

Effective School Management Strategies for Enhancing Early Childhood Development

Subhan¹, Shobihatul Fitroh Noviyanti^{2✉}, Ihsan Zikri Ulfiandi³, Musammil Lateh⁴

¹Taman Kanak-Kanak Muslimat Khodijah 124, East Java, Indonesia

^{2,3}Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Maulana Malik Ibrahim, East Java, Indonesia

⁴Hatyai University, Songkhla, Thailand

Abstract

This article examines effective school management strategies in developing early childhood skills at early childhood education. The purpose of this research is to explore the interplay between strategic management practices, collaborative decision-making, and parent and community engagement in fostering the holistic development of young learners. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative research method, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed using triangulation techniques to ensure reliability and validity. The findings reveal that collaborative decision-making and innovative school management strategies, such as natural learning and digital learning approaches, play crucial roles in promoting early childhood skills development. Moreover, the study underscores the significance of parent and community engagement initiatives, including parenting programs, student guardian associations, and home visits, in creating supportive ecosystems where children can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. This research highlights the importance of strategic school management practices and proactive engagement with parents and the community in nurturing the comprehensive development of young learners in early childhood education settings.

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✉ **Correspondence Author:** shobihanoviyanti@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education serves as the cornerstone of a child's educational journey, laying the essential groundwork for their future development and success (De et al., 2023; Sitopu et al., 2024; Kastriti et al., 2022). In this pivotal stage, children not only acquire fundamental academic knowledge but also crucial life skills that shape their growth trajectory (Dishon & Gilead, 2021). As educators and stakeholders increasingly recognize the significance of holistic development during these formative years, the role of school management emerges as a critical factor in fostering the acquisition of life skills among young learners.

The nexus between school management and children's skills is a multifaceted realm, encompassing various dimensions of educational administration and pedagogical approaches (Abella et al., 2024; Andrin et al., 2024; Al-shatarat et al., 2023). Effective school management practices not only facilitate the delivery of academic content but also play a pivotal role in creating an environment conducive to the holistic development of children (Cordova Jr et al., 2024). From

curriculum design to teacher training, from resource allocation to parent engagement, the decisions and actions taken by school administrators profoundly influence the acquisition and refinement of life skills among early learners (Antony-Newman, 2024). Understanding these intricate linkages is essential for optimizing educational outcomes and nurturing well-rounded individuals poised for success in an ever-evolving society.

Previous studies have contributed valuable insights into the relationship between school management and the development of life skills in early childhood. Research in this area has examined various dimensions of school leadership, organizational culture, and instructional practices, shedding light on their impact on student outcomes (Dutta & Sahney, 2022; Bellibaş et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021; Kilag et al., 2023). Studies have shown that transformational leadership styles, characterized by vision, empathy, and empowerment, are associated with higher levels of student engagement and academic achievement.

Another research has highlighted the importance of creating a positive and inclusive school climate that fosters the social and emotional well-being of students (Fantus & Newman, 2021; Singla et al., 2021; Varela et al., 2021; Sayfulloevna, 2023). Schools that prioritize the development of interpersonal skills, such as empathy, communication, and conflict resolution, are better equipped to support the holistic growth of their students (Al-shatarat et al., 2023; Huerta et al., 2021). Their studies have underscored the role of teacher-student relationships in shaping children's attitudes towards learning and their ability to collaborate effectively with peers.

From social-emotional learning curricula to extracurricular activities focused on leadership and teamwork, schools have implemented a range of initiatives to support the acquisition of essential skills (Rohmah & Chotimah, 2024). Understanding the effectiveness of these interventions and identifying factors that contribute to their success is critical for informing evidence-based practices (Sanjani et al., 2023). While previous studies have provided valuable insights into the nexus between school management and children's skills, there remains a need for further research to build upon this foundation. By synthesizing existing knowledge and exploring new avenues of inquiry, scholars can continue to advance our understanding of how school management practices can be leveraged to promote the holistic development of early learners. This article seeks to contribute to this ongoing dialogue by identifying key research findings and highlighting areas for future investigation.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of early childhood education and the role of school management in fostering life skills, there remain notable gaps in current research and practice (Herman & Anhusadar, 2022; Miranda et al., 2021; Shafar et al., 2022; Purwaningsih & Al Muin, 2021). One significant gap pertains to the depth of understanding regarding the specific mechanisms through which school management influences the development of children's skills. While there is ample evidence to suggest a correlation between effective management practices and positive educational outcomes, further research is needed to elucidate the causal pathways and identify best practices.

