
Home-School Partnership: How do Indonesian elementary school principals perceive it?

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Abstract

Home-school partnerships are defined as the collaboration between family and school and to improve students' achievement. This study sought to understand the perceptions of Indonesian elementary school principals to capture the recent partnerships in the elementary education perceived by Indonesian school principals. The data were collected through interviews with Indonesian school principals in exploring their perspectives and practices of the home-school partnership in Indonesian elementary education. The participants were six elementary school principals from six Indonesia elementary schools. All the interview data were analyzed through within case-cross case analyses. The study revealed that Indonesian elementary school principals had perceptions which are consistent towards the important roles of the home-school partnership. Besides, they reported that the implementation of the home-school partnership existed; however, a parent-teacher association was not established. The school principals involved in this study also informed that parents' lack of knowledge and insufficient time were the two barriers from a home-school relationship. Recommendation and suggestion are offered to tackle the barriers. The results of the study suggest the improvement of training for teachers to build communication with parents various backgrounds of culture and experiences are needed.

Keywords

Home-school partnership, Indonesian elementary school, principals, perception

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Introduction

Home-school partnerships as an active relationship between home and school in order to maximize pupils' learning achievement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Despite the availability of empirical and theoretical studies for the term "home-school partnership", gaps in the literature should always be continuously supported. In this regard, most of the available research is based on families within Western and developed country backgrounds namely La Paro and Pianta, (2000), Lau and Ng (2019), and Lagacé Séguin and Case (2010). Little research has been conducted focusing on home-school partnership outside these two contexts of social and economic, and cultural backgrounds. In addition, the study for basic education is also limited, as in Indonesian elementary education.

Regarding the development of the students, a report from Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, and Fendrich (1999) informed that decrease in home's involvement to maximize students' learning outcome when students are growing up (Epstein, 1995; Jeynes, 2005). Some reasons might appear to cause this is the limited opportunity for parents to get involved in the last years of elementary education. In addition, the fact that parents are difficult to deal with advance materials of learning in higher grades. Since it would benefit educational stakeholder to introduce an appropriate policy and encourage long-lasting program for home-school partnership, it is significant to inform more academic result of studies involve the partnership for elementary education, especially in developing countries.

Previous studies have shown an indication that that parties of both schools and families have various perspectives that could block the positive effects of the relationship (Flessa, 2008; Lau, 2014; Lau, Li, & Rao, 2011). The limitations of these studies are the lack of perspective of school principals. The researchers just informed the perspectives of parents and/or teachers. It is also limited to focus group discussions as the data collection approaches. Since the relationship is a result of the interrelationship between home and school barriers, our study went beyond the boundaries of the perception of teachers or parents towards factor affecting home-school partnership. This study sought to understand the perceptions of Indonesian elementary school principals to capture the recent partnerships in the elementary education perceived by Indonesian school principals. Four major research questions guided this study: 1) How is the partnership perceived by Indonesian elementary school principals? (2) What are the partnership practices in their schools? (3) What are the barriers influencing home-school partnership in Indonesian elementary education? and (4) What strategies employed to address the barriers?

Literature Review

The importance of the home-school partnership

The partnership has been introduced as a solution to improve students learning outcomes with diverse needs (Brown & Medway, 2007; Hedges & Lee, 2010). Different

context of studies informed that if school and students' family work hand in hand, they will make a better partnership for the betterment of the school, family, and also students (El Nokali, Bachman & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; Lau & Power, 2018; Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007). Previous studies suggested parent involvement in school activities can contribute to improving the school community. Researchers informed that home-school partnership might not only offer a significant contribution for the school-related community to work together for the improvement, but it also boosts valuable resources for school daily operation (Westrich & Stroebel, 2013; Yamamoto, & Holloway, 2010).

