

Building Partnerships with Families and Communities: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This case study aims to explore the challenges and benefits of school-family-community partnerships in early childhood education in Indonesia. The purpose of the study is to illustrate how the Indonesian Partnership framework can be used to build, evaluate and address the challenges of such partnerships. The method used is a case study approach, which examines a specific early childhood education setting. The study found that the Indonesian Partnership framework can help schools structure and initiate partnership programs, as well as evaluate and sustain the activities. The study also highlights the importance of reflection and evaluation in collaboration. The results suggest that teacher training programs on building partnerships with families and communities could equip teachers with communication skills, strategies to address challenges, and knowledge to evaluate and sustain partnership programs.

Keywords: School, Community, Family, Partnership

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1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of partnership between school, family, and community then strengthens by encouraging the family and community to participate in education development which stipulated in Education Law No.30/2017. The regulation highlighted that family function has a strategic role in supporting the implementation of education to achieve national education goals. The next point is that family involvement in education requires a synergy between the education unit, the family, and the community to make it work.

The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) offers some important insights that a partnership between family and school can lead to greater exchanges of information, modeling respect, clear learning expectation between each party, and improved demonstration, which will positively influence a child's early learning education (Weiss, H. B., Caspe, M., & Lopez, M. E., 2006). Further, Coleman (1988) explained that social capital is developed through relationships consisting of (1) social obligations and expectations, (2) information channels, and (3) shared social norms. Social capital, therefore, has been proposed as one primary mechanism linking family engagement in children's education to achievement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Hill & Taylor, 2004).

According to Dearing, Sibley, and Nguyen (2015), collaboration between families, schools, and communities is believed to enhance each participant's ability to stimulate and support children's learning. This hypothesis is supported by the work of Ki Hajar Dewantara, a pioneer in the development of Indonesian education during the colonial era. Ki Hajar Dewantara argued that school, family, and community are three essential pillars of a successful education system (Iskandar, 2016). The emphasis on partnership in Indonesian settings underscores the importance of involving families and communities in early childhood education. The collaboration between families, schools, and communities can create a supportive network that can enhance children's learning outcomes by providing a range of resources and support.

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of the Indonesian Partnership framework in building, evaluating and addressing the challenges of school-family-community partnerships in early childhood education settings. The study provides a nuanced understanding of the challenges and benefits of such partnerships, specifically in the context of Indonesia, where the notion of partnership between school, family, and community is highly emphasized. The study's use of the Indonesian Partnership framework as a tool for building and evaluating partnerships is especially noteworthy, as it offers practical guidance for educators and policymakers seeking to improve early childhood education outcomes.

2. METHOD

For this study, a qualitative approach was taken in the data collection and analysis techniques. The research subject was one teacher in a preschool in Surabaya, Indonesia, and a case study design was employed to explore the nature of partnerships between families and communities in this context. The purpose of the case study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participant's interactions, sentiments, and behaviors within a specific process (Woodside, 2010). To further explore the connection between beliefs and behaviors, an interview instrument was used by the researchers during the data collection process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Background of Case

To get the information about partnership practice in Indonesia, I interviewed Saras, a preschool teacher who has been teaching for five years in one of the Preschool in Surabaya, Indonesia. Saras is teaching in Islamic preschool, and her students come from different ethnic groups in Indonesia such as Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, etc. As an educator, Saras believed that maintaining a positive relationship with the families is essential. At the beginning of establishing a partnership with families, she explained that firstly they would conduct an open house to make the children and family familiar with the school environment. The teachers would show each room area and the school facilities. Next, the parents will receive a "Parents handbook" which concludes the children's activity in one year, the children's learning goals, and school policies. This opportunity is also used for parents and teachers to have one on one meetings and talk about their children personally since usually, some parents have more to discuss regarding children's behavior or request for assistance when it comes to separation times.

Saras also explained that she always makes time to talk with parents when they are picking up their children. She will talk about how today's children's activities are going, and interesting things that happen in the class. She acknowledged that some parents might be in a rush, and don't have time to talk after class. Thus, she always writes a comment in home-school diaries. She emphasized that open communication is important to build mutual trust.

