

# The role of parental involvement in promoting education for sustainability in primary schools

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The study examines how schools involve parents, the challenges that parents face and the impact on students' awareness of and commitment to sustainable practices.

**Design/methodology/approach** – An exploratory case study, including semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

**Findings** – Findings show that collaborative approaches to curriculum design and diverse strategies for engaging parents in education for sustainability impact student behaviour.

**Research limitations/implications** – While the research provided valuable insights into parents' involvement in sustainability education, the study sample size was relatively small, with only eight schools in two regencies, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other regions or educational contexts.

**Originality/value** – Practically, this study can inform educational policymakers, school administrators and educators on strategies to enhance parental involvement and promote education for a sustainable future, especially in Indonesia.

**Keywords** Curriculum, Education, Parental involvement, Primary school, Sustainability

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

In recent years, the Millennium Development Goals – United Nations Development Program (MDGS - UNDP) have highly emphasised the need for education to address sustainability and prepare students for a sustainable future in reducing the impact of climate change that causes poverty, hunger, and diseases. Parental involvement in education is recognised as a critical factor in students' awareness. However, parents' specific role in promoting sustainability education remains understudied. This research investigates ways for schools to involve parents in fostering sustainable education practices and their impact on students' awareness and engagement in sustainable behaviours. In addition, researchers and policymakers worldwide have been focusing on parental involvement in schools for the last 3 decades (Jeynes, 2015), and the Indonesian government has just started to focus on parental involvement since the enactment of Law Number 20 in the year 2003 (Yuliatin, 2023), and strengthened when Indonesia starts to implement the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Some schools still lack parental involvement in promoting sustainability, especially in small towns and rural areas (Yulianti *et al.*, 2019). According to [Kompas.com](http://Kompas.com), a well-known newspaper in Indonesia, the Ministry of Finance of Indonesia stated that 80% of parents lack attention directed toward

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their children's education, and 30% of them never discuss it with their children's teachers (Media, Kompas Cyber, 2017). This is why this research is important to explore parent involvement in Indonesia to promote sustainability.

Research on parental involvement in Indonesia primarily highlights its impact on students' academic achievement (Yulianti *et al.*, 2019; Wahyu and Mangunsong, 2022; Sumarsono *et al.*, 2016), character development (Ariani *et al.*, 2022; Diana *et al.*, 2019), and well-being (Sari *et al.*, 2018; Wijaya *et al.*, 2022), reinforcing its significance in education. However, there is a lack of studies examining parents' roles in promoting education for sustainability, despite the growing global emphasis on sustainable development (Belmonte-Ureña *et al.*, 2021; Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2023). While international research extensively documents parental contributions to academic success (Davis-Kean *et al.*, 2021; Zhang *et al.*, 2020) and personal growth (Luo and Kiewra, 2021; Okello, 2023), limited attention has been given to their influence on fostering environmental awareness and sustainable behaviors. Addressing this gap, this study explores how parental involvement can support sustainability education, shifting the focus from conventional educational outcomes to parents' evolving role in shaping students' sustainable practices in Indonesia.

In addition, unlike previous studies that have broadly addressed curriculum change, this research provides unique insights into how curriculum change focused on sustainability is received and implemented in different educational contexts during a critical trial period. By exploring the role of teachers as facilitators (Perry and Booth, 2024) and principals as instructional leaders (Hallinger *et al.*, 2020) between the curriculum and parental influence on student behaviour on environment, social culture and economics, this study adds a new dimension to understanding the multifaceted dynamics of curriculum for sustainability implementation in Indonesia. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of parental involvement in locally rooted sustainability initiatives, which not only strengthens the effectiveness of sustainability education but also aligns with the objectives of SDG 4.7 (Education for Sustainable Development), underscoring the integration of cultural and global citizenship values into education, particularly how community engagement through parental participation supports these goals (United Nation, 2015). This study is expected to contribute to the existing body of research by providing a focused examination of the implementation and impact of Indonesia's curriculum, particularly in urban and rural settings, not only in Indonesia but worldwide.

#### *Education for sustainability*

Education for sustainability, as defined by UNESCO (2024), refers to the process of creating favorable conditions for social, economic, and environmental transformation by promoting responsible resource use, addressing critical social issues, and fostering universal access to education supported by governments (Pandey and Vedak, 2010; Demssie *et al.*, 2020; Glavič, 2020). It fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills to address global challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss, and behavioral change, thereby advancing SDGs such as Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption) and Goal 13 (Climate Action) (United Nation, 2015). By equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, values, and agency needed to tackle issues like inequality, poverty, and environmental degradation, education for sustainable development plays a vital role in achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (Wade and Atkinson, 2017; Rauch and Steiner, 2013).