Parents' participation in school, such as contributing to school functioning such as collaboration motivation and teachers turnover can be essential. Park, Stone, and Holloway (2017) reported that these are all vital in forming a maximal learning environment. Schools with active parents were reported to become more responsive to educational concerns, helping develop a program related to the need of the public. Hong and Ho (2005) reported that the partnership was related to the range of positive student achievements within elementary schools, for their academic and social competence. It is crucial during basic education because the students adjusted to the new learning environment (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Parents' who involved themselves could be vital to help student face the challenges in relation to learning, a reliable factor for learning adjustment (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004).

Perspectives of educational stakeholders

Research has recommended that teaching organization and culture affect the merits and activities of education within home-school relationship. Previous studies offered information that home-school partnership affects school parties produce a chance of involvement and available resources to encourage the collaboration (Ho, 2009). The various school bases decide the practice of the collaboration. In the other words, home-school partnership will be better if schools have a clear and better plan for communicating with parents (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Studies also investigated that the perception of teachers, parents, as well as school principals influences, determine the effectiveness of the program implementation in building home-school partnership (Epstein, 2001).

While many teachers agree with the home-school partnership, others may be negative about it since there was a lack of trust between home and school (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). Other researchers have informed that parent social and education factors determine the implementation (Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010; Morris & Taylor, 1998; Murray, Finigan-Carr, Jones, Copeland-Linder, Haynie, & Cheng, 2014; Ng, 1999). The better the factors, the more flexible the opportunity obtained by the school to bridge the home-school partnership. Moreover, family with confidence will be likely supporting their children academic outcome and achievement than those who have no such a kind of confidence (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000; Kroeger & Lash, 2011; Waanders, Mendez & Downer, 2007).

Indonesian home-school partnerships

Indonesia is ranked fourth in population in the world. Its total population reaches over 250 million people. Indonesia is the 17th largest country in the world consisting of five main islands and other thousands of small islands. In this study, the research was conducted in Sumatra Island, the second- most densely populated. Specifically, the current study was done in an urban area in Jambi, Indonesia. Urban settings are characterized by cultures that may affect student parents' motivation to get involved in home-school partnerships. It also refers to the process of how they involve themselves into the development of the implementation of the partnerships. Forms of the home-school partnerships in Indonesia that have been revealed by some researches were: a). Holding a meeting with parents of students at school. b). Making agreements about school discipline with parents of students c). Schools Conduct home visits. d). Receiving student parents' visits. e). Involving parents in developing student character f). Providing counseling services at the school (Juliani, 2019; Yulianti, Denessen, & Droop, 2019).

Methodology

Research design, participants, and locale of the study

The current study is a qualitative study. It aimed at examining home-school partnership in improving students' learning outcomes in Indonesia. The current study involved interview sessions with six Indonesian elementary school principals with four main research questions; (1) How is the partnership perceived by Indonesian elementary school principals? (2) What are the partnership practices in their schools? (3) What are the barriers influencing home-school partnership in Indonesian elementary education? And (4) What strategies employed to address the barriers? The site for this study was a province in Jambi, the southern part of Sumatra Island, Indonesia.

Table 1. *Participants' biographical information*

Principals	School	Age	Working experience	Education
A	1	45	20	Bachelor
B	2	53	30	Bachelor
C	3	51	25	Bachelor
D	4	48	21	Bachelor
E	5	49	22	Bachelor
F	6	52	26	Bachelor

Data collection and analysis

Based on a review of the literature, the interview questions were developed in previous studies in the Indonesian context. All interviews were conducted by the researchers. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to make sure consistency across participants. On the other hand, it allowed the exploration of new issues. Some techniques were applied for the interviews, for example, to avoid leading questions, to use probing techniques, and to let the participant leads the interview sessions. All interview session lasted for about thirty minutes. All interviews were recorded using a smartphone. The recording was transcribed through a Microsoft Office application. All six participants of the interview can be seen in Table 1.

