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Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration Model in Strengthening Children's Economic Character in Child-Friendly Schools

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Abstract: This study explores a multi-stakeholder collaboration model (school, parent, community, government) in fostering children's economic character in child-friendly schools. Through a qualitative phenomenological approach with in-depth interviews with 12 respondents, it was found that current collaboration is still partial and event-based, but most effective when realized in real, contextual projects. Key challenges include weak coordination, lack of consistent support, and unbalanced stakeholder roles. Nonetheless, there are significant opportunities through regular forums, long-term mentoring, and synergy with the local economy. The proposed ideal collaboration model is participatory, contextual, and adaptive, with concrete steps in the form of regular coordination forums, curriculum integration, and continuous monitoring. The implementation of this model is expected to strengthen the economic character of children, including the values of responsibility, cooperation, and independence, within the framework of child-friendly schools.

Keywords: Multi-stakeholder collaboration; economic character; child-friendly schools

Introduction

Character education is an essential component in fostering moral and ethical values, with recent studies highlighting the synergistic impact of parental and community involvement (Djazilan & Wuryandani, 2024). The concept of a "child-friendly school" (CFS) emphasises the creation of an inclusive, safe, and supportive learning environment that prioritises children's rights and holistic development (Hajar Astuti & Nurkolis, 2025; Tusriyanto, 2020; Wargadinata, 2025). However, the economic aspect of this framework often receives little explicit attention.

The development of economic character, which encompasses values such as entrepreneurship, financial literacy, responsibility, and collaboration, is crucial for children's future success and social well-being (Sánchez-Rubio et al., 2024). In many contexts, the adoption of the SRA model has been uneven, creating disparities where some primary schools have become child-friendly while others lag behind, underscoring the need for strong support systems (Musau et al., 2022). The success of poverty alleviation efforts has also been linked to multi-stakeholder collaborative approaches (Permata Sari et al., 2025). Furthermore, the education sector is recognised as an important component of national strategies for empowering action through education (Finnegan, 2023). This study aims to answer two main questions:

First, how is collaboration currently practised between schools, parents, communities and the government in fostering economic character in child-friendly schools? Second, what are the challenges and opportunities in implementing a multi-stakeholder collaboration model to strengthen children's economic character in child-friendly schools?

The research gap and novelty of this study is that despite the importance of collaboration among stakeholders in character education and SRA development having been widely discussed (Djazilan & Wuryandani, 2024; Kristanti et al., 2024; Musau et al., 2022; Nursaptini et al., 2020), there is still a *gap* in the in-depth understanding of the specific mechanisms and real challenges in multi-stakeholder collaboration for strengthening children's economic character in the context of SRA in Indonesia. This study fills this *gap* by providing empirical analysis based on the direct perceptions of various stakeholders in the field. *The novelty* of this study lies in the identification of an adaptive and contextual collaboration model, rooted in the participants' experiences, as well as the formulation of concrete implementation steps that balance the roles of schools, parents, communities, and the government to foster children's economic character in SRA.

Methods

This study utilised a qualitative phenomenological approach, in line with studies exploring the synergistic impact of parental and community involvement in character education (Djazilan & Wuryandani, 2024). The design used was a qualitative case study, focusing on the dynamics and results of collaboration in fostering economic character in child-friendly schools.

The research subjects involved 12 key respondents from various stakeholders, selected purposively to represent diverse perspectives. The respondents consisted of: 3 public primary school teachers; 3 school principals (2 public primary schools, 1 private primary school); 3 parents; 2 community representatives (1 local MSME, 1 educational NGO); 1 education official. All respondent names were anonymised to maintain confidentiality. The communities referred to in this study were the MSME and educational NGO communities in Salatiga.

