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## Exploring the Underlying Factors of School and Stakeholders' Relational Gaps: A Case Study

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20422044>

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### Publication History:

Date Submitted: April 8, 2026

Date Accepted: April 10, 2026

Date Reviewed: April 11, 2026

Date Revised: May 07, 2026

Date Published: May 28, 2026

### How to cite this work:

Rubio, E., & Hurtada, J. (2026). Exploring the Underlying Factors of School and Stakeholders' Relational Gaps: A Case Study. *MĒTILĒDTĒD: International Multidisciplinary Journal in Language, Education, and Culture*, 2(9), 421–433. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20422044>

### ABSTRACT

The quality of relationships between schools and their stakeholders—such as parents, community leaders, local government units, and civil society organizations—plays a crucial role in achieving effective, inclusive, and sustainable education systems. This study explored the underlying factors contributing to relational gaps between schools and stakeholders in Bagumbayan District through an in-depth case study approach. It aimed to understand the nature of these gaps, the contributing factors, and their implications for school-community collaboration and educational outcomes. A qualitative case study design was employed to provide a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of the phenomenon. Multiple stakeholders, including school personnel and community representatives, were purposively selected as participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis to capture diverse perspectives on school-stakeholder relationships. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, key issues, and explanatory themes. Findings revealed that relational gaps were influenced by communication barriers, lack of regular engagement, differing expectations, limited transparency in school decision-making, and minimal stakeholder participation in school activities. Socio-cultural differences, time constraints, and resource limitations also contributed to weak collaboration. Additionally, some stakeholders reported feeling excluded from meaningful involvement in school governance and planning processes. Despite these challenges, the study identified opportunities for strengthening relationships through improved communication channels, inclusive leadership practices, regular consultations, and the establishment of collaborative partnerships. Trust-building and mutual understanding emerged as critical elements in bridging relational gaps. The study concludes that addressing relational gaps requires intentional efforts to foster open communication, shared decision-making, and active stakeholder engagement to promote stronger school-community partnerships and more responsive educational environments.

**Keywords:** stakeholder engagement, institutional trust, school-community collaboration, communication barriers



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## INTRODUCTION

### Background of Study

The quality of relationships between schools and their stakeholders such as parents, community leaders, local government units, and civil society organizations—has become increasingly recognized as a crucial factor in achieving effective and inclusive education systems worldwide. Internationally, educational research emphasizes that collaborative school–community partnerships strengthen learning environments, improve accountability, and enhance student outcomes. However, studies also reveal persistent relational gaps characterized by weak communication, limited participation, lack of trust, and unequal power dynamics between educational institutions and community actors (Hands, 2023; Wagman et al., 2025). These relational gaps often prevent stakeholders from meaningfully contributing to educational decision-making and program implementation, despite policy frameworks promoting inclusive governance in schools.

Although global literature highlights the importance of participatory educational governance, there remains a research gap in understanding the underlying relational barriers that shape stakeholder engagement within specific school contexts, particularly in developing regions. Addressing these challenges is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Sustainable Development Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), both of which emphasize collaborative partnerships as key drivers for equitable and sustainable education systems.

In the Philippines, stakeholder participation has been institutionalized through School-Based Management and community partnership programs of the Department of Education (Philippines), which encourage schools to collaborate with parents and local communities in planning, resource mobilization, and governance. Research in Philippine public schools indicates that stakeholder engagement positively influences school sustainability, program implementation, and educational outcomes (Alonzo & Paglinawan, 2025; Rupole & Ching, 2025). Nevertheless, studies also report challenges such as insufficient communication channels, lack of awareness of school programs, limited trust, and uneven participation among stakeholders (Estrada & Mori, 2026). While these studies provide valuable insights into stakeholder involvement, a significant literature gap exists regarding how relational tensions, power imbalances, and contextual community factors shape the interaction between schools and stakeholders in localized educational settings.



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Within South Central Mindanao, where communities are characterized by cultural diversity, geographic dispersion, and socio-economic disparities, school–community collaboration plays a particularly vital role in supporting educational development. Research in Mindanao highlights that community engagement and culturally responsive leadership strengthen participation and shared responsibility in schools (Lagura & Noynay, 2026; Sarmiento & Nuqui, 2020). Despite these promising developments, empirical evidence remains limited regarding the specific relational gaps that may hinder sustained collaboration between schools and stakeholders across districts in the region. This gap suggests the need for localized qualitative inquiries that capture the lived experiences and perspectives of both educational actors and community partners.