Additionally, there is a dearth of research that examines the intersectionality of various factors influencing the efficacy of school management in building life skills (Cordova Jr et al., 2024; Herman & Anhusadar, 2022; Shafar et al., 2022). Factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural background, and community support systems can significantly impact the implementation and effectiveness of management strategies (Rohmah & Chotimah, 2024). Understanding how these contextual factors interact with school management practices is essential for designing tailored interventions that address the diverse needs of early learners. The majority of existing research tends to focus on the role of school management at the macro level, overlooking the nuances of day-to-day interactions within the school environment. A more granular understanding of how

leadership styles, teacher-student relationships, and classroom dynamics influence skill development is necessary for informing targeted interventions and professional development initiatives. By addressing these research gaps, scholars and practitioners can advance our understanding of the intricate interplay between school management and the cultivation of life skills in early childhood.

Novelties in the realm of school management and the cultivation of life skills in early childhood education are emerging as educators and researchers delve deeper into innovative approaches and methodologies. One notable novelty lies in the integration of technology as a tool for enhancing skill development. Digital platforms and educational apps offer interactive opportunities for children to practice problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity in engaging ways. Moreover, virtual learning environments provide avenues for collaboration and communication, fostering the development of essential 21st-century skills. Another novelty stems from the recognition of the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in promoting skill development among diverse student populations. Educators are increasingly acknowledging the impact of cultural background, language, and identity on learning outcomes, and are incorporating culturally relevant content and perspectives into their curriculum design. By embracing students' cultural assets and fostering a sense of belonging, schools can create inclusive environments that empower all children to succeed.

There is a growing emphasis on the role of community partnerships and experiential learning opportunities in skill development. Collaborating with local organizations, businesses, and institutions enables schools to offer authentic, real-world experiences that enhance students' problem-solving abilities, teamwork skills, and civic engagement (Thomas et al., 2021; Mashudi, 2021). By expanding the boundaries of the traditional classroom and connecting learning to the broader community, schools can prepare students to navigate complex challenges and contribute positively to society. The emergence of interdisciplinary approaches to skill development represents a novel trend in early childhood education. Integrating concepts from various disciplines, such as art, music, and physical education, into core academic subjects provides opportunities for students to apply their knowledge in diverse contexts. By connecting learning experiences across different domains, schools can promote holistic development and cultivate well-rounded individuals equipped with a range of competencies.

This article sets clear objectives to guide the exploration of the role of school management in building life skills in early childhood education at TKM Khodijah 124 Sumberwatu. This writing aims to analyze the practical implications and recommendations for educators, administrators, policy makers and other stakeholders involved in early childhood education. In essence, this article is to contribute to improving the experience and results of education as a life skill for early age students. By empowering educators and stakeholders with the knowledge and tools necessary to create a nurturing and supportive environment that promotes the holistic development of each child.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate the role of school management in building life skills in early childhood education (Liu, 2022; Purwanto et al., 2023). The research is conducted at TKM Khodijah 124, located in Sumberwatu, Kaliacar village, chosen for its representative nature of early childhood educational settings within the community. Descriptive qualitative research offers a nuanced understanding of the phenomena under study, allowing for in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and practices of stakeholders involved in school management and early childhood education.

Data for this study are gathered through multiple sources, including interviews, observation, and documentation at TKM Khodijah 124. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with school administrators, teachers, parents, and community members to capture their perspectives on school management practices and their perceived impact on children's skill development (Yang et al., 2022). Additionally, observations are carried out within the school environment to document daily routines, interactions, and instructional approaches. Furthermore, relevant documentation such as school policies, curriculum frameworks, and student performance records are analyzed to provide context and complement the interview and observation data.

