

Nurturing the Whole Child: An Appreciative Inquiry into the Role of Parents and Stakeholders in Fostering Holistic Development among Elementary Learners

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ABSTRACT

Across educational contexts worldwide, there is a growing shift from purely academic outcomes toward whole-child education that integrates cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and moral development. This paradigm recognizes that learners thrive when schools work in close partnership with families and community stakeholders. Anchored in this

perspective, the present study explored how parents and stakeholders contribute to fostering holistic development among elementary learners in South Cotabato, particularly in Norala District. The study aimed to document and analyzed positive, high-leverage practices of parents and stakeholders using an appreciative inquiry approach. This qualitative design focused on identifying strengths, successful experiences, and enabling conditions that support learners' holistic growth. Data were gathered through interviews and focus group discussions and were analyzed using thematic analysis to surface recurring patterns, shared meanings, and core insights related to home-school-community collaboration. Findings revealed that parents and stakeholders possess a multidimensional understanding of holistic development, encompassing academic achievement, social-emotional competence, physical and emotional well-being, values formation, and community engagement. Participants emphasized that consistent parental involvement, emotional guidance, and strong partnerships between schools and communities create supportive and motivating learning environments. Effective communication, shared responsibility, and continuity of programs were identified as critical enablers of learner success. Moreover, sustained academic support, health and nutrition initiatives, and co-curricular activities such as sports and values-oriented programs were viewed as essential in nurturing well-rounded learners. The study concluded that holistic child development is a shared responsibility that extends beyond the classroom. When parents and stakeholders are recognized as active partners rather than peripheral supporters, schools become inclusive and nurturing spaces that promote balanced growth. Strengthening parental capacities, fostering open communication, and sustaining collaborative practices are vital to ensuring learners' academic success and overall well-being. These findings underscore the importance of relationship-centered and strengths-based approaches in advancing holistic education.

Keywords: holistic development, parental involvement, community partnership, appreciative inquiry

I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Around the world, education systems are shifting from narrow academic metrics to whole-child approaches that integrate learners' cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and ethical development, with schools explicitly partnering with families and communities to sustain learner well-being and success. While evidence links parent involvement to better achievement and broader developmental outcomes, much is measured through deficit-oriented lenses or focused on narrow academic proxies.

In an international setting, whole-child frameworks (e.g., Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model) and Sustainable Development Goals 4 guidance, argue that children thrive when schools, families, and communities coordinate supports so learners are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. Meta-analyses also show positive associations between parental involvement and learner outcomes beyond grades (e.g., adjustment, creativity), underscoring holistic gains (EJ ERIC meta-analysis, 2021; Liu et al., 2024). However, cross-national evidence often privileges academic performance metrics and under-documents strength-based narratives of how parents and wider stakeholders co-create conditions for whole-child flourishing in diverse localities.

In the Philippines, national initiatives (e.g., Brigada Eskwela) institutionalize partnerships with parents, LGUs, NGOs, and private entities to improve learning environments; recent implementing guidelines continue to foreground multi-stakeholder collaboration (DepEd DO 009, s.2024; DepEd DM 033, s.2024). Emerging Philippine studies report positive links between parental engagement and literacy/reading growth in elementary grades and describe culturally shaped forms of involvement in Filipino homes (DLSU Research Congress, 2024; ScienceDirect study on Filipino parents, 2020). However, most studies emphasize participation rates or facilities improvement and

less often capture strength-based stories of how parents and stakeholders nurture holistic, not only academic development using appreciative lenses.

In Region XII, Regional development plans highlight stakeholder participation and education as human-capital priorities across provinces (PSA-RSDP 2023–2029) and DepEd Region XII communications promote decentralized, partnership-driven quality assurance in schools (DepEd RO XII). However, region-level documents stress partnership mechanisms but provide limited qualitative, learner-centered evidence of how parent and community assets concretely support elementary learners' whole-child outcomes.

In South Cotabato, division-level partnership reports and school-level documentation, e.g., program accomplishment reports, partnership activities, indicate active engagement of PTAs, SGOD units, LGUs, and local organizations in supporting schools (sample divisional/school reports, 2021–2022). However, local records typically catalog inputs (donations, activities) rather than synthesize narratives of effective practices and conditions enabling holistic development (social-emotional skills, health, safety, engagement) among elementary learners. This creates a need for place-based appreciative accounts from parents and stakeholders that surface what is working well and why in South Cotabato schools.

The study aligns primarily with SDG 4 (Quality Education)—targets on inclusive, equitable, and effective learning and education for sustainable development—and secondarily with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) through attention to student wellness, and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) via school–family–community collaboration. (SDG.org, unesco.org)

Guided by Appreciative Inquiry, this study aimed to document and analyze the positive, high-leverage ways parents and stakeholders in South Cotabato, particularly in Norala District, contributed to holistic development (academic, social-emotional, health/safety, engagement) among elementary learners, generating actionable, strengths-based insights for school and division partnership

strategies.

