A Phenomenological Study of Collaborative Leadership in Schools: Advancing Educational Quality Through Stakeholder Synergy at SD Lukman Al Hakim Batu Kajang, East Kalimantan, Indonesia

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Article Info	Abstract
	This research seeks to understand the essence and implementation of collaborative leadership in efforts to enhance educational quality through stakeholder synergy at SD Lukman Al Hakim in Batu Kajang, East Kalimantan. Adopting a qualitative phenomenological method, the study investigates the lived experiences of key educational stakeholders including the school principal, teachers, parents, and the school committee using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The results indicate that collaborative leadership fosters a participatory culture and transparent communication, while also reinforcing shared responsibility in both decision-making and program implementation. This collaborative approach builds synergistic, adaptive, and improvement-driven relationships that contribute to the advancement of educational service quality. Moreover, the study highlights collaborative leadership as a vital approach to overcoming educational challenges in remote regions by empowering the school community and cultivating an inclusive, student-centered learning environment.

Artikel Info	Abstrak
	Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami esensi dan penerapan kepemimpinan kolaboratif dalam upaya meningkatkan mutu pendidikan melalui sinergi para pemangku kepentingan di SD Lukman Al Hakim, Batu Kajang, Kalimantan Timur. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi kualitatif, studi ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman langsung para pemangku kepentingan pendidikan utama termasuk kepala sekolah, guru, orang tua, dan komite sekolah melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan kolaboratif mendorong terbentuknya budaya partisipatif dan komunikasi yang transparan, sekaligus memperkuat tanggung jawab bersama dalam pengambilan keputusan dan pelaksanaan program sekolah. Pendekatan kolaboratif ini menciptakan hubungan yang sinergis, adaptif, dan berorientasi pada perbaikan yang mendukung peningkatan kualitas layanan pendidikan. Lebih lanjut, studi ini menegaskan bahwa kepemimpinan kolaboratif merupakan strategi penting untuk mengatasi tantangan pendidikan di daerah terpencil dengan memberdayakan komunitas sekolah dan membangun lingkungan belajar yang inklusif serta berpusat pada kebutuhan siswa.

I. PENDAHULUAN

In the 21st century, collaborative leadership has become a pivotal framework in school management, particularly in addressing complex educational challenges that require unified efforts and multi-stakeholder engagement. Within primary education, the role of school principals has shifted from being sole decision-makers to becoming facilitators who promote synergy among diverse members of the school community. As Harris and Jones (2020:74) emphasize, collaborative leadership fosters inclusive environments that support idea-sharing, joint decision-making, and equitable distribution of responsibilities aligned with educational objectives. Collaboration across roles within schools helps nurture a resilient, innovative, and adaptable institutional culture in the face of ongoing change.

In the Indonesian context, ensuring the quality of education remains a pressing issue especially in under-resourced and hard-to-reach regions like Batu Kajang in Paser Regency, East Kalimantan. The gap in education quality between urban and remote areas has resulted in limited learning opportunities for children in disadvantaged regions. According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2023), several remote areas in Kalimantan continue to show education quality index scores below the national average. Key challenges include poor

infrastructure, a lack of competent teachers, and minimal community involvement in educational development. In light of these obstacles, collaborative leadership offers a strategic pathway to leverage local assets and enhance school capacity.

Stakeholder participation is therefore essential in shaping a robust educational ecosystem. School leaders, teachers, parents, school committees, and local community figures each play vital and complementary roles in supporting the learning process. As noted by Leithwood et al. (2021:213), strong school-community partnerships help improve student achievement by building cohesive cultural and social support structures. At SD Lukman Al Hakim Batu Kajang, active engagement from multiple actors in program development, addressing instructional challenges, and promoting student character education embodies the collaborative ethos this study aims to examine.

Collaborative leadership has also shown promise in advancing school-level innovation, particularly in evidence-based decision-making, tailored instruction, and empowering teachers as instructional leaders. Harris and Jones (2020:74) assert that trust-based collaboration fosters an environment where open communication and shared responsibility thrive. Principals who lead inclusively contribute to cultivating a more productive school climate. At SD Lukman Al Hakim, this leadership approach plays a critical role in addressing resource limitations. Mondal (2020:32–33) further supports this view, noting that collaborative leadership—defined by collective responsibility and participatory decision-making—can significantly accelerate school development by enhancing teaching quality, deepening stakeholder relationships, and improving student performance.