The data collection method in this study involved semi-structured interviews with all participant groups to gather rich narratives about their experiences, perceptions, challenges, and successes in collaborative efforts (Djazilan & Wuryandani, 2024). The interview questions covered an overview of current collaboration practices, the most effective forms of collaboration, concrete examples, reasons for success/failure, the roles of each party, challenges, opportunities, ideal models, and concrete steps forward.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes, patterns, and categories related to multi-stakeholder collaboration and economic character development. This involved coding, categorising, and interpreting narrative data from interviews to build a comprehensive understanding of the collaboration model. Thematic analysis is presented in the form of thematic descriptions and supporting quotes from respondents.

Results and Discussion

Result

Based on in-depth interviews with 12 respondents and thematic analysis, several key themes related to multi-stakeholder collaboration practices in fostering economic character in child-friendly schools were identified:

Patterns of collaboration among stakeholders remain partial and event-based

Most informants described that collaboration was already taking place but was not yet structured or sustainable. Collaboration tended to occur during specific activities such as bazaars or competitions, rather than as a routine practice.

KS1: *"Collaboration exists, but it is still event-based, not systematic. For example, it is only active during competitions or literacy month."*

G1: *"It is ongoing, but not yet routine. The school has tried to involve parents through the 'Student Bank' activity, but participation is not stable."*

L1: *"We are sometimes invited to speak about small businesses. But it is not sustainable."*

Interpretation: Collaboration has not yet been institutionalised due to a lack of routine communication mechanisms and formal role sharing.

The most effective collaboration occurs when it is based on real and contextual projects

Collaboration is considered effective when it is realised in real projects that directly involve students and link learning to simple economic practices.

G2: *"A small entrepreneurship project at the end of the semester teaches children to appreciate the fruits of their labour."*

KS3: *"The 'Mini Honesty Canteen' project teaches children honesty and responsibility."*

L1: *"Workshops held directly at our business premises are effective because the children are directly involved."*

Interpretation: The project-based approach has proven to be an effective collaborative tool because it involves children's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in a real socio-economic context.

The determining factors for successful collaboration are commitment and regular mentoring

Collaboration works well when there is intensive mentoring, continuous communication, and clear roles between parties. Failure occurs if activities are ceremonial or schedules are inflexible.

L2: *"Successful because of intensive mentoring."*

KS1: *"Because all parties feel they have a role, children learn economics and responsibility at the same time."*

G1: *"It won't work if it clashes with the parents' working hours."*

Interpretation: Consistency, a sense of ownership, and monitoring by schools or the government are crucial factors.

The roles of stakeholders are still unbalanced and centred on schools

The most dominant role is held by schools (teachers and principals). Parents and the community play a supporting role, while the government acts as a licensor or policy facilitator without substantial direct involvement.

G1: *"Teachers as facilitators, parents as supporters, the community as a source of inspiration, the government as a licensor and provider of a small amount of funding."*

P1: *"The government is a policy and incentive facilitator."*

O1: *"We are often invited to meetings, but we don't understand what we can do besides contributing."*

Interpretation: There is an imbalance in the distribution of roles, and the collaboration model has not yet achieved an equal multi-stakeholder partnership.

Barriers and challenges to collaboration

Some of the main obstacles are parents' lack of time, minimal coordination between parties, the absence of clear collaboration guidelines, and low government support in terms of funding and monitoring.

G3: *"The programme is in place, but government support has not been consistent."*

KS3: *"The school has formed a collaboration team, but coordination is still weak."*

G1: *"It won't work if it clashes with the parents' working hours."*

Interpretation: The obstacles are structural (lack of regulatory support) and cultural (lack of shared awareness).

Opportunities for strengthening future collaboration

Respondents expressed optimism about opportunities to strengthen collaboration through regular forums, long-term mentoring models, and the involvement of the local economic sector (SMEs and cooperatives) in children's economic learning processes.

KS1: *"Quarterly communication forums between schools, committees, and village representatives."*

L2: *"Long-term mentoring programmes, not one-off visits."*

KS2: *"Thematic classes with cooperatives help children better understand the value of saving."*

Interpretation: Significant opportunities arise if collaboration is institutionalised through SRA regulations based on economic characteristics and sustainable local partnerships.

