate strategic management studies. Furthermore, the use of supplementary quantitative data on the educational composition of ASPEK Indonesia’s 103 member unions provides a fresh perspective rarely found in

previous qualitative studies on trade unions, which generally rely solely on qualitative interview data without systematically mapping the structural characteristics of the membership base. By combining in-depth qualitative data with descriptive membership data, this study yields a more holistic understanding of how ASPEK Indonesia’s strategic choices in the field of education are rooted in the structural realities of its membership base, rather than merely reflecting the normative aspirations of the organisation’s leadership. A further implication of this comparison is the need to shift the

perspective on trade unions in Indonesia, from merely reactive advocacy actors to proactive and strategic human resource management actors. As demonstrated by the case of ASPEK Indonesia, trade unions capable of managing education and leadership development in a planned manner have the potential to possess stronger collective bargaining power, whilst also becoming more relevant to a younger generation of workers who demand concrete added value from trade union membership—not merely a symbol of working-class solidarity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that ASPEK Indonesia has adopted a policy that is relatively unpopular within the labor movement tradition: implementing education management with a distinct strategic direction to break free from environmental determinism and the “protest-monger” stigma, moving toward a competency-based union characterized by social dialogue and partnership (mutual understanding, respect, trust, and benefit). At the strategic level, the leadership prioritizes human resource development as an institutional priority aligned with the organization’s 2022–2027 Strategic Plan, implemented through amendments to the Articles of Association and Bylaws at the 8th Congress, which expand membership to include digital platform workers and allocate strategic resources to the Digital Union School. At the functional level, this orientation is translated into concrete programs such as periodic training, thematic training on the rights of young and female workers, collective bargaining agreement negotiations, occupational safety and health (OSH) training, resolution of industrial relations disputes, administrative digitization, and “link and match” synergies with government programs. At the workplace level, the strategy is tested through inclusive mentoring practices and the strengthening of members’ bargaining positions within companies, carried out through informal, flexible, and egalitarian communication patterns.

This article evaluates the transformation of the trade union movement model within the **Indonesian Trade Union Association (ASPEK Indonesia) from a conventional, confrontational approach (based on mass action and protests) towards a competency-based approach (competency-based unionism) through structured education and cadre development management. By applying the Strategic Choice Theory of Kochan, Katz and McKersie, the main conclusions of this article can be summarised across three levels of organisational decision-making: Firstly, the strategic level: ASPEK Indonesia’s top leadership utilised its strategic autonomy to reorient the organisation’s philosophy in order to address the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, automation and digitalisation. Concrete policies are demonstrated through amendments to the Articles of Association and By-laws adopted at the 8th Congress (2024) to include digital platform workers, as well as the issuance of DPP Decree No. 12/2024, which allocates 40 per cent of ILO funds to the development of digital trade union schools and leadership training institutions. Secondly, at the operational level: Strategic policies have been translated into competence-based thematic training programmes (such as *Just Transition* negotiations, Health and Safety at Work (K3/OSH), industrial relations dispute resolution, and digital literacy through the *Content Creator Class*). A shift in leadership criteria has also been observed: from the previous reliance on being ‘vocal in public speaking’ to the requirement to hold **competency certification/training** (in collaboration with the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration/BNSP). Furthermore, the digitalisation of membership administration was strengthened by recruiting 50 digital administrators at DPC level to attract Generation Z workers. Thirdly, at the workplace level: Implementation on the ground was carried out through an inclusive, informal and flexible mentoring approach. Here, ASPEK Indonesia prioritises egalitarian social dialogue and partners with management/employers before conflicts arise, ensuring that the trade union functions effectively as a professional forum for the “collective voice”. Overall, trade union education management serves as a “core strategic choice” for ASPEK Indonesia to maintain the organisation’s relevance, enhance collective bargaining capacity, and strengthen the intellectual legitimacy of the trade union amidst the dynamics of the modern labour market.

As for suggestions, To enrich the literature on strategic management of non-profit organisations and industrial relations, further research building on this article could focus on evaluating the quantitative impact and long-term effects to measure the extent to which the *Digital Union School* programme and competency certification contribute to improving the success rate of Collective Labour Agreement (CLA) negotiations or reducing the incidence of industrial disputes within companies. A potential area for further study is a comparative analysis between trade union confederations, comparing the effectiveness of the application of *Strategic Choice Theory* between ASPEK Indonesia (which is based in the service/professional sector) and manufacturing/factory-based trade union confederations (whose members are predominantly of secondary education level).

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