Moreover, this shift in leadership dynamics not only elevates the professional performance of teachers and school leaders but also encourages more active parental involvement in their children's education. Operating within a rich cultural context, SD Lukman Al Hakim exemplifies a unique model of collaboration worth investigating through a phenomenological lens. This study seeks to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of educational stakeholders at the school, aiming to capture how collaborative leadership is manifested in daily practice. Through this exploration, the research intends to generate a nuanced understanding of how such leadership contributes to educational improvements in remote settings. The insights gained are expected to enrich academic discourse on educational leadership while also offering actionable recommendations for schools facing similar geographical and social challenges.

II. METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach grounded in the phenomenological method to explore the meanings and lived experiences of educational stakeholders concerning collaborative leadership in primary education. Phenomenology is particularly apt for uncovering rich, in-depth insights into personal and collective experiences that are often inaccessible through quantitative techniques. As highlighted by Stolz (2022:822–823), phenomenological research in education enables the contextualization and interpretation of individual and shared experiences through descriptive, interpretive, and reflective inquiry.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on individuals directly involved in leadership and collaborative decision-making processes at SD Lukman Al Hakim Batu Kajang a primary school located in a remote area that actively implements collaborative leadership principles. The study's key informants included the school principal, teaching staff, parents, school committee members, and local community figures.

Data collection methods comprised in-depth interviews, participant observations within various school settings (including staff meetings, classroom activities, and partnership programs), and document reviews of school plans and reports. The data were analyzed using a structured phenomenological approach: reviewing transcripts, extracting significant statements, grouping these into core themes, developing both textual and structural descriptions, and ultimately formulating a composite understanding of how stakeholders perceive and practice collaborative leadership (Gagah Daruhadi, 2024:600–602). To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied multiple strategies such as source and method triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. These procedures align with Gagah Daruhadi's (2024:607) principles of methodological rigor in phenomenological research and serve to reduce potential researcher bias.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

This study identifies three core themes that characterize the implementation of collaborative leadership at SD Lukman Al Hakim Batu Kajang: (1) meaningful stakeholder involvement, (2) transparent and inclusive communication practices, and (3) collective decision-making tailored to local needs.

1. Meaningful Stakeholder Involvement

The school principal assumes the role of a facilitator who actively encourages the participation of teachers, parents, the school committee, and local community leaders in both the planning and execution of school programs. This style of leadership is evidenced by the creation of collaborative spaces that promote the sharing of ideas, open dialogue, and program development grounded in shared goals. In the remote context of Batu Kajang, the principal's leadership extends beyond administrative functions to a more transformational role building community networks and mobilizing collective support for a variety of initiatives, from academic programs to student character education.

This leadership model reflects a non-hierarchical, partnership-based approach, where every stakeholder is treated as an equal contributor to the educational process. Informants highlighted that their participation was not merely symbolic, but deeply substantive, reflected in real contributions of time, ideas, and resources. Parents and community members are actively engaged not just in school meetings or events, but also in co-designing learning programs, supporting outdoor activities, and offering feedback on instructional strategies. A teacher shared, *"We regularly have open discussions with the principal, even about small matters like how to better motivate students who struggle to engage."* This suggests that collaboration and shared decision-making are not limited to high-level policies but are embedded in day-to-day teaching practices.

These findings resonate with Leithwood et al. (2021:213), who argue that robust school-community partnerships enhance learning quality by providing coherent social support systems. Such collaboration fosters a nurturing educational environment where students are encouraged not only by their teachers but also by the broader social network. Supporting this, Tejeiro (2024:40) found that distributed leadership particularly when it encourages teamwork, shared decisions, and a unified school vision promotes inclusive, student-focused educational practices. At SD Lukman Al Hakim, collaborative forums and team-based decision-making processes exemplify these principles in action.

Furthermore, Nadeem (2024:84) in the *British Journal of Contemporary Education* highlights that distributed leadership contributes significantly to improved teacher morale, expanded leadership capacity, and reduced administrative burden on principals. When leadership is shared according to expertise, teachers are more motivated, leadership is more equitable, and staff become actively involved in continuous professional development. This dynamic helps build a healthier, more effective learning environment.

2. Transparent and Inclusive Communication Practices

Collaborative leadership at SD Lukman Al Hakim is also marked by open, egalitarian, and reciprocal communication. Rather than serving solely as a means to transmit information, communication is utilized as a tool to shape school culture and foster trust. The principal establishes both formal and informal spaces for dialogue, allowing all members of the school community to express opinions, offer suggestions, and voice concerns constructively.

Weekly teacher meetings serve as reflective sessions to address instructional challenges, monitor student development, and share strategies for character education. Meanwhile, monthly school committee meetings provide a platform to align school programs with community expectations. Throughout these forums, the principal avoids authoritarian methods and instead upholds principles of mutual respect and shared input. This open communication approach promotes a productive exchange of ideas and builds strong, trusting relationships among stakeholders.