Scholars have identified several principles to ensure that education for sustainability meets these standards, including integrating advanced knowledge and promoting a mutual learning model in schools. This approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of different systems and the need for individuals and institutions to shift their thoughts, values, and actions toward sustainability (Jabareen, 2012; Biltagy, 2022). Research has shown that education for sustainability is necessary to create changes in knowledge, values, actions, and ways of life that empower individuals to make decisions and take responsible actions that contribute to the well-being of the planet and future generations (Agbedahin, 2019).

### Parental involvement

In the United States, parental involvement is one of eight national education goals that promote sustainability. Across the country, K-12 schools and the Department of Education have been committed to integrating schools, families, and communities to improve student learning and well-being (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). Hiatt-Michael (2001) defines parental involvement as how parents participate in their children's education, including things like helping students learn at home, talking with their children about their goals, reviewing school report cards, attending parent-teacher meetings, supporting school activities, and others (Herrs *et al.*, 2016). Schools in Indonesia still need to work on collaborating and sharing responsibilities with parents. In some cities, schools involve the parents of students in decision-making to increase student success. However, schools in urban and rural areas often need parental involvement due to principals and school administrators needing more knowledge and experience to involve parents in school, busy parents, and not having time for their children. Most parents need help understanding how to get involved in their children's education (Yulianti *et al.*, 2019). Table 1 provides a Comparative Analysis of Parental Involvement Studies, comparing the Indonesian and global contexts alongside UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Framework 2030.

Some people may question how parents can be involved in schools. Parents can become involved in their children's education in many ways. Epstein (1987) and Fan and Chen (2001) proposed a broadly recognised typology to account for different levels of parental association with their children's education. In her early work, Epstein (1987) distinguished four sorts of parental association in schools: essential obligations (e.g. parent creates supportive home environment to support children's education), school-to-home communications (e.g. parent builds communication with the teacher about school program and children's report), parent association at school (e.g. parents attend and actively participate in parent-teacher organisation/PTO), and parent involvement in learning exercises at home (e.g. assist children to do their homework or doing their task at home). The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (2015) divided parent engagement in childhood education into parent-led learning and parent-school partnership. Parent-led learning includes shared reading,

**Table 1.** Comparative analysis of parental involvement studies

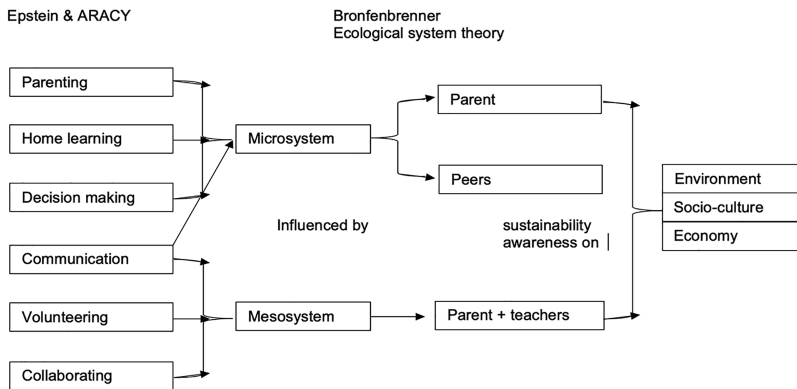
Aspects	Indonesian studies for parental involvement	Global studied for parental involvement (e.g. USA)	UNESCO's ESD frameworks 2030
Primary focus	Academic achievement, character development, and student well-being (Yulianti <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Wahyudi and Mangunsong, 2022; Sari <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	Academic success, social-emotional development, education for sustainability, and civic engagement (Davis-Kean <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Zhang <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	Promoting sustainability education through formal and informal learning (ESD 2005–2014, GAP 2015–2019, ESD for 2030)
Parental role in education	Limited to traditional forms of support (homework help, school meetings)	More active engagement in school decision-making and community initiatives	Encourages parents as partners in fostering sustainable practices at home and school (SDGs 4, SDGs 11, and SDGs 17)
Sustainability education	Limited research on parental influence in sustainability education (Belmonte-Ureña <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	Studies explore parental roles in environmental awareness and pro-sustainability behaviors (Okello, 2023)	Focus on transforming learning environments, empowering youth, and accelerating local action (ESD for 2030)

