

Management of School-Parent Partnerships in Enhancing Student Learning Independence in Elementary Schools

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Abstract. This study investigates the management of school-parent partnerships aimed at enhancing learning independence among elementary school students in two public schools in Cianjur, Indonesia: SDN Ibu Dewi 1 and SDN Cibulakan. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis to explore the planning, implementation, and evaluation phases of partnership management, along with enabling and hindering factors. The findings reveal that structured partnership management involving effective communication, active parental involvement, and collaboration with external stakeholders significantly supports students' learning independence. Differences between schools highlight the role of technology access and resource allocation in partnership effectiveness. Recommendations focus on strengthening planning, communication, and participatory programs to sustain partnership benefits. This study contributes to educational management literature by integrating theoretical frameworks with practical insights into fostering effective school-parent collaborations.

Keywords: School Partnership Management, Parent Involvement, Learning Independence, Elementary Education, Educational Collaboration.

1 Introduction

The success of basic education in the 21st century is increasingly understood as a collaborative enterprise, contingent not only upon pedagogical quality within the classroom but also upon the effective synergy between schools and families [1], [2]. This collaborative paradigm has moved beyond peripheral engagement to become a central tenet of effective educational administration [3]. The ultimate aim of this collaboration is the holistic development of the student, with a particular emphasis on fostering *ke-mandirian belajar*, or learning independence. This concept, deeply rooted in theories of self-regulated learning and intrinsic motivation, posits the student as an active, agentic participant in their own educational process. The cultivation of such independence is considered a critical outcome for lifelong learning [4].

While the imperative for school-parent collaboration is widely accepted, its practical implementation is frequently encumbered by significant structural, communicative, and cultural barriers. In practice, communication patterns often devolve into unilateral, administrative information dissemination—such as circulars or formal

meetings—rather than fostering the constructive, participatory, and dialogical engagement required for a genuine partnership [5], [6]. This common misalignment creates a perceptual and operational gap between the school's curriculum-centric orientation and the parents' more personalized, immediate concerns for their child's socio-emotional and academic development. This disconnect is exacerbated by pressing contextual factors, including severe parental time constraints due to economic demands, varying levels of parental educational literacy, and, increasingly, the inequitable distribution of technological access and digital literacy. Collectively, these barriers diminish the potential intensity, quality, and inclusivity of parental involvement, thereby neutralizing the partnership's intended efficacy [7], [8].

This study proceeds from the premise that overcoming these barriers is not merely a sociological challenge but a core, non-negotiable task of professional educational administration. The transition from a passive, information-recipient model to an active, co-producer partnership model requires deliberate, systematic, and sustained management. Without a formal management framework that encompasses planning, implementation, and evaluation, partnerships often remain ad-hoc, personality-driven, reliant on the initiative of individuals, and, consequently, ineffective and unsustainable [9].

A robust theoretical foundation for such a management framework is provided by Epstein's comprehensive model of school, family, and community partnerships. This model is critical as it moves beyond a simplistic or monolithic notion of involvement to identify six discrete and actionable types of engagement that schools must manage: (1) Parenting (assisting families with child-rearing skills and understanding child development), (2) Communicating (designing and implementing effective two-way school-to-home and home-to-school communication), (3) Volunteering (recruiting, organizing, and valuing parent help and support), (4) Learning at Home (providing information, guidance, and resources for families to support students with homework and curriculum-related activities), (5) Decision Making (including parents as participants in school decisions and developing parent leaders), and (6) Collaborating with the Community (identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs and family practices). This framework underscores that a successful partnership is a complex, multi-faceted construct that must be actively and professionally managed.

The empirical evidence validating this managed approach is extensive and conclusive. Large-scale meta-analyses, such as the comprehensive reviews by Fan and Chen [10] and Jeynes [11], have demonstrated a robust positive correlation between parental involvement and student academic outcomes. Furthermore, specifically found that involvement which is supportive and academically focused—a direct product of effective Learning at Home and Communicating strategies—is a powerful predictor of achievement. This body of research confirms that when parents are effectively engaged as partners, students exhibit not only higher academic performance but also enhanced motivation, better social skills, and stronger self-regulatory capacities [4]. The challenge, therefore, lies not in proving the *value* of partnership, but in understanding the *mechanisms* of its effective management in diverse contexts.