Informants reported that such dialogue made them feel heard and empowered to contribute meaningfully. The principal's habit of listening attentively before making decisions exemplifies a reflective and inclusive leadership style. Observations revealed that during meetings, the principal consistently encouraged teachers to speak first and often postponed decisions to allow for thoughtful input from all parties. This leadership behavior emphasizes not just procedural efficiency, but also the cultivation of social and emotional bonds as the cornerstone of long-term collaboration.

This approach aligns with the findings of Sukor et al. (2025:940), whose systematic review highlights that inclusive, data-informed leadership significantly improves decision-making effectiveness at the school level. Their analysis revealed that nearly half (48%) of the studies reviewed underscored the critical role of participatory communication and emotional engagement in fostering trust and responding to school-specific needs. Similarly, Jesus et al. (2025:8) reported that collaborative leadership practices such as shared decision-making and active stakeholder involvement enhanced communication, teamwork, and accountability within schools. These elements are directly linked to increased trust and overall school performance.

Therefore, participatory communication functions not only as a tool but as a foundational element of trust-centered leadership. This is demonstrated through practices like transparent information sharing, openness to constructive feedback, and recognition of collective contributions. At SD Lukman Al Hakim, such communication practices have strengthened social bonds and cultivated a school climate that supports innovation and ongoing professional learning.

3. Collaborative Decision-Making Rooted in Local Realities

A key aspect of collaborative leadership at SD Lukman Al Hakim lies in its inclusive decision-making process, which is grounded in the school's actual context and shaped by the input of multiple stakeholders. The principal does not operate as a sole authority, but rather as a facilitator who brings together diverse viewpoints from teachers, parents, and school committee members. Strategic choices are preceded by open forums that invite all parties to contribute ideas and offer solutions informed by their personal experiences and the specific needs of the school. This participatory cycle fosters a strong sense of collective ownership and accountability. As one school committee member expressed, *"We feel respected because we're involved from the outset not just informed after the decisions are finalized."* This highlights that decisions are formed through inclusive consensus, not hierarchical mandates, reflecting the shared vision of the entire school community.

A clear example of this inclusive approach is the launch of the "Learning in Nature" program an innovative, context-based learning initiative that stemmed from collaborative discussions among school stakeholders. The initiative was developed in response to the school's limited classroom facilities and a recognition of students' need for more dynamic, enjoyable, and nature-integrated learning. Teachers reported that the program not only addressed spatial constraints but also significantly increased student engagement and enthusiasm. Utilizing local environments such as nearby forests, community gardens, and public spaces as learning sites, the school creatively turned its limitations into opportunities. This case illustrates that collaborative leadership thrives not only within formal structures but also in the willingness to respond boldly and imaginatively to real-world challenges.

These practices demonstrate a leadership approach that is both adaptable and deeply attuned to the school's cultural and geographic environment. Mansfield and Lambrinou (2024:15) emphasize that culturally responsive leadership marked by community involvement and context-aware strategies fosters educational innovation that resonates with local values and needs. In this model, the principal acts as a catalyst for transformation, channeling local assets into a cohesive force for building an enduring educational system.

Likewise, Morrison and Mercieca (2023:101) argue that participatory

governance in community-based schools enhances the effectiveness of micro-level policies, especially when these are customized to reflect local conditions often overlooked by broader national directives. Hill and Wilkinson (2023:57) also stress that leadership embedded in community values leads to more democratic and socially legitimate decision-making processes. As such, local needs driven decision-making is not only a response to infrastructural or administrative challenges it also functions as a platform for civic education. In this way, stakeholders become active participants in shaping meaningful and contextually relevant change, rather than passive executors of top-down policies.

At SD Lukman Al Hakim, this model of collaboration not only results in innovative educational programs but also nurtures a lasting culture of cooperation an essential form of social capital for overcoming the structural limitations often faced by schools in remote areas.

Overall, the implementation of collaborative leadership at SD Lukman Al Hakim has significantly contributed to shaping a positive and inclusive school culture grounded in active participation. This culture is evident in the balanced and respectful relationships among the principal, teachers, parents, and community figures all of whom work collectively to cultivate the school as a shared space for growth and development. One clear sign of the culture's success is the clarity of roles among stakeholders: teachers are dedicated to guiding the learning process, parents play a vital role in character education, and the principal acts as a unifying force who fosters collaboration. This role distribution emerged not spontaneously, but through sustained communication and continuous cooperation over time.