**Source(s):** Authors' own creation, adapted from Yulianti *et al.* (2019), Wahyudi and Mangunsong (2022), Sari *et al.* (2018), Belmonte-Ureña *et al.* (2021), Davis-Kean *et al.* (2021), Zhang *et al.* (2020), Okello (2023), UNESCO's ESD Frameworks 2030, 2005–2014 and 2015–2019)

parent-children conversation at home, and homework support. Parent-school partnership involves communication about children’s attitudes and progress in the schools, what children are learning, specific information about what families can do to help, and parents’ engagement in the school community.

To get broader insight, this study employs the parental involvement categories developed by Epstein (2010) and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) (Woodrow *et al.*, 2016) to analyse how parents in Indonesia engage with schools in order to promote sustainability. The Epstein and ARACY frameworks, in conjunction with the components of education for sustainability—namely, the environment, socio-cultural factors, and economic considerations—form the foundation for the data findings and subsequent analysis. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) provides insight into the interactions between parents and schools in promoting sustainable educational practices (Yulianti *et al.*, 2019). This theory emphasises the importance of considering the influence of multiple levels, particularly the microsystem and mesosystem, which encompass parental involvement and the relationship between parents and teachers.

In the context of sustainability education, the environmental habits in school and environmental parenting modelling by parents through everyday practices can foster environmental awareness as mentioned in SDGs 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDGs 13 (climate action), SDGs 14 (live below water), and SDGs 15 (life on land) in children (Sipahutar *et al.*, 2024; United Nation, 2015). Socio-cultural factors influence parenting practices through cultural values, norms and communal practices, in Indonesia called “*gotong royong*” exemplifies SDGs 17 (Partnership for the goals) shaping parental engagement in school and home sustainability education to achieve sustainability goals (Sihvonen *et al.*, 2024; United Nation, 2015). Meanwhile, economic factors (SDGs 8) determine the resources available to parents and their capacity to engage in sustainability initiatives, especially their engagement in the school project (Al-Hail *et al.*, 2021). Both families of higher and lower socio-economic status contribute to sustainability efforts in different ways (Rad *et al.*, 2012). By focusing on the microsystem and mesosystem, this study emphasises the pivotal role of parents and teachers in influencing children’s sustainable behaviours in alignment with UNICEF’s Global Goals for sustainable development (UNICEF, 2020). This combination of the theories was the framework to guide the research, especially for the objective and research questions, to get comprehensive findings. Figure 1 below presents the Conceptual Framework for Parental Involvement and School-teacher Relationships in Sustainable Education.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework for parental involvement and school-teacher relationships in sustainable education. Source: Authors’ own creation, adapted from Epstein (2010) and Woodrow *et al.* (2016)

To be more specific, this study aims to investigate the role of parental involvement in promoting education for a sustainable future by answering three following guidance questions:

- (1) How do schools (principals and teachers) involve parents in contributing to education for sustainability?
- (2) What are the experiences and challenges schools face to involve parents in supporting sustainable education practices?
- (3) How does parental involvement influence students' awareness and engagement in sustainable behaviours?

This research is expected to provide valuable insights into the role of parents in fostering sustainable education practices in schools. Theoretically, the findings of this study may contribute to existing literature on parental involvement, sustainability education, and the ecological systems theory. Practically, this study can inform educational policymakers, school administrators, and educators on strategies to enhance parental involvement and promote education for a sustainable future, especially in Indonesia.

### Methodology

The research is built upon an interpretative qualitative paradigm (Sprake and Palmer, 2022), employing an exploratory multi-case study design that aligns with the study's objective of investigating the role of parental involvement in sustainable education within the Indonesian context (Henderson, 2020). This approach entailed the selection of a sample of schools that had implemented the Merdeka curriculum and adopted sustainability education programs, particularly the "Sekolah Penggerak," which tailored their operational school curriculum to emphasise sustainability (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2016). In addition to the trial implementation of the independent curriculum, which also incorporates sustainable education, the trial schools were only a few schools and were trialled for only 2–3 years, which meant that the author did not have many options to find schools to sample. To ensure comprehensive representation, a diverse range of principals and teachers were selected from various schools, taking into account different characteristics and locations (Hollins and Guzman, 2005). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and curriculum document analysis, allowing for triangulation and acquiring secondary data resources (Denzin, 2017). The curriculum document analysis method entailed a comprehensive examination of the operational school curricula, focusing on those tailored under the "Sekolah Penggerak" initiative, emphasising sustainability education. The documents were selected based on their relevance to the research focus (Morgan, 2022), including curriculum documents from the schools that are studied and project lesson plans of teachers that outline the integration of sustainability principles—the analysis aimed to identify strategies and content related to sustainability education and parental involvement.