Statement of the Problem

This research analyzed the positive, high-leverage ways parents and stakeholders in South Cotabato, particularly in Norala District, contributed to holistic development among elementary learners, generating actionable, strengths-based insights for school and division partnership strategies.

Specifically, the research problem revolved around understanding the following key questions:

1. What is the shared understanding of “holistic development” among parents and stakeholders of elementary learners?
2. What positive experiences and successful practices do parents and stakeholders share in supporting the holistic development of elementary learners?
3. What shared visions do parents and stakeholders have for enhancing the holistic development of elementary learners in the future?
4. What strategies and collaborative approaches can be developed to strengthen the role of parents and stakeholders in nurturing the whole child?
5. How can parents, stakeholders, and schools sustain and build upon current strengths to continuously promote the holistic development of elementary learners?

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, qualitative research, specifically appreciative inquiry, was employed to document and analyze the positive, high-leverage ways parents and stakeholders in South Cotabato, particularly in Norala District contributed to the holistic development of elementary learners, generating actionable, strengths-based insights for school and division partnership strategies. By centering on strengths, successes, and shared visions, AI aligns with

strengths-based qualitative paradigms that move beyond deficit-oriented frameworks and foreground aspirational dialogue (Bushe, 2013; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Applied to educational contexts, AI has demonstrated its capacity to surface meaningful stories, foster participant engagement, and yield actionable insights through collective reflection and generative questioning (Griggs & Crain-Dorough, 2021).

Participants of the Study

The involved a total of fifteen (15) Participants: 10 parents and 5 stakeholders in DepEd Norala District, South Cotabato Division, who met the researcher's specified inclusion criteria:

Inclusion Criteria for Parent Participants (10)

- (1) *Must be a parent or legal guardian of an elementary learner currently enrolled in a public school within Norala District, South Cotabato, during School Year 2025–2026.*
- (2) *Must have been actively involved in at least one school-related activity (e.g., meetings, programs, or parent-teacher initiatives) within the past school year.*
- (3) *Willing to share personal experiences, insights, and contributions related to their child's holistic development.*
- (4) *Able to provide informed consent and commit to participating in interviews or focus group discussions.*

Inclusion Criteria for Stakeholder Participants (5);

- (1) *Must be an individual or representative of an organization (e.g., teacher, community leader, NGO worker, or LGU official) directly engaged in supporting elementary learners in Norala District.*
- (2) *Must have at least one year of active involvement in school-community partnerships or child development programs.*
- (3) *Willing to articulate their perspectives and roles in fostering holistic development among learners.*

(4) *Able to provide informed consent and commit to interviews or discussions as required by the study.*

Sampling Technique

During the conduct of this study, a Purposive Sampling Technique was intentionally utilized to carefully select fifteen (15) participants: 10 Parents; 5 Stakeholders in DepEd Norala District, South Cotabato Division, who will 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 to effectively pinpoint and contact eligible participants through online survey platforms. Researchers resort to purposive sampling 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.

Data Gathering Instrument

In this study, a semi-structured interview functioned as an exploratory instrument during both in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to document and analyze the positive, high-leverage ways parents and stakeholders in South Cotabato, particularly in Norala District contribute to holistic development among elementary learners, generating actionable, strengths-based insights for school and division partnership strategies.

The validity and appropriateness of this tool 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 maintained strict adherence to a predefined set of procedures. The primary objective of this study is to document and analyze the positive, high-leverage ways parents and stakeholders in South Cotabato, particularly in Norala District contribute to holistic development among elementary learners, generating actionable, strengths-based insights for school- and division-level partnership strategies.

In the initial phase, the researcher diligently sought formal authorization from both the Superintendent of DepEd-South Cotabato 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 survey questionnaire was developed, subjected to rigorous evaluation, and then administered to the targeted participants.

The researcher employed a Purposive Sampling Technique to carefully select elementary school teachers as participants in this study. In strict adherence to the EWMCI-Research Ethics Committee guidelines, the researcher conducted interviews and facilitated Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), all of which were carried out 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 provided a deeper understanding of the issues under investigation and allowed for meaningful interpretation of participants' experiences.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study explored the role of parents

and stakeholders in fostering holistic development among elementary learners through an Appreciative Inquiry approach, highlighting their contributions to nurturing the whole child in terms of academic, social, emotional, and moral growth. The participants of the study were parents, teachers, school heads, and community stakeholders from selected elementary schools in Norala District, Division of South Cotabato, during the school year 2025–2026.

Conducted within the local school-community context, the research employed a qualitative design using Appreciative Inquiry to gather narratives, perceptions, and best practices that showcased positive experiences and collaborative efforts in supporting learners' holistic development. The study was undertaken to provide valuable insights into how synergistic partnerships between families and stakeholders contribute to the overall growth of children, serving as a basis for strengthening school-community programs and interventions that holistically address learners' needs.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results revealed that parents and stakeholders share a multidimensional understanding of holistic development, encompassing academic growth, social-emotional competence, physical and emotional well-being, community collaboration, and moral formation. Participants' experiences highlighted the interconnections of these domains and the importance of consistent support across home, school, and community contexts.