More specifically, in the province of Sultan Kudarat, educational institutions operate within a complex socio-cultural landscape shaped by diverse ethnic groups, rural communities, and varying levels of access to educational resources. While schools strive to promote community engagement through participatory programs, anecdotal observations and limited local studies suggest that communication barriers, differing expectations, and limited stakeholder empowerment may contribute to relational gaps that affect collaboration and shared decision-making. However, scholarly investigations examining these relational dynamics remain scarce within the province, creating a clear research gap in understanding how such interactions influence educational initiatives and school development.

Hence, this study aimed to explore the underlying factors contributing to relational gaps between schools and stakeholders through an in-depth case study approach in Bagumbayan District. By examining the perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders, the research seeks to generate context-sensitive insights that may inform more inclusive partnership strategies and strengthen collaborative governance in schools. Ultimately, the findings aim to contribute to the broader discourse on educational partnerships while supporting the realization of sustainable, community-responsive education systems.

### **Research Questions**

This study aimed to explore the underlying factors contributing to relational gaps between schools and stakeholders through an in-depth case study approach in Bagumbayan District for school year 2025-2026.

Specifically, this seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What experiences reveal the relational gaps between the school and its stakeholders?
2. What factors contribute to the emergence of relational gaps between the school and stakeholders?



3. How do relational gaps influence collaboration and participation among stakeholders?
4. What strategies can strengthen relationships between the school and stakeholders?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically adopting case study as the primary approach because it sought to deeply explore and interpret the underlying factors contributing to relational gaps between schools and stakeholders through an in-depth case study approach in Bagumbayan District for school year 2025-2026. Qualitative research is particularly suitable when the aim is to understand how individuals experience and make meaning of a phenomenon from their own perspectives, rather than to measure variables numerically, allowing rich, context-embedded insights to emerge from participants themselves.

### Respondents of the Study

Table 1 displays the qualifications of the participants based on the criteria set by the researcher prior to the selection of qualified informants of the study.

**Table 1**

#### *Participants' Inclusion Criteria*

<b>Qualifications</b>
Participants: 15 Respondents (5-School Heads, 5 Stakeholders and 5- Teachers)
<p><b>Direct Involvement in the School Context</b> Participants must be actively involved in the target school (i.e., employed as a teacher, serving as a school head, or officially recognized as a stakeholder such as a parent, PTA officer, or community representative) within the selected school or district.</p> <p><b>Minimum Length of Experience/Engagement</b> Teachers and school heads must have at least <b>1–3 years of continuous service</b> in the school, while stakeholders must have at least <b>1 year of active participation</b> or engagement with the school to ensure familiarity with its practices and relationships.</p> <p><b>Experience Relevant to School–Stakeholder Interactions</b> Participants must have experienced or been involved in school-related activities, meetings,</p>



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programs, or decision-making processes where interaction between the school and stakeholders occurs.

#### **Willingness to Participate and Provide Informed Consent**

Participants must be willing to voluntarily participate in the study, share their experiences, and provide informed consent for interviews or data collection procedures..

### **Sampling Technique**

During the conduct of this study, a Purposive Sampling Technique will be intentionally utilized to carefully select fifteen (15) participants: 5 teachers, 5 school heads, and 5 stakeholders from schools in Bagumbayan III, Division of Sultan Kudarat, who meet the researcher's specified inclusion criteria:

Purposive sampling, alternately referred to as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, constitutes a variant of non-probability sampling. Within this approach, researchers exercise their own judgment and discretionary acumen in the selection of individuals from the population to partake in their survey endeavors (Alchemer, 2021). This method of sampling mandates that researchers possess prior knowledge of the objectives underpinning their study so as to effectively pinpoint and make contact with eligible participants through online survey platforms like Alchemer. Researchers resort to purposive sampling in order to secure access to a distinct subgroup of individuals, whereby all survey respondents are meticulously chosen based on their alignment with a specific demographic or criterion.

