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Stakeholder Collaboration as a Principal's Leadership Strategy Toward Effective Schools

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Abstract: This study aims to describe the leadership of school principals in building stakeholder collaboration to realize effective schools at SDN Bunikasih 2, Warungkondang District, and SDN Pasirmuncang, Cugenang District, Cianjur Regency. The research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings show that principals in both schools applied management functions comprehensively in planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating collaborative efforts. SDN Bunikasih 2 implemented collaboration through formal organizational structures, such as task distribution and scheduled meetings, whereas SDN Pasirmuncang developed collaboration through social approaches grounded in community closeness. Both approaches proved effective in strengthening stakeholder support and improving the school climate. This study highlights that collaborative leadership that adapts to local social contexts is essential for building effective schools and enhancing community engagement in education.

Keywords: Principal Leadership, Stakeholder Collaboration, Effective Schools, Educational Management, Community Engagement

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamics of 21st-century education, schools are required to function not only as learning organizations that are academically effective but also as institutions capable of establishing strong collaborative networks with stakeholders (Apriani et al., 2025; Bandur et al., 2022; Sukmayadi & Yahya, 2020). The involvement of stakeholders such as teachers, parents, school committees, communities, businesses, and local governments plays a crucial role in creating a conducive educational ecosystem (Idharudin, 2025; Mustofa, 2025; Sukung & Huludu, 2023). Within this context, the leadership of the principal becomes a strategic force because principals are responsible for bridging diverse interests, coordinating programs, and ensuring that every stakeholder contributes to shared goals. The urgency of collaborative leadership continues to increase as schools cannot operate effectively without broad support and participation from the surrounding community (Kasmawati, 2021; Mulyasa, 2022).

The concept of stakeholder collaboration positions the principal not only as an administrator but also as an instructional leader capable of unifying visions, establishing open

communication structures, and fostering a participatory culture (Sidik & Nugraha, 2024; Zahria, 2024). Fayol (2016) and Siagian (1982) emphasize that effective leadership requires the ability to plan, organize, actuate, and supervise resources to achieve organizational objectives. In the context of schools, the principal's ability to orchestrate internal and external elements becomes the key to establishing sustainable collaboration. When principals successfully integrate teachers, school committees, parents, and the community into strategic programs, schools are more likely to achieve effectiveness in terms of their climate, the quality of instructional services, and students' learning outcomes (Karomi, 2025).

Effective schools are characterized by a supportive learning environment, positive social relationships, high-quality instruction, and strong community support. Systematically designed stakeholder collaboration contributes to shaping such a climate—by increasing parental involvement, strengthening community participation, building reciprocal communication, and fostering teacher professionalism. Evidence from various studies indicates that strong stakeholder support is associated with higher academic and non-academic achievement (Rahman et al., 2025; Setiyanti & Setyowati, 2025). In this regard, principals serve as the primary driving force that determines the direction and quality of stakeholder relations (Firdaus & Erihadiana, 2022).

However, a research gap remains between theoretical ideals and practical implementation. Although literature highlights the importance of stakeholder involvement, empirical findings show that collaboration processes at schools often remain administrative, top-down, and lack reflective dialogue between principals, teachers, and the community. Moreover, previous research has largely focused on transformational or managerial leadership within the internal school context, without deeply exploring interactions with external stakeholders (Iqbal, 2021; Karomi, 2025). This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive investigation of collaborative leadership strategies and their influence on school effectiveness.

The cases of SDN Bunikasih 2 in Warungkondang and SDN Pasirmuncang in Cugenang, Cianjur Regency, provide an interesting context for exploration. Although both schools are situated within strong social environments rooted in communal cooperation, challenges remain in strengthening reflective communication among principals, teachers, and stakeholders. Preliminary data show ongoing collaborative activities involving parents, school committees, and local institutions; however, the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes still tend to be instructional and lack participatory dialogue. This condition suggests that the existing social potential has not yet been optimally managed to support the realization of effective schools.

Based on this context, a study on “Principal Leadership in Building Stakeholder Collaboration to Achieve Effective Schools” is essential. Using a case study approach, this research seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of principals' strategies in planning, managing, and evaluating collaboration, as well as uncovering challenges and interpersonal dynamics that emerge in practice. The results are expected to enrich the literature on educational leadership while offering practical models for schools to develop participatory, reflective, and sustainable collaboration that accelerates the achievement of effective schooling.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of principal leadership in building stakeholder collaboration at SDN Bunikasih 2, Warungkondang District, and SDN Pasirmuncang, Cugenang District, Cianjur Regency. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows the researcher to capture social dynamics, interaction patterns, and subjective meanings that emerge in collaborative practices within the school environment. Creswell and Clark (2017) emphasize that a qualitative method is appropriate when researchers intend to explore phenomena naturally within complex contexts.