Parents committee is also another form of partnership that the school tries to build with parents. Parents committee have the responsibility to support the school event such as parenting workshop, outings, cultural celebration, etc. They were creating a WhatsApp group among teacher-parents to make the coordination and communication more accessible. Parents committee also accommodates the parent's voice in terms of giving feedback to the curriculum, learning system or school event. Through the video of parents committee commentary that Saras shared to me, it showed that parents feel like they were welcome and belong to the school since they contribute to many school events and hope that they can maintain the positive relationship between parents and teacher. The school intends to build the partnership not only with parents but also the community. There are several activities which involve the community as the learning resource such as field trip to Agro-tourism and post office, inviting police officer as a guest in preschool, creating a collaboration with local health posts (Posyandu) to do immunization, and celebrating Muslim festival by donating to the orphanage. Saras argued that children may have a great experience while learning directly from the community. The children also seemed excited to learn outside the class.

Further, Saras said that the school in which she's worked uses the partnership framework provided by the Indonesian Government as the guidance to establish a partnership with families and communities. She also emphasized that the school principal always ensures the partnership practice in school work effectively. If they have a conflict with parents or the community, they always discuss it through teacher meetings and try to find a possible solution to address the problem.

B. School-Family-Community Partnership Approach

Through the interview, Saras defined partnership as the form of collaboration between the school, family, and community based on mutuality and reciprocity. The idea of partnership argued by Saras supported the notion of partnership suggested by Martinez-Miguel & Stuart, (2002) which defined partnership as the form of reciprocity and co-operation. Further, the approach used in one

case above shows that they use the framework of partnership provided by the Indonesian Government. The principles of partnership stated in the framework include: (1) Equity, equality, and mutual respect, (2) Collaboration and togetherness, (3) Fostering partnership which equips each other, (4) Creating Asah, Asih, Asuh (educating, loving, nurturing) environment (Iskandar, 2016). Several types of parents and community involvement in partnership framework provided by Indonesian Government showing the similarity with the Epstein theory which will elaborate in the table below.

Table 1. Compare Type of Partnership

Six types of involvement interactions By Epstein	Partnership with Family and Community (Indonesian partnership framework for Early Childhood Education)
1. Communicating	1. Fostering two-way communication
2. Parenting	2. Parental education
3. Volunteering	3. Volunteering
4. Learning at home	4. Encouraging parents to participate in learning at home activity
5. Collaborating with community	5. Collaborating with community
6. Decision-making	
(Epstein, 2010)	(Iskandar, 2016)

First, the form of school-family-community partnership mentioned in both Epstein and Indonesian partnership framework is communication. The Indonesian partnership framework for early childhood education suggested that two-way communication aims to get information and feedback on the development of learners, both from the family to the early childhood educator and vice versa (Iskandar, 2016). Along similar lines, Epstein (2006) argued that the use of communication is to keep the parents up to date with the school programs and students' learning outcomes. Hornby (2000) discussed that schools should offer a range of communication options to parents and create strategies to develop two-way communication. This case study illustrated how the teacher maintains the communication through direct conversation during arrival and picking up, school diary, parents-teaching meetings, and creating Whatsapp groups for parents and teachers who participated in coordinating some school events. Furthermore, increased communication between parents and teacher enables parents to address the children behavior problem more effectively and provide the support for their academic learning (El Nokali et al., 2010)

The second form of partnership mentioned is parenting activity. The goals of parental education based on the Indonesian partnership framework for early childhood education is to cater parent's knowledge of child's development and how to stimulate it, raise parent's awareness of their roles and responsibility in early childhood learning, as well encourage problem-solving through partnership approach (Iskandar, 2016). Epstein (2010) argued that parenting activity not only beneficial for parents but also helps the teacher to understand parent's concerns, needs, views and goals of their child, respect the family culture, background, and strength to support children's learning, as well improve the teacher's awareness to discuss information regarding child development with parents. In this case study, several parenting workshops and seminars conducted in the Preschool Saras worked in. Saras argued that through the Parenting Seminars, both parents and teachers gain the understanding that parents and teachers should work together to support the children's learning development. The parents also showed their interest in parenting seminars programs because it gives them the opportunity to share and discuss their concerns with professionals.