The Indonesian context provides a specific and urgent setting for this inquiry. National policies, such as the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation (Permendikbud) No. 30 of 2017 concerning the involvement of families in education, explicitly mandate this collaboration. This regulation attempts to institutionalize the role of

families, shifting their position from that of external, passive stakeholders to internal, active partners. This policy is further reinforced by Permendikbud No. 75 of 2016 regarding School Committees, which provides a formal structure for parental participation in governance and decision-making. However, despite this strong policy framework, a significant gap persists between policy aspiration and field-level implementation. Local studies in Indonesia [12], [13] confirm the positive impact of collaboration but also highlight the persistent, context-specific barriers, such as the digital divide (Putra & Hartati, 2023) and varied institutional capacities, that inhibit the systematic management of these partnerships [8].

Therefore, a critical knowledge gap remains. While meta-analytic data confirms *that* partnership works, and Indonesian policy mandates *that* it should happen, there is a deficit of deep, qualitative, and comparative research that explores *how* effective partnerships are systematically *managed* at the school level. We lack descriptive-narrative accounts of the specific managerial processes—the planning, budgeting, implementation logistics, communication strategies, and evaluation mechanisms—that differentiate effective partnerships from ineffective ones. This study aims to address this gap by conducting an in-depth, qualitative comparative case study of two public elementary schools in Cianjur, Indonesia. By examining and contrasting their managerial practices, this research seeks to identify the specific institutional processes and leadership actions that successfully translate the abstract goal of partnership into a tangible reality that fosters student learning independence.

2 Method

This study employed a qualitative research paradigm utilizing a comparative case study design. This design was selected for its capacity to provide a rich, holistic, and contextually-embedded understanding of the complex social and managerial phenomena under investigation. The research was conducted at two public elementary schools in Cianjur District, Indonesia: SDN Ibu Dewi 1 and SDN Cibulakan. These sites were selected through purposive sampling based on their contrasting profiles regarding available resources, technological infrastructure, and community engagement levels. This deliberate contrast facilitated a comparative analysis, allowing for the identification of core managerial principles that transcend specific contexts, as well as adaptations dictated by local resources.

Data were collected through three primary methods to ensure methodological triangulation [14]. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including school principals, teachers, parents, and members of the school committee, to explore their perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of the partnership management process. Second, participant observation was carried out during school activities, parent-teacher meetings, and community events to capture the *in-practice* dynamics, social interactions, and enacted behaviors of the partnership [15]. Third, document analysis was performed on administrative and archival records, including school strategic plans, partnership program outlines, meeting minutes, formal policies, and communication logs, to provide a formal, documentary basis for understanding the managerial structure.

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, the study employed triangulation of both sources and methods. Furthermore, member checking [16] was utilized, whereby emergent interpretations were presented to participants for verification and refinement. Data analysis was conducted thematically using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña [17], which involves the iterative processes of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This systematic approach permitted the identification of dominant patterns, themes, and causal links related to the planning, implementation, evaluation, and contextual factors of school-parent partnership management, providing a comprehensive and grounded portrait of the practices at both case sites.

3 Result

3.1. The Architecture of Partnership: Planning, Structuring, and Budgeting

The initial phase of partnership management—planning—demonstrated the most significant structural divergence between the two schools. While both institutions conducted regular meetings involving school leadership, teachers, and the parent-led school committee, the nature and output of these planning activities differed substantially. At SDN Cibulakan, the planning process was highly formalized and integrated into the school's annual strategic plan [18]. This manifested in a documented annual work plan for partnership activities, complete with specific objectives, timelines, responsible persons, and, critically, a dedicated line-item budget. This budget allocated specific funds for activities such as parent training workshops, joint literacy programs, and monitoring tools. This formalization provided a clear roadmap, ensured programmatic continuity beyond the initiative of any single individual, and established a clear mechanism for accountability. This systematic approach aligns directly with, which emphasizes the need for formal structures and shared responsibilities to move participation from ad-hoc to systematic. Furthermore, the inclusion of parents in the planning and budgeting phase reflects principles of participatory management, which is empirically linked to greater stakeholder commitment and program sustainability [7].