The case study design supports this need, as it enables holistic analysis of leadership phenomena, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are inseparable (Adrias & Ruswandi, 2025; Yin, 2017).

The research subjects included principals, teachers, school committees, parents, and village administrators involved in collaborative activities at both schools. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their role and involvement in school programs that contain collaborative elements. This technique aligns with Miles et al. (2014), who stated that participant selection in qualitative studies should be based on their ability to provide rich and relevant data to the research focus. The involvement of various stakeholders allowed the study to examine leadership dynamics from multiple perspectives.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and documentation analysis. Interviews were conducted to explore stakeholders' experiences and views regarding principals' strategies in planning, organizing, and evaluating collaboration. Observations were employed to observe stakeholder engagement, principal-stakeholder interactions, and the real-time implementation of school programs. Documentation analysis included reviewing school plans, meeting minutes, committee reports, and records of external partnerships. The use of methodological triangulation ensured stronger validity and comprehensive findings (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2014; Shenton, 2004; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007; Tisdell et al., 2025).

In this qualitative study, the researcher acted as the primary instrument who directly engaged with participants and the research context. To facilitate data collection, supporting instruments such as interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation analysis formats were used. This principle aligns with Lincoln and Guba (1985), who state that the researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research, as subjective interpretation significantly influences the discovery of meaning in the data.

Data trustworthiness was ensured through four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through source and method triangulation and member checking with participants. Transferability was supported by detailed descriptions of the school context to allow the findings to apply to similar settings. Dependability was ensured through systematic documentation using an audit trail. Confirmability was maintained by grounding conclusions in the original data, including field notes, interview transcripts, and documentation.

Data analysis followed the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by identifying key themes such as collaborative planning, stakeholder organization, program implementation, and evaluation mechanisms. Findings were then presented in thematic narratives and matrix displays outlining stakeholder relationships. Conclusion drawing occurred continuously throughout the research to ensure that emerging interpretations reflected actual field conditions. This model allowed flexible responsiveness to dynamic collaboration processes while enhancing analytical accuracy.

The study was conducted over a three-month period, from January to March 2025, which included preparation, data collection, validation of findings, and preparation of the final report. With these methodological procedures, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of principal leadership practices in fostering stakeholder collaboration to achieve effective schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Planning

Planning stakeholder collaboration at SDN Bunikasih 2 and SDN Pasirmuncang was carried out through a structured process to ensure that all relevant parties could contribute to achieving effective schooling. The principals began the planning process by identifying the school's priority needs, such as infrastructure improvement, character development, and

strengthening school–community relations. This initial step reflects Fayol’s (1949) principle that organizational actions must be grounded in clear goals and strategies. As stated by the Principal of SDN Bunikasih 2: “We begin by identifying school needs. After that, we determine who can be involved in working together.”

At SDN Bunikasih 2, planning was conducted through formal meeting forums involving teachers, the school committee, and community leaders. The principal facilitated discussions to determine program priorities, stakeholder roles, and implementation timelines. This aligns with Hallinger and Heck’s (2010) concept of shared planning, where effective collaboration emerges when all parties participate in decision-making. One teacher stated: Before any program begins, we are always invited to discuss it first. We feel involved, not merely given instructions.”

In contrast, planning at SDN Pasirmuncang took place more flexibly through informal communication. The principal frequently engaged in direct discussions with community figures, village officials, and parents before drafting formal work plans. This demonstrates Mintzberg’s (1994) adaptive planning approach, in which small organizations commonly formulate plans through fluid contextual interactions. “People here are very open. So, before making programs, I visit community leaders first to talk. Only after that do we prepare the written plan,” explained the principal of SDN Pasirmuncang.

Research documentation reveals that both schools developed annual work plans explicitly incorporating stakeholder collaboration. These plans included activity lists, schedules, performance indicators, and responsible personnel. The use of measurable indicators reflects results-based planning (Mulyasa, 2021), enabling systematic monitoring of collaboration outcomes. As a teacher from SDN Pasirmuncang noted: “We also identify potential obstacles, mainly those related to communication with parents.”

Planning also considered the social characteristics of each school environment. SDN Bunikasih 2 optimized local gotong royong culture to support infrastructure projects, while SDN Pasirmuncang leveraged close community relationships to strengthen discipline and religious development programs. This supports Epstein’s (2011) theory that effective collaboration must be context-based to maintain relevance and impact.