The constant comparative method of the grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) were used. Specifically, the method of comparing and contrasting the respondents' responses to each interview question was used to form categories, assign codes to the categories, summarize the content of each category for developing themes, and find negative evidence (Boeije, 2002). Each interview was carefully studied to examine its internal consistency. As soon as more than one interview was completed, comparisons between interviews within the same kindergarten were conducted. Upon the completion of all within-group analyses, between-group comparisons were conducted with regard to the experience of home-school collaboration to validate the story told by one group. Different aids (i.e., memo writing, close reading and rereading, and coding) were used to facilitate the identification of relevant quotes and to support the systematization of the analysis process. The second author analyzed all interview responses. However, six randomly selected transcripts (two transcriptions of each stakeholder) were cross-coded by the authors. The authors also held discussions to ensure the congruency between the emerging findings and the respondents' responses. We implemented triangulation and member checking in this study (Mukminin, 2012; Mukminin & McMahon, 2013) to exam the trustworthiness of the data collected.

We performed triangulation in the research by analyzing data from interviews to verify the accuracy of the data. We returned the interviewed transcript data to each participant participating for verification. This was done to ensure that each teacher agreed with the data we obtained and used, and each teacher or participant allowed us to use the data that came from them in our research. Creswell (2014) states that researchers should explicitly define their own biases, values, and interests on the topic of their research and the process of their access to research participants. Through reflexivity, we actively participated in critical self-reflection about our potential biases. Through reflexivity, we have become more self-conscious to control our biases. We have self-reflection by discussing whether we have a bias and if so, what bias do we have in our analysis. Johnson and Christensen (2019) explain that qualitative data analysis is “a messy, time-consuming, creative, mysterious and brilliant process and there is no doubt that there is no consensus on the analysis of qualitative data forms” (Creswell, 2014). In data analysis, interviews were recorded with a

recorder and transcribed, then carefully analyzed and categorized into one of several topics. In the first step, we did what Miles and Huberman called (1994) "Within the analysis of the situation." After interviews and audiotapes of the discussion group were transcribed, we analyzed and categorized them into sub-topics and topics. Then we did what Miles and Huberman (1994) called "a comprehensive analysis of the issues." We re-analyzed and compared the texts of all eight teachers in order to find the frequency of data between the participants for each general topic and for each sub-topic. We analyzed between cases in order to remove redundant data (for example, a participant did the same statement several times).

Ethical considerations

We protected the identities of all participants in this study through covering their real names and places. We also convinced all participants that their statements and views would not be shared with other parties and would be used only for the study.

Findings

Perceptions of the home-school partnership: The importance of the home-school partnership

When the Indonesian school principals involved in this study were asked about their school's vision and their attitude regarding home-school partnership, they were very consistent supporting the program and its activities. The partnership between teachers and parents was consistently perceived by principals as a way to improve parents' comprehension of the students' process of learning and the practices of the schools as well as their rationale. This support parents to make efforts sustainable strategies to support their children at home. The participants of the study thought that the parents should get involved in the partnership to make them more realize the practice of teachers in the school. Since the parents support the teacher, a problem will be easier to overcome. One of the school participants reported,

“Teachers work will make much more flexible as if parents know and respect the work. As a result, the parent would be more supportive of all activities in improving the quality of the learning. In addition, it will also be a problem solving for the school.” (Principal 2)

Besides helping parents understand the school practices, the close partnership between school and home will also support the long school plan for the betterment of the school. Principal 5 stated that the partnership could make a good impact on improving school plan; the parents will be more supportive of making school plans work. The consistency of the partnership will also be beneficial for nurturing decision for students future. Principal 3 had his opinion,

“Because for students at elementary school, they don’t decide for themselves and are dependent on the decision they parents do and the various kind of condition and environment that parents facilitate for them. So when a parent attends school more often or gets participated participates in various activities to learn about the school's future plan for students, then the things that parents have in nurturing the students would be consistent with the school.” (Principal 3)