Eight schools from two regencies in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, were purposively selected for this study to represent the diversity of educational settings during this trial phase of Indonesia's new curriculum. The selection of schools was made purposively with the help of the Ministry of Education at the district level by looking at the location (city, urban, rural) and the type of school accreditation (A, B, and C) because the school information could not be accessed publicly. After that, a letter was sent to the school principal with a recommendation letter from the provincial government and the district education office. Upon the agreement, an interview was conducted at the school.

The participating teachers were chosen because they had been designated as school representatives for curriculum development training organized by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture. Due to the limited availability of schools implementing the 'Merdeka' curriculum with sustainability-based projects, this approach was the only feasible way to select schools and participants during the trial phase. Interviews were conducted with eight principals

and eight teachers, a sample size deemed appropriate for an exploratory case study focused on qualitative insights rather than quantitative data (Creswell, 2013). To ensure confidentiality, participant identities were anonymised using unique codes, and all data were stored securely. The methodology ensured a comprehensive understanding of the various perspectives and practices regarding parental involvement in sustainable education (Yin, 2014). Details of the study participants, including their roles and locations, are provided in Table 2.

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the qualitative data obtained from the interviews. This method involves systematically identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within the data (Wæraas, 2022). To ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees, each participant was assigned a unique code, such as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and so forth (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). This coding system not only ensured the anonymity of the participants but also facilitated the organisation and retrieval of data during the analysis process (Guest et al., 2013).

In analysing the data, a thematic analysis approach was employed in order to identify patterns and themes related to students' behaviour and the influence of parental involvement in a systematic manner. The coding process was conducted in several stages. Initially, open coding was employed to identify preliminary categories, followed by axial coding to establish relationships between themes. This process permitted the identification of recurring patterns in the data that reflected how parental involvement contributed to changes in students' sustainable behaviours. By linking these themes to the research questions, the study offers a comprehensive analysis that supports the conclusion that parental involvement plays a significant role in shaping students' awareness and engagement in sustainability practices.

Several key strategies were employed throughout the study to ensure the research's integrity and reliability. First, the researchers employed triangulation, combining data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews and curriculum document analysis. This approach allowed for cross-verification of the data, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings (Shenton, 2004). Furthermore, an exploratory case study design enabled an in-depth examination of parental involvement in sustainable education across a diverse sample of schools, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Yin, 2016). While the research acknowledges potential biases in teacher interviews, it is important to note that teachers often have close relationships with parents, enabling them to gather valuable

**Table 2.** Teacher and principal – participant lists based on name of schools, roles, and location

ID	Unit	Roles	Name of school	Location in regent
P1	Participant 1	Principal	School A	Makassar (City)
P2	Participant 2	Principal	School B	Makassar (Suburb)
P3	Participant 3	Principal	School C	Makassar (Urban)
P4	Participant 4	Principal	School D	Soppeng (Urban)
P5	Participant 5	Principal	School E	Soppeng (Rural)
P6	Participant 6	Principal	School F	Soppeng (Urban)
P7	Participant 7	Principal	School G	Soppeng (Suburb))
P8	Participant 8	Principal	School H	Soppeng (Rural)
P9	Participant 9	Teacher (1st grade)	School A	Makassar (City)
P10	Participant 10	Teacher (5th grade)	School B	Makassar (Suburb)
P11	Participant 11	Teacher (3rd grade)	School C	Makassar (Urban)
P12	Participant 12	Teacher (1st grade)	School D	Soppeng (Urban)
P13	Participant 13	Teacher (4th grade)	School E	Soppeng (Rural)
P14	Participant 14	Teacher (1st grade)	School F	Soppeng (Urban)
P15	Participant 15	Teacher (2nd grade)	School G	Soppeng (Suburb)
P16	Participant 16	Teacher (6th grade)	School H	Soppeng (Rural)

**Source(s):** Authors' own work

information about parental influence on students' attitudes and behaviour (Boit, 2020). This connection helps to ensure that teachers' perspectives reflect a broader understanding of students' home environments and parental involvement.