### **Research Instruments**

In this study, a semi-structured interview functioned as an exploratory instrument during both in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to explore and describe the underlying factors contributing to relational gaps between schools and stakeholders in remote schools of Bagumbayan III, Sultan Kudarat for school year 2026-2027.

The validity and appropriateness of this tool will be substantiated through a rigorous evaluation process conducted by a panel of experts who possess expertise in the development of relevant research instruments.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

To ensure the research's reliability, the researcher will maintain a strict adherence to a predefined set of procedures. The primary objective of this study is to investigate underlying factors contributing to relational gaps between schools and stakeholders.



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In the initial phase, the researcher diligently sought formal authorization from both the Superintendent of DepEd-Sultan Kudarat and the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies (CGS). This authorization is essential to obtain the necessary permissions for the researcher to conduct the study, emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations.

Following this, a secondary authorization letter was sent to the District Supervisor, explicitly requesting access to the specific data required for this research. A meticulously crafted interview and FGD Protocols will be developed, subjected to rigorous evaluation, and then administered to the targeted participants.

The researcher employed a Purposive Sampling Technique to carefully select the teachers as participants in this study. Assuming strict adherence to established EWMCI-Research Ethics Committee, the researcher will proceed with conducting interviews and facilitating Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), all of which were conducted through face-to-face interactions.

Ultimately, the data collected from interviews and FGDs were systematically organized, subjected to comprehensive analysis, and interpreted using the thematic analysis approach. This approach is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the issues under investigation. See the diagram below:

### **Data Transcription Process**

In this study centered on uncovering the underlying factors contributing to relational gaps between schools and stakeholders in Bagumbayan III, Sultan Kudarat for School Year 2026–2027, a content or thematic analysis approach was employed to examine the collected data. This methodology, as described by Flick (2014), Ngag (2023), and Braun (2009), involved the systematic categorization of textual components, including statements, phrases, and words, into organized groupings or categories. These categories were either derived from established frameworks or custom-developed to align with the study's specific objectives.

To execute this analytical process, a series of essential steps was diligently followed. Initially, all data sources, such as interview transcripts, notes from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and relevant documents, were meticulously organized and prepared for analysis. This phase ensured the systematic arrangement and accessibility of the data.

Subsequently, the researcher deeply engaged with the data by conducting a thorough review of interview transcripts and FGD notes. This immersive process aided in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the content and context embedded within the collected information. The third step involved initiating a systematic coding process. Initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful segments or patterns within the data. These codes captured



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essential concepts, ideas, or themes related to the underlying factors contributing to relational gaps between schools and stakeholders for School Year 2026–2027.

Following coding, the identified codes were grouped into preliminary themes based on shared meaning or relevance. This step aimed to establish an initial structure for organizing the data. Next, the emerging themes and their corresponding codes underwent a process of review and refinement. The researchers ensured the consistency and clarity of these themes, making necessary adjustments. Each refined theme was assigned a descriptive name that succinctly represented the content it encapsulated, facilitating easy identification and interpretation.

Relevant data excerpts, such as quotes or segments extracted from interviews and FGDs, were selected and associated with the respective themes. These excerpts served as supporting evidence for the identified themes. Finally, the thematic analysis extended beyond surface-level identification. The researchers interpreted the meaning and implications of each theme within the context of the study's objectives. They sought patterns, connections, and variations within the themes to provide a comprehensive understanding of the narratives of the teachers. This meticulous and structured process of thematic analysis enabled the researchers to systematically explore and comprehend the underlying factors contributing to relational gaps between schools and stakeholders.

### **Data Analysis**

This study used thematic analysis to examine the factors causing relational gaps between schools and stakeholders in Bagumbayan III, Sultan Kudarat (SY 2026–2027). The process involved organizing data from interviews and FGDs, thoroughly reviewing it, coding key ideas, grouping them into themes, and refining these themes for clarity.

Supporting excerpts were used as evidence, and the data were interpreted to identify patterns and deeper meanings. Overall, this structured method helped researchers understand the root causes of weak school–stakeholder relationships.