Overall, planning practices at both schools reflected strong and participatory management functions. The principals successfully integrated needs analysis, stakeholder mapping, dialogic processes, and formal documentation to ensure focused implementation of collaboration programs. These findings align with collaborative leadership theory (Lestari & Wibowo, 2021), which emphasizes the importance of open and responsive planning in strengthening school–stakeholder partnerships.

Organizing

The organization of stakeholder collaboration at SDN Bunikasih 2 and SDN Pasirmuncang was carried out by structuring the workflow, defining stakeholder roles, and establishing coordination mechanisms to ensure that every participant clearly understood their responsibilities in supporting school programs. At SDN Bunikasih 2, the principal organized teachers, the school committee, and community members by forming working teams for each priority program, such as facility improvement, religious activities, and student discipline initiatives. This organizational pattern reflects Robbins and Coulter’s (2018) principle that organizing functions to establish working relationships and divide tasks to ensure activity effectiveness. One teacher stated: “We are divided into several teams, such as facilities, student activities, and religious affairs. So, everyone knows exactly what their responsibilities are.”

At SDN Pasirmuncang, organizing was more flexible and adapted to the capacity of each stakeholder. The principal primarily coordinated with teachers, community leaders, parents, and village officials through informal communication to ensure that each party understood their roles in collaborative programs. This approach aligns with Mintzberg’s (1994) concept of adaptive organizing, in which organizations with strong social characteristics rely on informal

agreements to form dynamic and responsive work structures. As the principal explained: “We don’t always establish formal teams. Sometimes a mutual agreement is enough who can help and what their role is. What matters is that the program runs smoothly.”

Organization also involved establishing communication mechanisms among stakeholders. At SDN Bunikasih 2, the principal scheduled regular meetings with teachers and the school committee to monitor program progress. These meetings were supported by structured minutes that functioned as accountability records. Meanwhile, at SDN Pasirmuncang, communication was more frequent but informal, often held at community leaders’ homes or in spontaneous discussions within the village. This supports Emmer and Sabornie’s (2015) view that effective communication is crucial to maintaining coordination and a positive organizational climate. A teacher at SDN Pasirmuncang explained: “For any activity, the principal usually talks directly to community figures or village officials first, then informs us afterward.”

Organizing practices also maximized the potential of the local community. SDN Bunikasih 2 collaborated with residents for gotong royong activities and infrastructure improvements, while SDN Pasirmuncang involved religious leaders and community organizations to strengthen character education and student discipline. This approach aligns with Epstein’s (2011) community-based involvement theory, which states that effective collaboration leverages social assets in the school’s environment.

Internally, the principals ensured that teachers understood their strategic roles as key implementers of school programs. Teachers were involved not only in program execution but also in agenda formulation and preliminary evaluation. This demonstrates the implementation of participatory leadership, where teacher involvement strengthens program sustainability. Hallinger and Wang (2015) emphasize that such involvement enhances implementation effectiveness and supports the development of a strong school culture.

Overall, the organizing practices at both schools show that the principals were able to integrate formal structures and informal social networks according to the unique characteristics of their respective environments. These findings reinforce collaborative leadership theory, which highlights that the success of collaboration depends on the leader’s ability to establish coordination structures that are effective, adaptive, and aligned with school needs.

Implementation

The implementation of stakeholder collaboration at SDN Bunikasih 2 and SDN Pasirmuncang illustrates how principals mobilize all parties through coordinated, communicative, and participatory approaches. At SDN Bunikasih 2, the principal ensured that each program was carried out according to the plans established collaboratively with teachers, the school committee, and the community. Implementation occurred through scheduled coordination activities, such as school cleanliness campaigns, religious development programs, and student discipline initiatives involving community support. This aligns with Stoner’s (1995) concept of the actuating function, in which leaders effectively mobilize human resources toward shared objectives. As one teacher explained: “During the activities, the principal always supervises directly. He ensures that each part is executed according to the assigned responsibilities.”

At SDN Pasirmuncang, the implementation process was more flexible and rooted in strong social relationships between the principal and local stakeholders. The principal frequently engaged in personal approaches, especially in religious programs, student discipline supervision, and environmental activities. This reflects community-based leadership, in which social networks are utilized for mobilizing participation. The approach is in line with Epstein (2011), stating that community engagement functions optimally when supported by interpersonal connections and trust. As the principal noted: “We always involve community

leaders in implementation. Direct communication works faster, and people feel more appreciated.”