Data analysis in this study employs a triangulation approach, integrating findings from multiple data sources to enhance the credibility and validity of the research outcomes (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2024). Through iterative cycles of data collection, coding, and thematic analysis, patterns, and themes emerge, offering insights into the complex interplay between school management and the cultivation of life skills in early childhood education. Triangulating data from interviews, observations, and documentation allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions, ensuring robust and nuanced findings that contribute to the body of knowledge in this field.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Result

School management encompasses the array of administrative and leadership functions essential for the effective operation of educational institutions (Dutta & Sahney, 2022; Bellibaş et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2021). At its core, school management involves strategic decision-making, resource allocation, and organizational planning aimed at optimizing learning outcomes and fostering a supportive environment for all stakeholders. In the context of early childhood education, effective school management is of paramount importance in laying the foundation for children's lifelong learning and development (Samsidar & Nazir, 2024; Faujiah et al., 2023). School managers in early childhood settings, such as preschools and kindergartens, play a crucial role in creating nurturing environments that promote the comprehensive growth of young learners.

Child-Focused Curriculum Management Strategy

This study found that curriculum management that is responsive to children's needs can support their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. The application of play-based learning methods, as well as the integration of thematic learning that combines various areas of knowledge, can improve the basic skills needed at an early age. Curriculum management in this educational institution is sought to support the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development of children. One of the approaches applied is play-based learning, which has been proven to be effective in facilitating fun learning, as well as stimulating basic skills in early childhood. In addition, thematic learning integrations that connect different areas of knowledge are also introduced to help children understand the relationships between different concepts in everyday life. The results show that a curriculum that is responsive to children's developmental needs not only increases motivation to learn, but also strengthens basic skills that are essential for their future lives.

The managerial strategy applied at TKM Khodijah 124 in managing the curriculum for early childhood. As part of the research, various activities carried out in this school were recorded and analyzed. Among them, the application of game-based learning methods that are carried out every day, as well as the use of thematic media that combines subjects such as mathematics, language, and art in one holistic theme. Observations of learning activities revealed that children were more

enthusiastic about participating in activities that integrated games and thematic learning. The use of aids such as pictures, music, and stories was also seen to increase their understanding and engagement in learning. With this strategy, there has also been a positive development in children's social and emotional abilities, including an increase in their interaction with peers and teachers.

Table 1. Curriculum and Learning Management

Learning Activities	Activities Carried Out	Learning Tools
Language Learning	Compose simple sentences and stories	Storybooks, pictures
Math Learning	Play with blocks of numbers and shapes	Block numbers, chalkboard
Art Learning	Coloring pictures and creating artwork	Paper, crayons, watercolors
Social Learning	Group discussions about the value of friendship	Posters, picture cards
Cognitive Learning	Play puzzles and memory games	Puzzles, memory games
Physical Activity	Light sports and outdoor games	Ball, a simple sports tool

Table 1 illustrates the various activities carried out at TKM Khodijah 124 in order to support children's development through a child-based curriculum. Each activity is designed to stimulate different abilities in children, such as language, math, art, social, and physical skills. Language learning is carried out using storybooks and pictures to improve children's language skills. Math activities use blocks of numbers and shapes to visually introduce basic mathematical concepts. Art learning provides space for children to express themselves through color and creativity. Social discussions introduce the values of friendship and the importance of cooperation, while physical activity allows children to exercise their gross motor skills through light exercise. All these activities are carried out in a fun atmosphere and support the active learning of the child, which is very important at an early age.

The curriculum implemented at TKM Khodijah 124 focuses on the holistic development of children. Consistently applied play-based learning can increase children's involvement in learning activities, which in turn supports their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. In addition, the use of thematic learning that integrates various subjects has also proven effective in helping children relate the knowledge they gain to everyday life. Activities carried out at this school also show an improvement in children's social skills, such as the ability to work in groups, share, and communicate with peers and teachers. Therefore, curriculum management that is responsive to children's needs can be considered an effective strategy in creating a well-rounded learning experience.

Strategic Management School and Decision-Making

The research conducted at TKM Khodijah 124 delved into the intricate dynamics of decision-making processes and school management strategies aimed at developing life skills in early childhood. One prominent finding highlighted the prevalence of collaborative policy-making as the primary form of decision-making within the school community. This collaborative approach ensured that decisions regarding curriculum design, resource allocation, and extracurricular activities were inclusive and reflective of the diverse perspectives of stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, parents, and community members. By involving multiple stakeholders in the decision-making process, TKM Khodijah 124 fostered a sense of ownership and collective responsibility, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of initiatives aimed at promoting life skills development among young learners.