Conversely, the planning process at SDN Ibu Dewi 1 was characterized as largely ad-hoc and reactive. While meetings were held, they were often convened to address immediate issues rather than to proactively design a long-term strategy. Plans were rarely documented in detail, and activities were contingent upon event-based initiatives from individual teachers or parents. Consequently, there was no dedicated, protected budget for partnership activities, making programs vulnerable to operational disruptions and resource competition. This lack of structural formalization inhibited the sustainability of interventions and created ambiguity regarding roles and responsibilities. This finding supports the literature suggesting that a lack of systemic planning is a primary barrier to effective, long-term partnership [9]. From the perspective of learning outcomes, the systematic planning at SDN Cibulakan, which included explicit budgeting and evaluation metrics, was more likely to translate parental involvement into sustained learning support at home. This aligns with meta-analytic findings that structured, well-resourced interventions yield more significant academic and personal gains for students [10], [11].

3.2. The Praxis of Partnership: Implementation, Communication, and Resource Mobilization

In the implementation phase, both schools executed a similar range of collaborative activities, including family literacy events, school-based health programs (*Posyandu*), hygiene promotion, parenting workshops, and community work days (*gotong-royong*). These activities, which often involved external partners such as local health clinics and NGOs, are consistent with effective practices cited in the literature, particularly Epstein's Collaborating with the Community type. However, the *modality* of implementation and communication diverged significantly, reflecting the digital divide and differences in resource allocation.

SDN Ibu Dewi 1, constrained by limited internet access and infrastructure, relied almost exclusively on traditional, analogue communication methods. These included face-to-face meetings, physical announcement boards, and paper-based circulars. While these methods ensured inclusivity for a community with low digital literacy, they were also slow, labor-intensive, and limited the frequency and immediacy of interaction, a finding consistent with barriers identified by Indriyani and Yusnani [8]. In stark contrast, SDN Cibulakan employed a hybrid communication strategy. It maintained traditional methods for formal announcements while heavily leveraging digital tools for routine, two-way interaction. This included dedicated instant messaging groups (like WhatsApp) for each class, a simple online platform for sharing learning materials, and online documentation of activities. This digital integration, reflecting a strategic adaptation to available resources [19], [20], facilitated higher frequency communication, more rapid feedback, and greater parental engagement, particularly for working parents unable to attend physical meetings [21].

However, this digital approach was not without its own challenges, as it risked excluding the small number of families with limited digital access or literacy. Furthermore, the analysis of hindering factors across both sites confirmed findings from the broader literature. The most significant barriers to parental participation were structural: parental time constraints due to work, transportation difficulties, and traditional cultural norms regarding gender roles in education [7], [11]. The findings here suggest that while digital tools can mitigate some barriers (e.g., time and location), a one-size-fits-all implementation strategy is ineffective. An effective, inclusive implementation requires a blended approach that strategically combines digital efficiency with the inclusivity of traditional methods, tailored to the specific socio-economic and technological realities of the community.

3.3. Mechanisms of Accountability: Evaluation, Feedback, and Continuous Improvement

The evaluation of partnership activities revealed the third major point of divergence. SDN Cibulakan had instituted formal, documented feedback mechanisms. These included annual parent satisfaction surveys, regular evaluation meetings with the school committee and parent representatives, and the tracking of simple performance indicators (e.g., participation rates, activity completion). The findings from these evaluations were documented and explicitly used to inform the following year's planning and budgeting cycle. This practice created a clear cycle of continuous improvement, akin to a

Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) framework, fostering organizational learning and strengthening accountability [3]. This formal process allowed leadership to quickly identify operational problems (e.g., low attendance at a specific workshop), facilitate data-driven decisions, and demonstrate to parents that their feedback was valued, thereby reinforcing their engagement. This aligns with meta-analytic findings that interventions incorporating monitoring and evaluation components are more likely to produce positive and sustained student outcomes.

At SDN Ibu Dewi 1, evaluation practices were almost entirely informal, verbal, and ad-hoc. Feedback consisted of casual post-activity conversations or general observations by the principal. Without formal instruments, documented metrics, or dedicated evaluation meetings, valuable information was often lost. This made it difficult to longitudinally assess the effectiveness of any given activity, identify systemic problems, or replicate successes. This reliance on informal evaluation is a significant barrier to institutional improvement [7]. The lack of a formal feedback loop meant that the school's planning process for the following year was based on anecdote rather than data, hindering the school's capacity to adapt and improve its partnership model. This finding underscores the urgent need for building evaluative capacity at the school level, even through simple, context-appropriate instruments, to ensure that partnership management is reflective, adaptive, and effective.