The implementation also demonstrated active participation from stakeholders. At SDN Bunikasih 2, the school committee contributed to classroom facility improvement and student supervision activities, indicating clear role distribution and mutual trust. Meanwhile, at SDN Pasirmuncang, community involvement was more prominent in maintaining school environmental order and supporting students’ religious and behavioral development. This aligns with Bandura’s (1997) concept of collective efficacy, where strong collaboration enhances the community’s confidence in achieving shared goals. A local community leader remarked: “When the school holds events, we are always invited. We usually help by organizing the venue or accompanying the students.”

Additionally, both principals played an active role in ensuring that teachers executed their responsibilities in line with collaboration plans. Teachers were involved in supervising events, monitoring student behavior, and managing activities involving parents and community organizations. This illustrates the implementation of instructional leadership, where the principal remains present to maintain the quality of ongoing programs (Hallinger, 2011). As a teacher stated: “During every activity, the principal accompanies and gives guidance. If there are changes, we are informed immediately.”

The implementation also involved problem-solving mechanisms for challenges encountered in the field. At both schools, principals addressed obstacles such as low parental participation through follow-up communication, personal approaches, and scheduling adjustments. This demonstrates situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988), where leaders adapt their style based on contextual demands.

Overall, the implementation of stakeholder collaboration in both schools shows that principals successfully mobilize diverse parties through consistent coordination, interpersonal relationships, and direct involvement. These findings confirm that the success of collaboration is not limited to planning but relies significantly on leaders’ ability to execute plans responsively and contextually, reflecting the essence of collaborative leadership in building effective schools.

Evaluation

The evaluation of stakeholder collaboration at SDN Bunikasih 2 and SDN Pasirmuncang was conducted through continuous monitoring of program implementation, stakeholder participation, and the impact of collaboration on school development. At SDN Bunikasih 2, the principal implemented formal evaluation through regular meetings with teachers and the school committee. These evaluations aimed to determine whether the activities had met the indicators established in the work plan. This reflects Terry’s (1972) principle that supervision is a managerial mechanism used to ensure that implementation aligns with predetermined standards. A teacher explained: “Usually, after each activity, we hold a meeting to evaluate what went well and what needs improvement.”

Meanwhile, at SDN Pasirmuncang, evaluation was conducted more flexibly through informal discussions among the principal, community leaders, and parents. Although not always formally documented, these evaluations were effective for identifying challenges, understanding stakeholder involvement, and defining necessary improvements. This approach is consistent with Stake’s (2004) concept of responsive evaluation, which emphasizes adaptability to social and cultural contexts. The principal noted: “If there is any issue or a program does not run maximally, we discuss it right after the activity. We do not need to wait for a formal meeting.”

In both schools, the evaluation assessed not only program outcomes but also implementation processes and stakeholder participation. The principals monitored stakeholder attendance, contribution, and commitment throughout activities. This aligns with Epstein’s

(2011) emphasis that collaboration evaluation must consider relational and process dimensions, not merely final results. A school committee member at SDN Bunikasih 2 stated: “We are also evaluated, such as whether our support was appropriate or why some events had low attendance.”

Evaluation also focused on the impact of collaborative activities on school climate and student behavior. At SDN Bunikasih 2, the evaluation showed improvements in school cleanliness and student discipline. At SDN Pasirmuncang, findings indicated an increase in community engagement in supporting students’ character development. These results support Scheerens’ (2016) concept of school effectiveness, which asserts that structured community involvement contributes positively to school quality.

Follow-up actions were implemented based on evaluation results, including improvements in planning, revisions to role distribution, and reinforcement of stakeholder communication. The consistency of follow-up measures demonstrates the principal’s capacity for adaptive decision-making, aligning with educational management theory, which emphasizes that sustained evaluation is essential for program continuity (Mulyasa, 2021).

Overall, the evaluation practices at both schools show that the principals successfully exercised the supervision function in collaborative leadership. SDN Bunikasih 2 highlighted formal, scheduled evaluation mechanisms, whereas SDN Pasirmuncang relied on responsive, informal communication. Both models were relevant to each school’s social environment and underscore that effective collaborative leadership requires consistent, reflective, and context-responsive supervision.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the principals’ leadership in establishing stakeholder collaboration at SDN Bunikasih 2 and SDN Pasirmuncang reflects the practice of collaborative leadership, implemented through two distinct models: a formal structural model and a social–communitarian model. The principal of SDN Bunikasih 2 structured collaboration through clear role divisions, formal documentation, and routine coordination, while the principal of SDN Pasirmuncang utilized informal, community-based social relations to mobilize stakeholder participation. These two approaches are consistent with Hallinger and Heck (2007) and Heck and Hallinger (2010), who argue that the form of effective leadership is highly influenced by social and cultural contexts within the organization.