The research identified two distinct school management strategies—natural learning and digital learning—that played pivotal roles in nurturing the holistic development of life skills among early childhood students at TKM Khodijah 124. Natural learning approaches, rooted in experiential and play-based methodologies, provided children with opportunities to engage in hands-on

exploration, experimentation, and problem-solving activities. Through activities such as outdoor play, gardening, and artistic expression, children developed essential life skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration in authentic and meaningful contexts. Similarly, digital learning initiatives leveraged technology to enhance student engagement and facilitate personalized learning experiences tailored to the unique needs and interests of individual learners. By incorporating educational apps, interactive multimedia resources, and online collaboration platforms into the curriculum, TKM Khodijah 124 equipped children with digital literacy skills and fostered their ability to adapt to and thrive in an increasingly digital world.

Result from this research highlighted the synergistic relationship between collaborative decision-making and innovative school management strategies in advancing the development of life skills in early childhood education. By embracing a collaborative approach to policy-making, TKM Khodijah 124 ensured that school management strategies aligned with the shared vision and goals of the school community. This alignment facilitated the seamless integration of natural learning and digital learning initiatives into the school curriculum, creating a cohesive and comprehensive approach to fostering life skills development among young learners. Overall, the research findings underscored the importance of inclusive decision-making processes and innovative pedagogical approaches in promoting the holistic development of life skills in early childhood education at TKM Khodijah 124.

The central role of collaborative decision-making and innovative management strategies in shaping the educational environment at TKM Khodijah 124. The research clearly emphasized that the involvement of various stakeholders—administrators, teachers, parents, and the wider community—was key to fostering a sense of shared responsibility and ownership. This collaborative approach not only ensured that the decisions made reflected the diverse perspectives and needs of all parties but also created an environment where the development of life skills among young learners was seen as a collective effort. Furthermore, the integration of both natural learning and digital learning strategies into the curriculum highlighted the school's commitment to providing a well-rounded educational experience that prepares children for future challenges, both in real-world and digital contexts.

The synergy between collaborative decision-making and the strategic implementation of learning approaches significantly enhances the effectiveness of educational practices at TKM Khodijah 124. The adoption of natural learning strategies, such as hands-on activities and play-based learning, alongside the use of digital tools, demonstrates the school's proactive approach in addressing the evolving needs of early childhood education. The results of this research indicate that by blending traditional and modern pedagogies, TKM Khodijah 124 is not only fostering essential life skills like creativity and collaboration but also equipping students with the digital competencies necessary to succeed in the digital age. This balanced approach reflects an educational philosophy that values both personal growth and technological adaptation, positioning the school as a forward-thinking institution in early childhood education.

Parent and Community Engagement

Effective school management practices that prioritize parent and community engagement create inclusive learning environments where children feel valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential. By leveraging the collective resources and expertise of parents and community stakeholders, schools can extend learning beyond the confines of the classroom and provide children with diverse opportunities to develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to succeed in school and in life. Moreover, fostering strong partnerships with parents and the broader community strengthens the social fabric of the school community, creating a collaborative

ecosystem where everyone plays a role in nurturing the growth and well-being of childhood learners. The research conducted at TKM Khodijah 124 shed light on the collaborative efforts between teachers, parents, and the community, specifically focusing on parenting programs, student guardian associations, and home visits.

The parenting program carried out at TKM Khodijah 124 has an important role in building collaboration between teachers and parents. The program offers a variety of workshops, seminars, and information sessions that provide parents with resources, guidance, and support to address various aspects of their child's education and development. By equipping parents with the knowledge and skills to support children's learning at home, the program strengthens the partnership between home and school, creating a cohesive support system for children's academic and social-emotional growth.

In addition, the Guardian Association (SGA) plays a significant role in facilitating collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community. SGA serves as a platform for dialogue, advocacy, and shared decision-making, allowing parents to raise concerns, provide ideas, and actively participate in formulating school policies and initiatives. Through SGA, parents feel that they have a role and responsibility in the educational process.

Home visits also emerged as an effective strategy to strengthen collaboration between teachers and parents. This visit provides an opportunity for teachers to establish closer relationships with parents, understand the child's home environment, and build mutual trust. By visiting students' homes, teachers can tailor teaching approaches according to individual needs and open more open lines of communication with parents, thus creating mutual respect and responsibility for the child's success.

Parenting programs, the Guardian Association (SGA), and home visits at KHODIJAH 124 TKM have proven to be effective in strengthening collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community. These three initiatives create a cohesive support system, where parents are actively involved in their children's education, improve communication, and build mutual trust and shared responsibility for students' academic and social-emotional success. A well-established collaboration between these parties also has a positive impact on the holistic development of children as shown in Figure 1.