Discussion

This discussion analyses the findings of the interviews in relation to the theoretical framework and research questions, while identifying challenges and opportunities in developing an effective multi-stakeholder collaboration model.

Partial and event-based collaboration practices (Theme 1) indicate that although there is awareness of the importance of collaboration (Djazilan & Wuryandani, 2024; Kristanti et al., 2024), the mechanisms are not yet institutionalised. This confirms *the* research *gap* that shows a lack of in-depth understanding of the systematic implementation of such collaboration. The SRA's focus on holistic development (Hajar Astuti & Nurkolis, 2025) actually requires continuous collaboration, not just a responsive approach to specific events.

Findings regarding the effectiveness of real-world, contextual project-based collaboration (Theme 2) are highly relevant to the concept of child-centred education (Liu, 2024) and experiential learning. Projects such as "Village Children's Economy" or "Mini Honesty Canteen" enable students to learn economic characteristics such as responsibility, honesty, and entrepreneurship directly. This supports the idea that economic character education is most effective when linked to the real-life context of children, rather than purely theoretical learning.

Commitment and regular mentoring as determinants of success (Theme 3) emphasise that collaboration cannot stop at the level of formality. Intensive mentoring from NGOs (L2) and a sense of ownership from all parties (KS1) are key. This is in line with the importance of ongoing support in mentoring programmes (L2) and the need for smooth communication (G3), which is also highlighted in the literature.

The imbalance of stakeholder roles (Theme 4) poses a serious challenge. When schools become the sole driving force, while parents feel they are only asked for donations (O1) and the government is only a licensor (P1), the ideal multi-stakeholder partnership model (Permata Sari et al., 2025) will not be realised. Efforts are needed to empower each stakeholder to make substantive contributions rather than merely administrative ones.

Barriers to collaboration, such as lack of parental time, poor coordination, and inconsistent government support (Theme 5), reflect structural and cultural challenges that must be overcome. The lack of government support (G3) can hinder programmes that require continuity. The lack of coordination (KS3) indicates the need for a formal, regular communication forum (KS1) to bridge differences in schedules and priorities.

Nevertheless, opportunities for strengthening collaboration (Theme 6) are very promising. The ideas of a quarterly communication forum (KS1), a long-term mentoring model (L2), and the involvement of village cooperatives (KS2) demonstrate a desire and potential to build more systematic and sustainable collaboration. These opportunities can be realised by designing participatory, contextual, and adaptive collaboration models in line with regional potential, as indicated by education officials (P1). The integration of character-based economic learning into the thematic curriculum (G1) and the formation of collaboration teams (KS3) are also potential concrete steps.

Overall, these findings confirm that an effective collaborative model for fostering economic character in SRA must be participatory (each party has a role), contextual (related to children's real lives), adaptive (in line with local potential), and sustainable (with regular coordination mechanisms and consistent support).

Conclusion

Multi-stakeholder collaboration practices in fostering children's economic character in child-friendly schools are currently still partial and unsystematic. The most effective collaboration has been proven to occur when it is based on real and contextual projects, with commitment and regular mentoring as determining factors for success. However, there are significant challenges in the form of weak coordination, a lack of consistent support from the government, and an imbalance in the roles of stakeholders, which are still centred on schools.

Nevertheless, this study identifies significant opportunities for strengthening collaboration through the establishment of regular forums, the implementation of long-term mentoring models, and synergies with the local economy. The ideal multi-stakeholder collaboration model is one that is participatory, contextual, and adaptive. Concrete steps for implementation include: establishing regular coordination forums across actors; drafting MoUs and technical guidelines for collaboration; integrating character economics learning into thematic curricula; holding regular student creative economy exhibitions; involving parents in planning and evaluation; and providing monitoring and incentives from local governments.

Thus, multi-stakeholder collaboration is not only an educational strategy, but also a social ecosystem that shapes children's economic character, fostering values of responsibility, cooperation and independence within the framework of child-friendly schools.

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