Member checking was employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the data. The participants were allowed to review and verify the accuracy of the interview transcripts and the researchers' interpretations, thereby ensuring that their perspectives were accurately represented (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Furthermore, comprehensive documentation of the research procedures—including the techniques employed for data gathering and examination—offered a transparent account, facilitating the replication and validation of the inquiry. Adherence to these exacting standards and ethical guidelines guaranteed the trustworthiness and dependability of the investigation, thus confirming the accuracy and reliability of the findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

High ethical standards were conducted in the research process. The government of the province of South Sulawesi has carried out procedures and data collection regulations in provincial areas in Indonesia by issuing a research permit with number 28821/S.01/PTSP/2023. Before the commencement of the study, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The informed concerned ensured they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and right to withdraw without any consequences (Orb *et al.*, 2001). To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, unique codes were assigned, identifiers were removed from transcripts and any identifying information was securely stored on password-protected servers accessible only to the research team (Wiles *et al.*, 2008).

## Findings and discussion

### *Experiences of school involving parents for sustainable education*

Most primary public schools implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum or “*Sekolah Penggerak*” involve parents in curriculum design (operational school curriculum). They invite parents or parent representatives to get some ideas for education for sustainability, especially for the environment and culture. Although the curriculum document guidelines that the Ministry of Education and Culture has shared do not specifically include education for sustainability, principals and the curriculum development team include sustainability, especially for environment, culture, and economy, in their operational school curriculum, especially in the project (*Pancasila* Project/P5).

Participant 1 states, “When the meeting was conducted for the curriculum design, many students' parents came and gave their ideas for the school improvement, especially the ways to collaborate with government offices, cultural sites, and environmental activists to support us maintaining the education for sustainability.”

Participant 5 expressed “We always align the curriculum with the local context, especially in the project of ‘P5’. We take from the school's environment. For instance, how to make brown sugar, because this village produces ‘brown sugar’ that is sold to the city, and it was successful because parents were involved in the project, from the beginning to the end of the project. From the project, students learn to use tools and ingredients that are environmentally friendly.”

These findings demonstrate the importance of collaboration, community engagement, and contextual relevance (microsystem) in curriculum development. Parental involvement in curriculum design strengthens the mesosystem (school-family interactions), which, according to Bronfenbrenner's theory, directly influences students' environmental awareness in the microsystem (home and classroom), as supported by the Epstein and ARACY frameworks. By engaging the expertise and resources within the community, schools can enrich the educational experience and empower students to become environmentally conscious global citizens. Furthermore, this reflects the Indonesian value of *gotong royong* or partnership for the goals (SDGs 17), demonstrating how national values are embedded in school practices (Argadinata *et al.*, 2022).

Of eight schools, two have implemented education for sustainability before implementing the Merdeka curriculum because schools were chosen as the *Adiwiyata* School. *Adiwiyata* School (Green School) is the program of the Minister of Environment of the Republic of Indonesia to establish a school community that cares for and is environmentally cultured.

Participant 2 said “Education for sustainability is not something new for us, because this school has been appointed by the district government as an *Adiwiyata* (green) school where the environment is our priority. The curriculum has been designed following the environmental school based on the mandate of the law.”

Besides involving parents in curriculum design, several schools also conduct workshops and seminars about the importance of parents in children’s education for sustainability. Parents are either participants in the workshop or speakers. By having the workshop or seminar, parents established their roles and awareness of the environment to their kids at home; this shows how parent volunteering, teacher-parent communication and collaboration (mesosystem) occur in the development of students for education for sustainability as part of Epstein and ARACY framework.

Participant 13 stated “I had a project related to the environment in my class, while educating the students, I think it’s important to educate the parents as well. So, what I was trying to do was make a workshop by inviting all parents through WhatsApp, and most of them participated. I also ever invited a speaker from the students’ parent to talk about the environment, and I think it works to make students aware of the environmental issue.”

Participant 16 expressed “Because the parents are active in the workshops not only in the environment but also other workshops, they support their children for the competition. Several months ago, there was a competition for a fashion show that uses recycled materials. Five students from this school became the representatives of this district to compete in the regional competition. It’s because of the support of the parents. the parents were enthusiastic to provide recycled material gowns and properties, along with the transportation that was difficult for the school to provide due to the financial problems.”