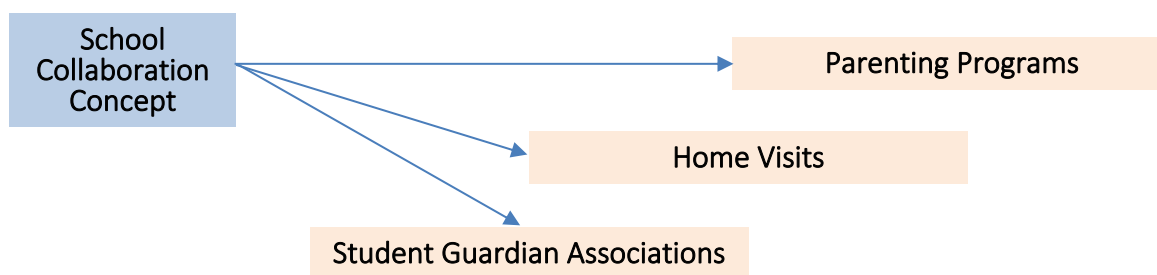


Figure 1. School Collaboration Concept

The research findings underscored the importance of collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community in promoting positive educational outcomes for children at TKM Khodijah 124. Through parenting programs, student guardian associations, and home visits, the school cultivated a supportive and inclusive learning environment where all stakeholders worked together to nurture the academic, social, and emotional development of every child. These collaborative efforts not only strengthened the partnership between home and school but also empowered parents to play active roles in their child's education, contributing to a culture of

shared responsibility and collective engagement in the pursuit of educational excellence.

The findings from the previous study on school management in developing life skills in early childhood underscore the critical role of collaborative partnerships between teachers, parents, and the community in fostering holistic development. By implementing parenting programs, student guardian associations, and home visits, TKM Khodijah 124 effectively engaged stakeholders in meaningful dialogue and collective decision-making processes, creating a supportive ecosystem where children could thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. This collaborative approach not only strengthened the bond between home and school but also empowered parents to actively participate in their child's education and contribute to the creation of a nurturing learning environment. Moreover, the research highlighted the importance of strategic decision-making and innovative school management strategies, such as natural learning and digital learning, in promoting the acquisition of essential life skills among early childhood students. By embracing a holistic approach to education and leveraging the collective resources and expertise of teachers, parents, and the community, TKM Khodijah 124 exemplifies how effective school management practices can drive positive outcomes for young learners and lay the foundation for lifelong success.

Discussion

Child-focused and play-based approaches have a significant impact on their development. According to the theory of child development put forward by Piaget and Vygotsky, children learn in a better way when they engage in fun and meaningful activities. Play-based learning, which provides an active and interactive learning experience, is in line with these principles, as it allows children to explore their world in a way that suits their developmental stage. In addition, thematic teaching helps children understand the relationships between the various concepts they learn, strengthen critical thinking skills, and facilitate the development of their social skills. Thus, these findings support the use of a need-based approach and stage of child development in curriculum management.

Play-based learning can accelerate the development of children's social and emotional skills. Cankaya et al. (2023) in his research also emphasized that structured play can help children in developing cognitive skills such as problem-solving and creativity. Games are also an effective means to support children's motor development. Chen et al., (2023) shows that thematic learning can improve the understanding of more abstract concepts for early childhood, strengthening connections between various subjects. Yang et al. (2022) suggests that the early childhood curriculum should be more responsive to the needs and interests of children, so that they can be more actively involved in learning. The findings show the alignment between the results of the research at TKM Khodijah 124 and the research in the literature, confirming the importance of a child-focused and game-based curriculum in supporting early childhood development.

Strategic management in schools involves the systematic formulation and implementation of plans and initiatives to achieve educational goals and objectives (Acciarini et al., 2021; Faujiah et al., 2023; Samsidar & Nazir, 2024). At its core, strategic management encompasses a forward-thinking approach to decision-making that is guided by a clear vision and mission. School leaders, including principals and administrators, play a pivotal role in strategic management by setting the direction for the school, identifying areas for improvement, and allocating resources effectively to support student success. Strategic decision-making in schools involves analyzing data, assessing organizational strengths and weaknesses, and considering the needs of diverse stakeholders to inform action plans and initiatives (Cordova Jr et al., 2024). By adopting a strategic management approach, schools can adapt to changing educational landscapes, maximize opportunities for innovation and growth, and ultimately, enhance the quality of education provided to students.