The school's work ethic is built upon three foundational principles: open dialogue, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and shared responsibility. Dialogue is not confined to formal settings it extends to casual, everyday interactions that deepen social bonds. *Gotong royong* is demonstrated in various communal efforts, such as organizing clean-up campaigns, improving school infrastructure together, and raising funds for student programs. Shared responsibility is reflected in the collective concern for both the academic success and emotional well-being of students. In this environment, the school is more than a traditional institution it becomes a dynamic learning community that grows and evolves alongside its members. The result is an inclusive atmosphere where students are acknowledged as unique individuals, their talents are nurtured, and they receive comprehensive support from the entire school ecosystem.

These findings support the perspective that collaboration among various educational actors is a powerful strategy to address the multifaceted challenges of schooling, particularly in regions where resources are scarce. When a school leader effectively unites different local assets whether internal or external to the school they form a social bridge that facilitates educational transformation in ways that are relevant to the community's context. At SD Lukman Al Hakim, limitations have not hindered progress; instead, they have driven innovation rooted in community involvement. Here, collaborative leadership serves as the foundation for educational practices that go beyond academic achievement, emphasizing social upliftment, moral development, and the cultivation of communal self-reliance. Therefore, this model of leadership is not merely an administrative technique it represents a broader grassroots movement aimed at achieving equitable and sustainable education in underserved areas.

B. Discussion

The study reveals that collaborative leadership at SD Lukman Al Hakim plays a transformative role in fostering a participatory and inclusive school culture. The principal acts as a facilitator, engaging all stakeholders teachers, parents, and community leaders in meaningful planning and decision-making. This non-hierarchical leadership model encourages shared ownership, strengthens school-community ties, and supports student-centered practices. Aligned with research by Leithwood, Tejeiro, and Nadeem, the school demonstrates how distributed leadership enhances educational

outcomes, teacher morale, and innovation. In a remote setting like Batu Kajang, such leadership becomes a key driver for sustainable and community-based educational development.

Collaborative leadership at SD Lukman Al Hakim emphasizes open and inclusive communication to build trust and strengthen school culture. The principal facilitates dialogue through regular meetings, values stakeholder input, and avoids authoritarian approaches. This participatory communication fosters empowerment, trust, and shared decision-making, aligning with research that links inclusive leadership to improved school performance. Overall, communication serves as a core element in creating a supportive, innovative, and collaborative school environment.

At SD Lukman Al Hakim, collaborative leadership is practiced through inclusive decision-making and community involvement. The principal acts as a facilitator, encouraging input from teachers, parents, and the community to create innovative programs like *Learning in Nature*, which address school challenges through local solutions. This approach reflects culturally responsive leadership, promoting democratic, locally relevant, and participatory governance. It builds a school culture based on shared responsibility, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and open communication. Each stakeholder has a clear role, contributing to both academic and emotional student development.

Despite limited resources, the school thrives by leveraging social capital and community collaboration. This model demonstrates how grassroots leadership can drive sustainable and equitable education in underserved areas.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION
A. Conclusion

The application of collaborative leadership at SD Lukman Al Hakim Batu Kajang has demonstrated its effectiveness in enhancing educational quality through inclusive stakeholder engagement. Acting as a facilitator, the principal has successfully fostered active involvement from teachers, parents, school committee members, and local community leaders. Transparent and inclusive communication has helped build mutual trust and reinforced shared accountability.

Decisions made collectively, and rooted in local context, have led to educational innovations that are both meaningful and practical.

This research concludes that collaborative leadership plays a vital role in shaping a positive school environment, clarifying stakeholder responsibilities, and boosting community participation. It presents a viable strategy for overcoming educational challenges in under-resourced regions by promoting a shared vision, ongoing dialogue, and mutual collaboration. Moreover, the study highlights that collaborative leadership extends beyond administrative functions, contributing to a more responsive and human-centered educational model. By engaging all stakeholders in the educational journey, the school becomes a dynamic arena for discussion and innovation, where local perspectives are integrated into real-world solutions. This inclusive approach nurtures a collective sense of ownership, supports long-term sustainability of educational programs, and enhances students' learning motivation in a more comprehensive and meaningful way.

B. Suggestion

This study recommends strengthening and expanding collaborative leadership practices in schools, especially in resource-limited areas. Key suggestions include providing leadership training focused on inclusive dialogue and stakeholder engagement, encouraging active participation from teachers, parents, and communities, and establishing transparent communication channels. Schools should also leverage local resources for innovation and adopt community-based models that promote shared vision and cooperation. Lastly, fostering a human-centered school culture rooted in empathy and mutual respect is essential to create an inclusive, motivating learning environment. These strategies support sustainable school improvement through trust, collaboration, and shared ownership.

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