The findings highlight the collaborative efforts between schools and parents to promote sustainability education within the primary education system. Schools prioritize sustainability by involving parents in curriculum design and integrating the local context into educational projects despite the need for explicit guidelines for sustainability education in official curriculum documents. The involvement of parents in curriculum design discussions, as highlighted by Participant 1, demonstrates a community-centred approach to education where different stakeholders contribute ideas to improve sustainability education. This collaborative approach extends to extracurricular activities, as evidenced by parent support for initiatives such as the brown sugar production project described by Participant 5. The designation of the *Adiwiyata* schools reflects a proactive stance on sustainability education, with Participant 2 highlighting the legal mandate and curriculum alignment with environmental principles.

This institutional commitment to sustainability sets a precedent for other schools. It underscores the importance of integrating environmental education into the curriculum. This finding aligns and adds to the study conducted by [Zahra et al. \(2024\)](#), who stated that it is important to integrate curriculum and learning approaches to enhance environmental education among early students. In addition, workshops and seminars serve as platforms to educate parents about the importance of their involvement in their children’s sustainability education, as highlighted by participants 13 and 16. By raising awareness and encouraging a sense of responsibility among parents, schools can utilize parental support to enrich student’s learning experiences and promote sustainable practices within and beyond the school environment; this study supports the study of [Eden et al. \(2024\)](#), who expressed that collaborative partnership between school, parents and communities broaden the educational experience by bridging the gap between the classroom and the real world.

Besides, schools also engage parents in collaborative projects in the context of the 5P project (*Projek Profil Pelajar Pancasila*) aimed at promoting sustainability within the school community, as stated in most of the school operational curriculum documents. These projects involve waste reduction programs, utilisation of culture for sustainability, sustainable lifestyle, local culture and wisdom, and entrepreneurship. There are many ways schools engage parents in a collaborative project; for instance, school C implemented a waste reduction program called “*bank sampah*” or waste bank. The program collaborates with principals, teachers, parents, and students. The school provides a waste bank, where students bring the plastics, bottles and paper waste from their homes, and parents collect that waste. The teachers support students to distinguish where to put their waste. After they gather waste, the school calls the recycled material activists to purchase it, and the money is used for school events. Besides involving parents in curriculum design, several schools also conduct workshops and seminars about the importance of parents in children’s education for sustainability. Parents are either participants in the workshop or speakers. By having the workshop or seminar, parents established their roles and awareness of the environment to their kids at home.

Participant 3 said, “I engage parents by inviting them to participate in collaborative projects. I make a park in the school, every class has the responsibility to plant flowers or trees. To get the plant, the parents donate one tree each parent to be planted in the school.”

Participant 10 expressed “as a teacher, it’s important to involve parents in school, one I was trying to do was inviting them for the entrepreneurship project. It was local culture project, the students should make and sell traditional food and beverage in the school. Parents support making the foods, as well come to school to buy the food.”

The waste reduction program implemented by School C not only addresses environmental issues but also demonstrates a sustainable approach to resource management by turning waste into a valuable asset. The program fosters a sense of collective responsibility for protecting the environment by involving parents, teachers and students in the process. Participant 3’s initiative to create a school park not only contributes to the enhancement of the school environment. It also creates a sense of pride and ownership among students and parents. By actively involving parents in donating trees for planting, the project promotes community involvement and cooperation in improving the school’s green spaces.

Similarly, Participant 10’s emphasis on entrepreneurial projects to engage parents highlights the potential for integrating cultural preservation and economic empowerment into the school curriculum. Students learn valuable business skills by utilising local cultural traditions and contribute to preserving and promoting indigenous knowledge and practices. This finding adds to the findings of [Rosique-Blasco et al. \(2016\)](#), who empirically analysed students’ entrepreneurial skills and sociocultural factors. However, their study does not include parental involvement, which is also important to consider.

Interpreting these initiatives in the Indonesian context, it is clear that such programmes go beyond immediate educational goals - they are deeply embedded in Indonesian communities’ cultural and social fabric. The active participation of parents, driven by a collective cultural value of communal responsibility (known as *gotong royong*), illustrates how these educational efforts are intertwined with broader societal norms, thus reinforcing the importance of integrating local cultural practices into school programmes as studied by [Virtue \(2024\)](#). This contextual interpretation highlights the unique contribution of this study to understanding how educational innovations can be effectively implemented in culturally resonant ways in Indonesia.