School managers, including principals, administrators, and governing bodies, play a pivotal role in setting the vision, mission, and goals of the school, as well as overseeing the implementation of policies and procedures to achieve these objectives. Effective school management entails not only efficient logistical operations but also a commitment to fostering a positive school culture, promoting student engagement, and supporting the professional growth and well-being of educators. Strategic management in schools is closely related to efforts to develop life skills in early childhood.

By adopting a forward-thinking decision-making approach, school leaders can prioritize the integration of life skills development into the curriculum and educational experiences of young students (Abella et al., 2024; Rohmah & Chotimah, 2024). Strategic management practices facilitate the identification of key areas for skill development, such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity, and inform the development of targeted interventions and initiatives to support their acquisition (Herman & Anhusadar, 2022; Samsidar & Nazir, 2024). Additionally, strategic decision making ensures that resources are allocated efficiently to provide enriching learning opportunities that promote a child's holistic development. By incorporating life skills development into a school's strategic goals and priorities, educators can create a supportive environment that empowers students to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, thereby laying the foundation for lifelong success.

Effective school management practices involved meaningful engagement with parents and the broader community to support early childhood skills development (Eden et al., 2024; Nash et al., 2021; Dini, 2022; Hasnawati, 2022). Schools that fostered partnerships with parents, local organizations, and community stakeholders were able to extend learning beyond the classroom and provide children with diverse opportunities for skill-building in real-world contexts (Hidayati et al., 2024). Parent and community engagement play integral roles in effective school management practices aimed at supporting early childhood skills development. Schools that prioritize building strong partnerships with parents and engaging with the broader community create environments where children can thrive both academically and socially. By fostering collaborative relationships with parents, schools gain valuable insights into each child's unique strengths, needs, and interests, enabling educators to tailor their approaches to better meet the individualized learning requirements of young learners. Moreover, involving parents in school decision-making processes empowers them to actively contribute to shaping the educational experiences of their children, fostering a sense of ownership and investment in their child's learning journey.

In addition to partnering with parents, effective school management involves forging connections with local organizations and community stakeholders to enrich the learning experiences of early childhood students. Collaborating with community members, businesses, and non-profit organizations provides schools with access to a wealth of resources, expertise, and opportunities for experiential learning outside the classroom. For example, partnerships with museums, libraries, and environmental organizations offer children opportunities to explore diverse interests, develop new skills, and make meaningful connections between their learning and the world around them (Eden et al., 2024; Hidayati et al., 2024; Maulidia, 2023). Furthermore, community engagement initiatives such as service-learning projects, volunteer opportunities, and cultural exchanges broaden children's perspectives, foster empathy and social responsibility, and promote the development of essential life skills such as collaboration, communication, and problem-solving.

The findings of this research highlights the critical role of strategic management and collaborative decision-making in enhancing early childhood education. The integration of child-focused, play-based learning and the involvement of parents and the community in the decision-

making process not only reinforces the development of life skills but also ensures that the curriculum remains adaptable to the evolving needs of young learners. The study contributes to the existing body of literature by underscoring the importance of a comprehensive, forward-thinking approach to school management that prioritizes holistic development. The implications of these findings provide a framework for other educational institutions aiming to implement similar strategies in order to promote effective life skills development and foster a more inclusive and collaborative educational environment.

CONCLUSION

Effective school management strategies in developing early childhood skills at TKM Khodijah 124 highlights the important role of collaborative decision making and innovative school management strategies in encouraging the holistic development of young students. Through strategic school management practices, including collaborative policy making and the implementation of natural learning and digital learning approaches, TKM Khodijah 124 has created a dynamic educational environment that prioritizes the acquisition of important life skills alongside academic achievement. In addition, the school's commitment to parent and community involvement, exemplified through its parenting programs, parent association and home visits, underlines the importance of fostering strong partnerships between home, school and the wider community. By engaging stakeholders in meaningful dialogue and collaboration, TKM Khodijah 124 has built a supportive ecosystem where children can develop academically, socially, and emotionally. Going forward, continued investment in strategic school management practices and proactive parent and community engagement initiatives will be critical in maintaining and enhancing positive outcomes for early childhood development at TKM Khodijah 124 and beyond.

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