Third, the type of parent and community involvement mentioned is a voluntary program. The voluntary program in the Indonesian partnership framework for early childhood education aims to encourage parents and community participation and involve their voice to support children learning (Iskandar, 2016). In this case study, the voluntary program includes parents as the school committee, class coordinator, and volunteer in any school event. Saras explained that during the teacher-parents meeting they would discuss who was willing to become school committee and class coordinator. The teacher always tries to recruit the parents as a volunteer to the school event and ensure that their time, effort and ideas are appreciated. Epstein (2010) argued that volunteering helps the parents to understand the teacher's job, increase their development skill to work with children and ensure the parents that they are valued in school. Further, she also argued that volunteering also gives the teachers insight on a parent's talents and interest in school activity and child development. Parents will observe the teacher's discourse practice with children during their volunteering activity; this experience will help parents to work with children more effectively at home (Hindman, 2008).

Fourth, the parental involvement mentioned in the partnership approach by Epstein and Indonesian partnership framework is learning at home. The teachers should encourage parents to actively participate in children's learning activity at home (Iskandar, 2016). In this case study, Saras discussed how she encourages parents to be involved in children's learning activities at home by giving them feedback through the diary or direct conversation. She also explained that parent's involvement in learning activities at home would help the children to make the learning subject relevant to their life. Epstein (2006) argued that teachers should offer suggestions and techniques to involve the family in learning activities at home.

The illustration from this case study shows that Saras suggested parents participation in the learning activity at home through everyday practice such as learning literacy through shared-book reading, counting objects, and reciting daily prayers through habituation at home. The study conducted by Ewing (2012) provides a convincing argument for the effectiveness of parent's involvement in children's learning development. This study investigated the transition of mathematics knowledge through daily practice by Torres Islander state community parents to their children such as sorting shells and giving fish. This practice provides the teacher with insight to engage with families cultural tradition and take advantage of it as the family strength to support the children's learning.

Fifth, the type of family-school-community partnership mentioned is collaborating with the community. The purpose of collaborating with the community is to maximize the role of the community to support children's learning (Iskandar, 2016). Several activities with community conducted in the Preschool Saras worked in, such as collaborating with local health post (Posyandu) to do immunization and vaccination, inviting police and pediatrician as a guest in preschool, field-trip to Agro-tourism and fish market, as well celebrating special Islamic day by donating to the orphanage. Epstein (2006) claimed that collaborating with the community allows the student to improve their skill through extracurricular experience. In this case study, Saras argued that children gain a new experience while collaborating with the community. For example, the children learn a variety of gardening activities such as planting, weeding and mulching when they are conducting field trip in Agriculture. Those kind activities not only develop their knowledge of science learning but also build their sense of responsibility, understanding and love nature as they directly engage with the community who work in the Agro sector. allows the student to improve their skill through extracurricular experience.

Lastly, the table above shows that the only element which is not included in the Indonesian partnership framework based on Epstein theory is decision making. However, through the interview Saras argued that even though the school does not officially include family in curriculum planning, the family can give feedback to improve the quality of service through school committee, children book report or directly discuss it with the teacher. Epstein (2010) argued that involving family in decision-making enables the family to express their voices into school curricula which can affect children's education, empowering the feeling of belonging in school, and sharing the connectedness of experiences with the other families. The illustration from this case shows that the parents who actively participate in the school committee claimed the feeling of belonging resulted from the participation of creating school events which includes planning, organizing and collaborating with the teacher and communities.

C. The Essential Values to Build a Partnership with Families and Communities

Although many educators understand the importance of building a partnership with families and communities, it can be difficult to develop and maintain a collaborative and respectful partnership (McNulty & Beining, 2011). Through this interview, Saras argued that partnership requires an understanding, respecting others, attentive listening, trust as well open-honest and paraphrasing skill in communication. The concept of the Ecological model described by Bronfenbrenner (1977) emphasized that children development and behavior highly influenced by several levels of the social environment includes: (1) Microsystem (variable factors associated with family members), (2) mesosystem (refer to factors associated with the settings family actively participates such as extended family and community), (3) Ecosystem (variable factors linked with social settings which indirectly affect the family such as education system, mass media, support group), (4) Macrosystem (refer to beliefs, values, ideologies and attitudes). This model shows that various factors influence the behavior of children and family. Thus, the understanding and respecting values becomes the essential value in developing and sustaining the partnership. Saras also claimed that understanding and respecting is needed to maintain a positive relationship with families.