### *The challenges of parental involvement in education for sustainability*

As seen from the findings above, most of the school experience positively with the parents involved in the school to enhance sustainability. Parents also express enthusiasm and

willingness to support such initiatives. Despite the benefits, principals and teachers found several challenges to involve parents effectively. These include limited parental availability due to work commitments, financial problems, and the parent's knowledge and understanding regarding sustainability issues.

Participant 11 mentioned, "We cannot get more involvement because most of the students' parents are from low-income families in my school. They do not have the time and budget to support their kids for the environmental project at school. Moreover, many students are single parents or broken homes because some of their parents are in jail or may be working in other cities, and children usually stay with their grandmother."

Participant 9 expressed "The only problem is sometimes parents have jobs or are busy with their jobs so no time to participate in the school program. But I think this is a common problem, especially in public schools because some parents think that education is the government or school's responsibility."

Participant 8 stated "As you can see, our school is in a rural area, most parents have low education, they lack knowledge on the environmental issues, so they most often do not know how to contribute. Sometimes, they just rely on other students' parents and teachers, but they still support the budget."

The challenges participants identified highlighted the complex dynamic factors that influence parental involvement in sustainability education initiatives. Socio-economic factors, such as low income and parental work responsibilities, become significant barriers to active participation in school programs, especially for families experiencing economic hardship; this finding is consistent with [Yulianti et al.'s \(2019\)](#) study of parental involvement in children's education in rural and urban areas of Java. Furthermore, the perception that education is primarily the responsibility of the government and schools, as mentioned by Participant 9, reflects broader societal attitudes that may undermine the importance of parental involvement in education. Addressing these issues requires collaborative action between schools, communities, and policymakers to promote a culture of shared responsibility for children's educational development, as suggested by [Trot \(2019\)](#).

Furthermore, the educational disparities and knowledge gaps highlighted by Participant 8 reinforce the importance of targeted interventions to increase parental awareness and understanding of sustainability issues. Providing accessible educational resources and learning opportunities for parents can empower them to play a more active role in supporting their children's education for sustainability, as noted by [Baker et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Melis et al. \(2020\)](#). In addressing these concerns, schools can adopt inclusive and culturally responsive approaches to parent engagement that recognise and address families' diverse needs and circumstances ([McWayne et al., 2022](#); [Rattenborg et al., 2019](#)). This approach or concept in Indonesia is called *kekeluargaan* (familialism) ([Yuda, 2021](#)). By developing partnerships with parents and providing responsive support systems, schools can overcome barriers to parental involvement and create a supportive environment that promotes a sustainable education for all students. The approach bridges educational gaps and ensures that sustainability education is culturally relevant and widely accepted, further enhancing the effectiveness of these interventions.

#### *Impact of parental involvement on students' awareness of sustainable behaviors*

Most participants agree that parental involvement positively influences students' awareness of sustainability issues. Schools recognise the benefits of parental involvement, such as the awareness enhancement of environmental issues and the development of lifelong sustainability habits. Parents are powerful role models for their children, shaping their attitudes and behaviours towards sustainability as mentioned in SDGs 4.7 (quality education). When parents actively participate in sustainable activities and discussions, their children are likelier to adopt similar practices at home and in school. The collaboration between schools

and parents in promoting sustainability ensures a consistent message across home and school environments.

Participant 7 stated “I think by involving parents in education for sustainability, students are more aware of the environment, more and more students bring their water bottles, instead of buying water in plastics in school. I checked some classes several days ago, and only one or two students did not bring their bottles. This is because teachers always remind parents through WhatsApp to tell their kids to bring water bottles as well as lunch boxes.”

Participant 4 also said “In the past, the students did not care about the cleanliness, but right now I find some students always pick up the rubbish around the schools and more discipline to throw rubbish in the right places. I expect by this habit, the society around this school will not throw rubbish in the river anymore, because this location is vulnerable to flooding.”