Recent literature affirms that holistic development is achieved through intentional practices, collaborative partnerships, and values-driven education.

Also, the findings demonstrated that holistic learner development is strengthened through active parental involvement, emotional guidance, strong home-school partnerships, and community collaboration. Parents' commitment to meeting basic needs and supporting learning, combined with effective communication and shared responsibility, fosters a nurturing and motivating environment for learners.

Overall, the findings revealed that parents and stakeholders envision education as a holistic, collaborative, and values-driven process. Their shared visions emphasize balanced learner development, safe and supportive environments, emotional empowerment, moral formation, enrichment opportunities, and strong school-parent partnerships. These perspectives are strongly supported by recent educational research, reinforcing their relevance and significance.

Consequently, the findings illustrated that nurturing the whole child requires a multidimensional and collaborative approach. Capacity building empowers parents, effective communication bridges home and school, parental involvement reinforces learning, community activities cultivate values, and a positive school climate sustains trust and cooperation.

Moreover, the findings indicated that sustainable holistic development of learners relies on three interrelated areas: (1) strong home-school-community collaboration, (2) continuous academic and health support, and (3) co-curricular programs that foster discipline, values, and physical and emotional well-being. Participants consistently highlighted the necessity of communication, stakeholder partnership, and program continuity, reflecting both the practical challenges and opportunities present in elementary education settings.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were made considering this study's findings:

In conclusion, holistic development among elementary learners is a collective endeavor that extends beyond classroom instruction. The shared understanding of parents and stakeholders underscores the need for balanced educational approaches that nurture the mind, heart, and character of the child. Strengthening family engagement, promoting social-emotional learning, ensuring holistic care, fostering community collaboration, and reinforcing values education are essential in sustaining learners' overall development. When

these elements are harmonized, schools become nurturing environments that prepare children not only for academic success but also for meaningful participation in society.

The positive practices shared by parents and stakeholders affirm that learner success extends beyond the classroom. Holistic development is sustained when families, schools, and communities work collaboratively to address academic, emotional, and social needs. Strengthening these partnerships ensures that elementary learners grow into confident, motivated, and well-rounded individuals.

The study underscored that holistic child development is best achieved when parents and stakeholders are not viewed as peripheral supporters but as active partners in education. By strengthening parental capacities, fostering open communication, encouraging meaningful involvement, and cultivating collaborative school cultures, schools can create inclusive environments where children academically, socially, and emotionally thrive. These insights reinforced the call for sustained, relationship-centered strategies that place collaboration at the heart of educational practice.

Finally, coordinated efforts among parents, stakeholders, and schools. Communication, shared responsibility, learner-centered programs, and co-curricular activities form the foundation for promoting comprehensive growth. By prioritizing these strategies, schools can ensure that learners not only achieve academic goals but also develop socially, emotionally, and physically.

The integration of collaborative approaches and continuous support mechanisms strengthens the capacity of communities to nurture well-rounded learners, ultimately fostering resilient and capable future citizens.

Recommendations

Considering the findings of the study, the following were recommended:

1. DepEd may strengthen Home–School–Community Collaboration by institutionalizing regular communication and partnership

programs between schools, parents, and community stakeholders to support learners' holistic development.

2. School Administrators may strengthen Co-Curricular and Health Programs – Continue and expand initiatives like feeding, reading, sports, and gardening programs to support students' academic, physical, and emotional well-being

3. Policy Makers may provide Policies and Resources for Balanced Education – Ensure funding and policy support for academic, social-emotional, physical, and moral development programs, particularly in under-resourced schools.

4. Future Researchers may study the Impact of Multidimensional Support – Investigate how integrated approaches involving parental involvement, community collaboration, and co-curricular activities affect holistic learner outcomes.

IV. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical Considerations

Before the conduct of the study, all research plans and procedures were presented to East-West Mindanao Colleges, Inc. to ensure full compliance with prescribed institutional protocols. Ethical considerations were emphasized throughout the research process.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement. Participants were fully informed of the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, and participation remained entirely voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Furthermore, participation will remain entirely voluntary, affording participants the autonomy to withdraw from the study at any juncture without encountering any adverse consequences.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms or codes were used in place of actual names, and all collected data were securely stored, accessible only to the research team. Sensitive topics were discussed with care to avoid emotional or psychological harm, and appropriate support mechanisms were made available when necessary.

The researcher maintained a professional and respectful relationship with all

participants, upheld data protection standards, remained vigilant against bias, and reported findings honestly and accurately. Cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and beneficence guided all stages of the research to ensure meaningful and ethical contributions to educational practice and policy.

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Declaration AI Tools Utilization

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

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