The value of mutual trust is also mentioned in this case study. Saras argued that teacher-parents should develop mutual trust to avoid misunderstanding and conflict. It supported Epstein's (2010) arguments which assert that the base of a partnership is trusting and respecting and without this firm base the problems and disagreements that arise in the partnership will be harder to solve. In this case study, Saras illustrated the importance of mutual trust between teacher and families at the first encounter of child arrival. If families do not believe that the school could provide their child with security and encouragement during their first arrival, it will be difficult to address children starting school problems. Along the similar lines, if the school does not trust that families could contribute to children's education, the partnership programs will not work effectively. Saras emphasized that partnership should be established based on reciprocity. The partnership could not be achieved with only one-party effort. The activity of partnership "should be done by and with families and other collaborative partners not to them" (Riley et.al,1996 p.65).

Saras narrated that the manner in communication could affect the relationship between teacher and families. She also argued that each parent has their own style of communication, some might prefer in the formal ways while others prefer in more casual ways. It is essential for teachers to establish an open-honest conversation to clarify each other's goals and needs to support children's education while maintaining communication in respectful ways. Hornby (2000) proposed the use of

counselling skills for teachers to establish effective communication in a partnership which includes listening, understanding and action planning. In the first stage, the listening skills used to help families to be willing to open up about their concerns or ideas. Then, the understanding skills used to clarify the concerns, develop the understanding of the situation, and suggest the possible solution. Finally, action planning skill is needed to provide the families with a plan of possible options to address the problem.

D. Evaluating the Approaches

The evaluation of partnership should be conducted to improve the quality of service. Schools should occasionally seek the feedback from parents and communities to assess the effectiveness of partnership activities (Hornby, 2000). Riley et al. (1996) argued the evaluation of partnership activities is needed to build comprehensive strategies among stakeholders, guide the enhancement of program, create accountability, assess the innovative ideas, strengthen the communication, support the school reform, improve the quality of service and provide a record for policies and practice. In this case study, Saras described several attempts to evaluate the partnership with families and communities. Firstly, they always seek parent's suggestions and feedback by questioning how the school service, what can be done to improve the partnership, and whether the school provides a range of communication options for the parent's voice. Hornby (2000) stated that the successful partnership between parents and teacher requires two-way communication which involves open communication of information, concerns, and ideas. Therefore, its essential to ensure the communication channels work effectively. The school usually will discuss this in the parent-teaching meetings, or the parents could write down their feedback in the children's book report.

Secondly, they also surveyed the parents and community satisfaction with the events conducted by the school such as open days, workshops, and cultural festivals. Saras explained that they use the evaluation result as the guide to improve the program. For instance, they used to open the opportunity to do the voluntary programs only for the member of the school committee and class coordinator with the assumption that the other parents were usually busy with their work. However, they got the feedback from the evaluation that many parents are willing to participate as a volunteer in some school events. This evaluation enables the school to accommodate the parent's voice and create better communication with the parents. Moreover, the school always uses a questionnaire of satisfaction towards school events results to produce better programs by eliminating less preferred programs and sustaining the best one. Carter (2003) suggested that schools should establish a system to record the time and process of volunteers to sign in and out and conduct the evaluation from parents' feedback. Thirdly, Saras explained that the school also uses the indicator partnership checklist provided in the Indonesian partnership framework for early childhood education. The partnership assessment tools have been developed to evaluate the effectiveness of implementation partnerships practice towards the achievement of goals (Iskandar, 2016). The self-evaluation instrument provided for teachers and families to assess the accomplishment of partnership practice in school. The teachers and families can also write down the possible factors that support or inhibit the partnership practices in the evaluation instruments. Self-evaluation aimed to reflect the practice and improve the quality of pupil, professional and organizational (MacBeath, 2005)

E. Challenges and gaps in building partnership with family

There will always be challenges that occur in building a partnership with the family. Karther & Lowden (1997) argued that even though partnership brings enormous rewards, the obstacles of partnership resulted from parents involvement are also numerous. Since each parent has a range of personalities and perspectives, some will be easy to work with, and others will be more challenging (Hornby, 2000). In this case study, there were several challenges that Saras faced in building a partnership with families.