The planning process in both schools demonstrates an alignment between collaborative programs and actual school needs. This reinforces the concept of needs-based planning, which emphasizes situational analysis as the foundation for collaborative program development. Nasir et al. (2023) support this perspective, stating that stakeholder involvement becomes more effective when programs respond to real school conditions rather than administrative routines.

Stakeholder involvement in the planning stage highlights the principal’s role as a dialogue facilitator. Both principals engaged teachers, parents, and school committees in formulating collaborative programs, reflecting Epstein’s (1995) overlapping spheres of influence theory, which posits that school effectiveness increases when relationships among home, school, and community are built through reflective dialogue. The principals acted as connectors who aligned diverse stakeholder interests toward shared goals.

The organizing practices also demonstrate contextual adaptation. SDN Bunikasih 2 used formal organizational structures such as working teams, while SDN Pasirmuncang relied on flexible agreements shaped by interpersonal trust. These approaches align with Robbins and Coulter (1995), who explain that organizing may adopt either formal or informal mechanisms depending on the organizational context. Adaptation to the local environment reflects leadership sensitivity to school culture and community expectations.

Stakeholder collaboration implementation also exhibited consistent mobilization of participation. At SDN Bunikasih 2, a structured coordination mechanism ensured program

continuity, whereas at SDN Pasirmuncang, interpersonal engagement served as the primary driver of participation. These findings support Hossain and Aydin (2021), who assert that school–community collaboration in rural contexts is often more effective through informal social interactions. Collaboration activities such as gotong royong, religious mentoring, and behavior monitoring highlight collective agency among stakeholders, in line with Bandura’s (1986) theory that shared action reinforces collective confidence in achieving common goals.

Evaluation practices further demonstrate two complementary modes: formal evaluation at SDN Bunikasih 2 and responsive evaluation at SDN Pasirmuncang. This aligns with Stake’s (1967) argument that evaluation must consider local communication culture to ensure timely and meaningful feedback. Both schools evaluated not only program results but also stakeholder engagement processes. This reflects Black and Wiliam’s (1998) notion that continuous formative assessment can enhance program quality and stakeholder participation.

The analysis reinforces that the success of stakeholder collaboration is influenced by the principal’s ability to apply participatory leadership. The principals ensured open communication, established mutual trust, and empowered teachers and community members as co-owners of school programs. Brundrett and Duncan (2011) argue that participatory leadership strengthens community cohesion and increases shared responsibility for school success.

Overall, the discussion highlights that differences in social context do not inhibit collaborative effectiveness. Instead, schools that adapt leadership strategies to their sociocultural environments are more successful in fostering stakeholder participation. These findings confirm Scheerens’ (2016) view that effective schools are supported by well-managed social relationships, communication, and coordination. Therefore, context-sensitive collaborative leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing school quality through stakeholder engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the principals’ leadership at SDN Bunikasih 2 and SDN Pasirmuncang plays a pivotal role in fostering stakeholder collaboration to achieve effective school management. Both principals successfully implemented the management functions comprehensively, beginning from planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating collaborative programs. Despite the different social characteristics of each school, the findings demonstrate that collaboration can operate effectively when principals establish open communication, clarify stakeholder roles, and mobilize community participation using contextually appropriate approaches. The structural collaboration model applied in SDN Bunikasih 2 and the social–communitarian model practised in SDN Pasirmuncang have both proven effective in strengthening stakeholder involvement. These collaborative practices have contributed positively to the school climate, student discipline, and community support toward school initiatives. The findings affirm that adaptive collaborative leadership serves as a fundamental element for schools to optimize community resources and enhance educational quality.

The implications of this study highlight the importance of improving principals’ capacity in collaborative leadership, particularly in relationship-building, facilitating dialogue, and designing responsive collaborative structures aligned with the community’s social context. Local governments are encouraged to provide leadership training focused on partnership management and school networking development. Teachers and other stakeholders should also be consistently engaged in planning and evaluation stages to ensure that collaboration is not merely ceremonial but embedded as part of school culture. Furthermore, this study suggests that collaboration models should not be standardized but instead adjusted to each school’s socio-cultural dynamics. With strengthened leadership capacity and active stakeholder participation, schools can achieve greater effectiveness and ensure sustainable improvements in education quality.

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