### **Scope and Limitations**

The study explored the underlying factors contributing to the relational gaps between schools and stakeholders (what) by focusing on selected participants composed of school administrators, teachers, and key external stakeholders such as parents and community members (who) within Bagumbayan III (where) during the School Year 2025–2026 (when). It employed a qualitative case study research design (how), utilizing interviews, document analysis, and thematic interpretation to capture participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and interactions related to school–stakeholder relationships. The study was delimited to one school district and did



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not include other districts or regions, and it focused only on relational gaps without extensively examining other school performance indicators. It was conducted to identify and understand the root causes of communication breakdowns, misaligned expectations, and engagement issues in order to provide insights that could inform strategies for strengthening collaboration and improving partnerships between schools and stakeholders (why).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Results show that relational gaps are revealed through recurring experiences of low stakeholder participation, ineffective communication, interpersonal conflicts, lack of transparency, socio-economic constraints, and weak collaboration, which collectively lead to disconnection and misalignment between the school and its stakeholders.

Also, relational gaps emerge from poor and inconsistent communication, limited stakeholder engagement, unclear roles and expectations, lack of transparency and trust, socio-economic challenges, interpersonal conflicts, and systemic issues within school structures and leadership practices.

Moreover, relational gaps negatively influence collaboration and participation by reducing stakeholder engagement, weakening coordination, diminishing trust, fostering negative attitudes, affecting student involvement, straining relationships, and disrupting school programs and progress.

Finally, strengthening relationships requires improving communication practices, promoting transparency and trust, encouraging stakeholder participation, clarifying roles and expectations, fostering positive interpersonal relationships, implementing community engagement strategies, and recognizing stakeholder contributions.

## **Conclusion**

In light of the findings of the study, the following were concluded:

Relational gaps are not isolated incidents but are deeply rooted in both communication failures and contextual realities, emphasizing the need for schools to adopt more inclusive, responsive, and context-sensitive engagement practices.

Relational gaps are multi-dimensional and systemic in nature, indicating that addressing them requires not only improving communication but also restructuring practices that promote clarity, inclusivity, and shared accountability.

Unresolved relational gaps can significantly undermine the overall functioning of the school, reinforcing the importance of building strong relational foundations to sustain active participation and collective success.



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Strong school-stakeholder relationships are intentionally built through consistent, inclusive, and trust-driven practices, highlighting that sustainable collaboration depends on both structural strategies and genuine human connection.

## **Recommendations**

In light of the findings of the study, the following were recommended:

1. DepEd may implement a standardized “Monthly Stakeholder Check-In Day” where schools are required to conduct simple hybrid (online/offline) consultations to regularly update, listen, and address stakeholder concerns.
2. School Administrators may create a “Clear Communication Board + Chat Group System” (physical bulletin + Messenger/WhatsApp group) where all announcements, roles, and updates are posted consistently to avoid confusion and misinformation.
3. Policy Makers may develop a policy requiring stakeholder inclusion in key school decisions (e.g., planning and policy changes) through documented consultations to ensure transparency and shared responsibility.
4. Future Researchers may conduct a localized intervention study (e.g., communication or engagement model) that tests practical strategies like home visitation or digital communication systems to measure improvements in trust and participation.

## **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

In preparation for the conduct of this study, all the aforementioned plans and recommendations were presented to East-West Mindanao Colleges Inc. to ensure compliance with prescribed procedures and protocols. Within the context of the research focused on examining the lived experiences, core challenges, coping mechanisms, and locally grounded strategies of teachers who educated culturally diverse learners in remote schools of Bagumbayan III, Sultan Kudarat for School Year 2026–2027, it was imperative to emphasize the paramount importance of ethical considerations. Prior to commencing this study, the following ethical principles were highlighted:

**Informed Consent:** Before participation, explicit and informed consent was diligently obtained from all school heads involved in the study. It was ensured that they possessed a comprehensive understanding of the study's objectives, methodologies, potential risks, and benefits. Furthermore, participation remained entirely voluntary, affording participants the autonomy to withdraw from the study at any juncture without encountering any adverse consequences.



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**Anonymity and Confidentiality:** To safeguard the identities and responses of the teachers, rigorous measures were enacted to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Rather than using actual names, pseudonyms or codes were employed, upholding the privacy of the participants. The collected data were securely stored with access restricted solely to the research team.