Diverse home-school partnership practices

Since the participants of the study believe in the positive impacts of the home-school partnerships, Indonesian elementary schools have been introducing a variety of initiatives such as facilitating communication between parents and teachers, volunteering activities, and parent education. In particular, the schools have registered channels in formal and informal ways, written and oral. They also communicated to the parents about school teaching and learning processes. Two of the participants had their opinion,

“Apart from regular use of handbooks, teachers in her kindergarten were required to phone parents at least three times every month.” (Principal 4)

“For example, we request the class teacher make at least three phone calls per month with parents to communicate. So, we would also mark something special in the children's handbook. If parents have any special questions, there is a message box in the handbook for the parents to leave messages, and teachers would also write some notes. The communication would be mainly through the handbook and phone call. Volunteering was also a common practice.” (Principal 2)

Three different concepts and practices of handling parent volunteers were highlighted in the interview. They are perceived as a teaching resource, learners of the teaching pedagogy, and a resource of logistic. In the value of a teaching resource, the expertise of various family members can develop the curriculum implemented in the school. Oppositely, the activities by parents are viewed as a chance for the parents in observing their children teachers and obtain relevant skills to help the students learn. Principal 3 elaborated how volunteer parents are viewed as learners of teachers' pedagogy. Principal 1 said that there was a team of volunteers from parents that were invited in a certain schedule to the school to help conduct school events. They were educated on the ways to teach students when the events took place. They could understand how to deal with the students who are also their students. Teachers can also support the learning activities from school to home; they could involve helping the students complete home activities.

Barriers

Based on the results of the study, the obstacles or barriers in the implementation of the home-school partnerships were the collaboration between family and school and improving students' learning outcomes. There are parents who are too busy with their work

so that they do not care too much about their children's development. They seldom attend the meetings conducted in the school. This time limitation has prevented parents in partnerships to improve students' learning outcomes.

“Some parents need to make time to attend school meetings. They always had reasons that they were always busy with their work. Therefore, they seldom attend the meeting.” (Principal 6)

Besides the hectic day of the parents, it was also found that few participants of the study did not want to accept suggestions and recommendations from the teacher. Teachers always consulted with parents about the students' activities and behaviors. Principal 5 informed that a few parents can be very upset when they were informed about the problems done by their children. The information was given so that parents can work together with the teachers to solve the problems. Another finding of this study suggests that barriers including parents' lack knowledge are also among the barriers found in this study. Student parents' commonly do not understand the importance of the home-school partnerships in improving students learning outcomes. So that, the contribution given by parents in establishing cooperation with the school can be categorized as less optimal. Parents have not fully realized that involvement in the administration of education is absolutely essential. As it is known that, the school really needs collaboration with parents. The collaboration established has a clear goal which is to get participation, support, trust and understanding from the students' parents. This support directly or indirectly greatly helps the school in carrying out the program and implementation of education itself.

“Based on the report of the teachers, student parents still have limited knowledge about the importance of the home-school partnership. When it comes to elaboration between teachers and parents, it should be realized that this weakness emerged.” (Principal 5)

Thus it can be seen that parents play an important role in fostering student character. Parents have a very important role in educating children at home so that it helps the school in carrying out the process of education and learning in school so that the child's character can be formed as expected.

Strategies to face the barriers

When talked about barriers, the school principals in this study informed some solutions offered by the participants. They informed about the willingness of the school stakeholders in managing home-school partnerships. School should take time in establishing partnerships with parents to cooperate with teachers and school principals to achieve well in their educational activities. One of the school principals mentioned the information in the interview session,

“Our consistency in building relationships between home and school to improve students' learning process can be a solution for overcoming barriers faced within the relationship.” (Principal 2)

Building communication with parents should also be recommended by the participants of this study. The communication must be maintained to help them understand the importance of the partnerships to improve learning outcomes. Two of the principals in this study revealed,

“The communication between school and students’ family should always be promoted in order to face barriers found in this study.” (Principal 4)

“Should there be any strategies to overcome the barrier, the communication between teachers and parents should be always available.” (Principal 2)

In practice, teachers can have regular visits to students’ home as frequent as possible. Principal 1 mentioned in his comment that home visit is done to make the communication better. It also provides the opportunity to create a tighter relationship between home and school.