The examples provided by participants highlight the concrete results of parental involvement, such as reduced plastic waste and improved cleanliness habits. These changes not only contribute to a more sustainable school environment but also have the potential to influence broader social norms and behaviours related to environmental responsibility. In this way, collaboration between schools and parents provides a continuous message in the home and school environment, highlighting the importance of sustainability education in creating responsible and environmentally aware citizens. This finding strengthens the finding of [Rakotomamonjy et al. \(2015\)](#) that students who received environmental education had more positive attitudes than children not exposed to environmental education at school and home. Thus, integrating sustainability education into Indonesia’s school and home environments promotes environmentally responsible behaviour among students and aligns with and reinforces traditional cultural practices, further embedding these values within the community. Parenting, home learning, decision making and communication between parents and students (microsystem), and parents volunteering in children’s activities at school for sustainability and parent-teacher communication and collaboration (mesosystem) affect sustainability awareness for students, especially the in environment, socio-culture and economy. [Table 3](#) visualises the impact of parental involvement on students’ sustainability behaviours.

**Table 3.** Impact of parental involvement on student sustainability behaviors

Categories	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention
Plastic Use (SDGs 12.5, 14.1, 13, 6, 11, 15)	Most students bought water in plastic bottles and used single-use plastics	Majority of students brought reusable water bottles
Cleanliness Habits (SDGs 3.9, 6.2, 6.3, 11.6, 12.5, 14.1, 15.1)	Students did not care about cleanliness or littering	Students picked up rubbish and threw waste in the right places
Sustainable Awareness (SDGs 4.7, 12.8, 13.3, 11.6, 7.3, 6.3, 14.1, 15.1)	Students lacked awareness of environmental issues	Students became more aware of sustainability and environmental responsibility
Waste Reduction (SDGs 12.5, 12.3, 11.6, 13.3, 14.1, 15.3)	Students used single-use plastics and did not recycle	Students reduced plastic use and actively recycled as parents support to bring home-recycled waste to school
Tree Planting (SDGs 13.2, 15.1, 15.2, 15.3, 6.6, 11.7)	Students showed little interest in the school environment	Supported by parents by donating trees, students took pride in planting and maintaining green spaces
Social Norms (SDGs 5.1, 5.3, 10.2, 10.3, 3.4, 3.7, 16.1)	Students did not connect their actions to broader environmental impacts	Students understood how their habits (e.g. reducing waste) could prevent flooding

**Source(s):** Authors’ own work

### Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of parental involvement in promoting sustainability education in Indonesian primary schools. By addressing the challenges, implementing effective strategies, and leveraging the support of parents, schools can create a supportive environment that promotes students' awareness of and commitment to sustainable behaviours. The findings of this study have significant implications for research, practice, and society. From a research perspective, the study significantly contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the role of parental involvement in education for sustainability, particularly within the Indonesian context. In practice, the findings indicate that schools should adopt more inclusive strategies to engage parents in sustainability education, recognising that parental involvement significantly impacts students' awareness and behaviours related to sustainability. These insights can inform the development of school programmes and policies prioritising family engagement in environmental education. Furthermore, the study's results have the potential to influence public policy by advocating for the integration of parental involvement as a key component of national sustainability education initiatives.

In addition, the findings of this study extend Epstein's theory on the importance of collaboration between families, especially parents and schools, in shaping students' educational outcomes, not only in terms of academic achievement but also in terms of sustainability. Epstein's theory is illustrated by parents getting involved in designing the curriculum, workshops, and sustainability projects. This is particularly true regarding decision-making, parent volunteering, and parent-school connection. For example, projects like school-based 'waste banks' have reduced waste management costs through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse. This shows that sustainability projects can be profitable and help to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 12.5 (Waste Reduction) and Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 (Sustainability Education). In addition, this research makes a theoretical contribution by integrating Epstein's theory, ARACY, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological theoretical framework. This integrative approach allows for a more holistic understanding of parental involvement in continuing education in Indonesia, revealing how the interaction between micro (family-like) and meso (school-family relationships) factors shape sustainable educational practices. Thus, this research strengthens existing theories and links different perspectives to produce a relevant conceptual framework in local and global contexts.

Whilst the present study provides valuable insights into the subject of parental involvement in sustainability education, there are some limitations. Firstly, the relatively small sample size may limit the generalisability of the findings. Secondly, the study relies on the perspectives of principals and teachers rather than parents or students, which may introduce a certain degree of bias. Finally, the qualitative approach, which employs semi-structured interviews and document analysis, may be open to interpretation and may introduce researcher bias. It is recommended that future studies adopt a mixed methods approach, involving a greater number of participants and exploring long-term effects through longitudinal research. Furthermore, expanding the existing literature review to encompass UNESCO's frameworks and global studies on parental involvement could enhance its relevance, whilst a more critical synthesis of existing research and comparative analyses across different regions and school contexts would further strengthen the findings.

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