**Avoiding Harm:** Delicate subjects, such as the challenges inherent in their roles, were discussed with meticulous consideration for the potential emotional and psychological impact on the participants. Strategies were in place to minimize distress, and a support system was made readily available to assist participants should the need arise.

**Researcher-Participant Relationship:** The researcher maintained a professional and respectful rapport when engaging with the school heads. Any actions that could have exploited or caused harm to the participants were scrupulously avoided, ensuring their utmost dignity and respect throughout the research process.

**Data Protection:** Adherence to data protection regulations and laws was unwaveringly followed to safeguard the personal information of the participants. Stringent measures were employed to ensure the secure storage and transmission of data.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participants were assured that their involvement in the study was wholly voluntary, devoid of any form of coercion or external pressure.

**Researcher Bias:** The researcher remained vigilant regarding potential biases that might influence data collection and analysis, upholding objectivity and transparency throughout the research endeavor.

**Institutional Approval:** Before initiating the study, the researcher diligently sought ethical clearance from the pertinent institutional review boards or ethics committees.

**Honesty and Integrity:** The research findings were reported truthfully and accurately, devoid of any manipulation or distortion to align with preconceived notions or biases.

**Beneficence:** The potential benefits of the research to educational practices and policies were thoughtfully considered, ensuring that the study positively contributed to the enhancement of the education system.

**Cultural Sensitivity:** The researcher demonstrated cultural sensitivity by respecting local customs, beliefs, and practices within the research setting, refraining from imposing external values on the participants.



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**Inclusion and Diversity:** The study's structure prioritized inclusivity and diversity, encompassing a wide spectrum of the underlying factors contributing to relational gaps between schools and stakeholders.

## **Acknowledgment**

The researcher would like to extend his appreciation to all those who contributed to the completion of this study:

To **BAILAH B. SANDIGAN MAED**, the School President, for her unwavering support and leadership that foster an environment of academic excellence and professional growth. Her commitment to advancing quality education has greatly inspired to pursue the studies with dedication and purpose.

To **JULIET P. TAMBUNGALAN, MAED**, the Graduate Studies Consultant, the researcher sincerely appreciates her in providing meaningful opportunities for learning, research and development. Her vision continues to motivate the researcher to strive for excellence and to contribute positively to the researcher respective fields and communities.

To **EMELIA M. LOTILLA, Ph.D.**, Dean of the Graduate School, for her invaluable support, guidance, and leadership extended to all graduate students. Her dedication to promoting academic excellence and research has greatly contributed to the successful completion of this work.

To **JOSEVIC F. HURTADA, Ph.D.** the researcher's thesis adviser, for his invaluable guidance, patience, and encouragement throughout the completion of this study. His expertise, insightful suggestions, and continuous support have greatly contributed to the development and success of this research.

To the members of the examining committee, **JAIME BOY U. NGAG JR., Ph.D.** and **LEODIE D. MONES, Ph.D.** for their time, effort, and valuable insights in evaluating this research. Their constructive comments, thoughtful suggestions, and professional expertise have greatly contributed to the improvement and refinement of this study.

A heartfelt thanks to his wife, **MARY ROSE F. RUBIO**, their daughters **JAHZEEL EROSE F. RUBIO** and **IZHAR LAEL F. RUBIO** for their unconditional love, understanding, and support. Their encouragement has given the researcher courage and inspiration to continue this journey despite of the challenges he faced to pursue this journey in his graduate school.

To his classmate and friends, **Ma'am Bebie Joyce D. Sacramento**, **Ma'am Venna Liza Toreta**, **Ma'am Jemilyn Diamante** and **Ma'am Haydie Capundan**, his sincere gratitude for not



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giving up in pursuing the dreams they built together. Also, for the help they offer as always. The decision that he have made is to give up for this research, but it was totally change because of their persistent follow up, on the first hand he ignores the communication but later he realizes the necessities of the research.

Above all, to the **GREAT AND LOVING GOD**, for the wisdom, strength and blessings bestowed upon him, making this research endeavor possible.

### **Declaration AI Tools Utilization**

I do hereby declare the use AI tools, such as Chat GPT and Grammarly for grammar checking and setence organization purposes only.

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