Discussion

The study aimed at elaborating the perspectives of Indonesian elementary school principals on home-school partnership in kindergartens. The study refers to the ways that they view and do home-school partnerships, the barriers perceived for the home-school partnerships, as well as the strategies for overcoming the barriers. Similar to previously existing studies (Lau, 2014), the results of this current study have an indication that Indonesian principals have a consistent understanding regarding the value and usefulness of the home-school partnership. Because of the strong belief in this partnership, Indonesian elementary schools have facilitated various activities to involve students’ families, especially parents both at home and in school in supporting students learning process and the achievement development. These kinds of activities were significant to inform parents about the students’ learning process and progress, to help the parents comprehend the students’ development, and to facilitate information about learning in school, as well as to help them apply strategies effective to aid student learning at home.

The findings of the study informed that all participants who were Indonesian elementary school principals have been ready for home-school partnership; various barriers were found based on the data analysis. These barriers can prevent students’ development. Previous studies have highlighted that lack of time as main barriers to family participation in the partnership (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Cheung, & Pomerantz, 2011; Chiu & Ho, 2006; Mendez, Carpenter, LaForett, & Cohen, 2009). This study also informed that the Indonesian school principals perceive time as the main barrier of home-school partnerships. Prior research also found that teachers should encourage home-school partnerships by exposing frequent contact within various strategies (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Pang, 2004; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000; Uludag, 2008). The barrier has been revealed that working parents with much work often prioritize the daily activities they viewed to obtain practical things to be related with the partnership activities, for instance, monthly meeting and online group services. Another barrier found in this study was that the parents had no knowledge of the

home-school partnerships relationships; they sometimes did not want to discuss their children develop in the school. Fantuzzo, Tighe, and Childs (2000) and Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2005) revealed that this finding is similar to other previous studies revealing that the less awareness of the parents was one of the barriers in home-school partnership.

Based on the results of the study, it was explained that the solutions taken in overcoming the barriers from the implementation of the home-school partnerships are: Parents should take the time to establish cooperation with the school in growing student character. Be diligent in controlling the child and conducting deliberations and communication with teachers at school. Teachers do home visits as much as possible if needed to obtain complete data, both regarding students, parents, and the state of the house. There have been many obstacles faced by schools and also parents of students in establishing cooperation in growing student character. So that harmonious cooperation that helps each other between the school and parents is needed for the birth of a generation that has character in accordance with religious teachings. The school and parents need to make the same perception in educating children through continuous collaboration. So what is taught in school is not different from what is expected at home by parents and Public. Thus the values taught at home are the same as the values taught at school. In addition, schools and parents can easily carry out discussions in solving problems faced by children in the learning process both at school and at home.

Conclusion and Implications

Principals, across the elementary schools have a consistent perception of the importance of the home-school partnership. While various activities have been applied in the participating school of the principals of the study, they were mostly initiated and organized by the kindergartens. The establishment of the home-school partnerships is not common informed in this study. Different barriers, including limited time and parents' lack of knowledge were reported by the principals involved in this study. Various strategies were applied to face the time barriers. Strategies were also offered to tackle the challenges. The findings suggest that more training should be facilitated in focusing on skills. It enables educators to have better communication and efforts with parents from various backgrounds to facilitate their participation in home-school partnerships.

Some limitation of the current study should also be noted. First, Indonesian is defined as a populous developing country that cannot be compared to other developing countries. So, future research regarding home-school partnerships in various context and setting can be more developed. This study is limited to qualitative report; other methods are also suggested to be done, such as survey, observation, and documents. Future studies should be done home-school partnership research with a larger sample size which can depict a different pattern of a wider scope for a more complete examination of the home-school partnership. This will provide efficient and effective programs to provide an appropriate partnership between home and school in different contexts across developmental and educational stages.

Disclosure statement

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