One of them was dealing with parents who have a child with special education needs. At the first meeting with the parents, they told the teachers that their child might be a bit hyperactive and they suggested to look after their children more carefully. However, this child with special education needs began to push his friend and grabbed their hair when he was having a tantrum. Because this accident often occurs, the parents of the child who was pushed by the child with special education needs complained to the school. Saras then suggested the parents of the child with special education need to ask professionals to assess their child, but the parents were furious and started to blame the teacher.

From this case, she reflected the way she communicated with the parents and discussed the problem more carefully, with open-honest communication and attentively listened to the parent's side. She also accompanied the parents to the professionals and told them that the school would provide their child with a shadow teacher or additional support to accommodate the child's needs. The relationship between teachers and families with children with special needs is often problematic because the teacher's attitudes, talk, and action sometimes conflict with the way families feel toward their children (Carrington & Macarthur, 2012). Harris (2015) suggested that the school should create an inclusive environment by promoting sensitivity and embedding the belief that all children own their unique strengths and personalities.

The second case is when she has to deal with a parent who is linguistically diverse. Saras described that this family has minimal involvement because of the language barrier. The school also experienced the difficulty when they were discussing their child development outcomes and ways to support them at home. Araujo (2009) argued that the minimum of communication, misunderstandings, and miscommunications often occurs between the school and family with linguistically diverse reasons because of prejudice, stereotypes, and generalizations. Later, the preschool in which Saras worked provided an interpreter to cope with this problem so they could have effective communication. The illustration of miscommunication and lack of communication between teacher and parents because of the language barrier described by Jasis and Ordoñez-Jasis (2006) which suggested that the lack of parent's participation and interest affected children's academic outcome.

To establish an effective partnership the school should always take into consideration parents' voices, concerns, and ideas. López, Scribner & Mahitivanichch (2001) argued that parents' involvement is much more than contacting the school for the children's academic purpose. Furthermore, they also emphasized that the school should identify and address the family needs to increase their involvement in school. Several strategies could be conducted to accommodate the needs of parent with linguistically diverse such as provide them written communication form with their native language to maintain the communication, suggest the resources to acquire the second language, encourage them to participate in voluntary activities in school, and involve them in a multicultural event (Araujo, 2009)

The last case is dealing with parents with marital problems. Last year, Saras had a student who was often absent from school. Because she worried that the student might have gotten sick, she then contacted the parents. The mother of the student then told Saras that they currently have a family problem which unfortunately interferes with their child's education. At that time, Saras told me that she had no idea how to solve the problem because she thought that she should not get involved in parent's personal problems. Therefore, she only suggested to the mother that a parent's problem should not affect the children's education. Hornby (2000) argued that teachers need to raise the concern and conduct face to face meetings with parents when family problems affect children's education. The teacher's interpersonal communication skill will help the parents to understand the problem situation and consider the options to address the problem.

Finally, Saras argued that the challenges were sometimes not easy to address because it requires a lot of patience to manage her emotions. Sharing the problems with the peers teacher and school principal help her to reflect her action and attitude, as well develop the strategies to create a better partnership with families and communities. She concluded that when the teacher is able to understand the parent's feelings, the positive relationship which can support the student's learning is not impossible to achieve.

4. CONCLUSION

This case study yielded the illustration of building, evaluating and addressing the challenges of the school-family-community partnership in early childhood education settings. Throughout this case study, it shows that the types of involvement provided in the Indonesian Partnership framework for early childhood education could help the school to structure and initiate the partnership program as well evaluate and sustain the activities. This case study also brings the insight of the importance of reflection and evaluation in collaboration. Lastly, this case study also gives us an example of how listening, understanding and respecting is important in communicating with parents of children with disabilities. Thus, I argued that teacher training with the specific course on building partnership with families and communities could be conducted to equip the teacher with communication skills, strategies to address the possible challenges, and the knowledge to evaluate and sustain the partnership program.

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