4 Discussion

The findings of this comparative case study compellingly argue that the difference between a nominal, low-impact parent involvement program and a robust, high-impact partnership is a function of deliberate, systematic, and formalized management. The contrast between SDN Cibulakan and SDN Ibu Dewi 1 provides a clear narrative illustration of this principle: effectiveness is not accidental, nor is it solely the product of goodwill; it is a direct outcome of institutional design and professional administration. The study's results, when synthesized, suggest that the transition from an ad-hoc, reactive approach to a strategic, proactive one is the central challenge for school leaders seeking to leverage family engagement to improve student outcomes, such as learning independence. This discussion synthesizes the findings from the three managerial phases—planning, implementation, and evaluation—to construct a holistic model of effective partnership management, deeply intertwined with the theoretical frameworks of Epstein [1], Hoy and Miskel [3], and Fullan [9].

The analysis reveals that the *architecture* of the partnership, established during the planning phase, is its most critical component. The practices at SDN Cibulakan—formalizing the partnership within the school's strategic plan, documenting clear objectives, and allocating a dedicated budget—are not mere bureaucratic exercises. Rather, they are profound institutional signals that elevate the partnership from a peripheral, nice-to-have social activity to a core, must-have institutional function, equal in importance to curriculum and instruction [18]. This structural integration provides the stability, resources, and legitimacy necessary for all other activities to succeed. Without this formal scaffolding, as seen at SDN Ibu Dewi 1, partnership efforts remain fragile, personality-dependent, and unsustainable. This finding suggests that school leadership [22] is the determinative factor; leaders must actively *design* and *resource* the

partnership as a central element of the school's organizational culture not merely encourage it [23].

The *praxis* of partnership, or its implementation, highlights the critical tension between standardization and contextual adaptation. The findings regarding the digital divide are particularly salient. While SDN Cibulakan's use of technology demonstrably increased the frequency and efficiency of communication, it also surfaced the risk of digital exclusion [21]. Conversely, SDN Ibu Dewi 1's reliance on traditional methods, while inclusive, was inefficient and limited the depth of engagement. This tension refutes the idea of a best practice model for communication; instead, it points to the need for a best fit model. Effective management, therefore, requires a sophisticated, hybrid communication strategy that is context-sensitive and equitable [7]. This strategy must leverage the efficiency of digital tools for the majority while simultaneously investing in resource-intensive analogue methods for the digitally marginalized, ensuring that no parent is left behind. This is a complex managerial task that requires constant adaptation and feedback.

Finally, the findings on *accountability* and evaluation represent the missing link in many partnership initiatives. The informal, anecdotal approach of SDN Ibu Dewi 1 is common in many organizations, but it inhibits organizational learning and prevents the scaling up of good ideas [9]. The formal feedback loops at SDN Cibulakan, in contrast, allowed the institution to *learn*. By systematically collecting and analyzing data (even simple survey or attendance data), the leadership could identify failures, understand successes, and make evidence-based adjustments. This transforms the partnership from a static set of activities into a dynamic, adaptive system. When related back to the foundational theory of Epstein, this study suggests that *management* itself—specifically the functions of planning, budgeting, and evaluating—acts as the essential scaffolding that enables all six of Epstein's types of involvement to function effectively and sustainably. Without this managerial framework, Epstein's model remains a menu of options rather than an integrated, actionable recipe for success. This study's limitations include its qualitative, context-specific nature; the findings are not statistically generalizable. However, they provide a deep, transferable model of managerial processes that can inform practice and policy elsewhere.

5 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the effective management of school-parent partnerships significantly contributes to the enhancement of student learning independence at the elementary school level. The findings affirm that this effectiveness is not spontaneous but is the result of deliberate managerial action. A structured planning process that includes formal documentation and dedicated budgeting, an adaptive implementation strategy that balances digital efficiency with traditional inclusivity, and a formal evaluation system that fosters continuous improvement are the foundational pillars of a successful and sustainable partnership. The contrast between the two case-study schools underscores the critical role of institutional resources, leadership capacity, and strategic formalization in translating partnership policy into effective practice. These findings have significant implications for educational policy and leadership. They suggest a need to shift focus from merely *promoting* parental involvement to actively *building the*

managerial capacity of school leaders to design, lead, and sustain these complex collaborations. Ultimately, the success of such partnerships supports not only academic achievement but also the cultivation of student character, discipline, and independence—essential competencies for navigating the challenges of the 21st century.

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