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# Overcoming educational inequity for the urban poor through community-based schools: a case study of gajahwong school in Yogyakarta

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# Overcoming educational inequity for the urban poor through community-based schools: a case study of gajahwong school in Yogyakarta

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## ABSTRACT

Education inequality in Indonesia, especially for the urban poor, remains a problem. The poor often do not have adequate access to quality education, which impacts on their opportunities to improve their lives. One approach that can address this issue is through community-based schools, which involve educators, volunteers with a keen interest in education, families and communities in the education process to create a more inclusive and contextualized learning environment. This research aims to explore and understand how Gajahwong School in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, a community-based school, seeks to address educational inequalities for children from poor urban communities. The main focus of this research is to examine the practices, principles and curriculum implemented in the school. This research used a qualitative case study approach to collect data on the implementation of community-based schooling at Gajahwong School. Data were collected through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with one community leader, two school administrators, two teachers and two classroom volunteers. Data collection was conducted for 12 months. The data analysis technique used is thematic analysis, while the research question studied is how the community-based school model at Gajahwong School facilitates children's rights to a good education in addressing educational inequality among children from the urban poor. Analysis also used N-Vivo to support qualitative data analysis.—The findings report on the practices, principles, and curriculum at Gajahwong School. Highlighting the urgency of inclusive and contextual education for children from poor urban communities, the school's dynamic, contextual, and progressive curriculum is prepared for and based on the context of urban poor communities and children's rights, and is designed to meet children's needs and developmental characteristics. Inclusive and child rights-based education forms the basis of the curriculum which is designed in a thematic way, providing space for each child to develop according to his or her potential.

## Keywords:

Community-based school  
Gajahwong school  
Educational inequality

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## Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in a country's social and economic development (Rinaldi, 2020). Despite progress in improving access to education, a UNESCO report (2024) notes that around 251 million children worldwide are still out of school. In Indonesia, although rural and urban preschool

4

10 enrollment rates are relatively unchanged, educational inequality persists, largely due to economic factors (Statistics Indonesia, 2024). Although educational inequity has shown a decline in Indonesia in recent years (Setyadi, 2022), there is still a high need to address disparities in Indonesian education considering the urgency to drive psychosocial welfare and economic growth via the education sector. In this context, community-based schools emerge as an alternative to addressing educational inequalities by providing more inclusive educational opportunities that are relevant to the needs of local communities. Today, many community schools operate on an all-day and year-round basis, allowing both children and adults access to education (Maier, Daniel, & Oakes, 2017). By aligning local needs and community resources, community-based schools can create a more inclusive environment for students from different social, economic and special needs backgrounds (Schuelka & Lapham, 2019).

6 Access to quality education is often hindered by economic limitations, especially for poor urban families, according to BPS, access to education is hindered due to economic inequality (Statistics Indonesia, 2024). Sekolah Gajahwong comes as a solution with a participatory and contextual approach, involving teachers, students, parents, volunteers and the community in creating inclusive and relevant education. This participation not only strengthens the sense of belonging but also makes the school more responsive to the specific needs of its students and community (Epstein et al., 2019). Community-based education is not only learning in the community but also learning with and from the community (Choulagai, 2019). Gajahwong School is located in Ledhok Timoho Community Village, which was originally inhabited by people with the majority of professions as beggars, buskers, and scavengers (Husna, 2018). The community's concern for the future of their children led to the establishment of a play and learning space, which over time developed into a community-based school. This school adopts principles and values based on local resources, such as using used items as teaching media, which are in accordance with the conditions of the surrounding community.

“ sekolah ini terbentuk dari keresahan masyarakat dengan nasib anak-anak mereka, .... Awalnya sekolah ini itu sanggar, siapa saja boleh mengajar, waktu itu koordinatonya Faiz baru mulai berbentuk seperti sekolah regular karena pengalamannya dulu, .... Barang bekas sebagai media belajar karena dulu sumber daya yang berlimpah sampah dan ternyata sampai hari ini masih relevan” -M

This approach is not only relevant to limited resources, but also supports sustainability. Community-based schools, such as Sekolah Gajahwong, offer flexible and affordable solutions for marginalized groups by making the most of local resources (Purnomo & Solikhah, 2020). This education model connects learning with real life, making education more contextual and inclusive according to the needs of the community (Cole, 2010). However, its implementation and impact on the fulfillment of the educational rights of children from urban poor families still need to be explored further. As a student city, as many as 1.22% of children in Yogyakarta in 2023 do not have an identity (Statistics Indonesia, 2023). Birth certificates and other forms of identity are one of the requirements for children to access education (Yogyakarta City Education Office, 2023). The absence of birth certificates can hinder children's access to education. Gajahwong School itself facilitates children who do not have identity to get a good education. In addition, it also helps advocate for children who do not have an identity so that they can have an identity so that they can continue their education through collaboration with various parties.

“ sekolah ini gratis, syarat masuk sekolah orang tua mau berpartisipasi aktif seperti membuat bekal sehat minim sampah, piket membersihkan kelas, dan hadir dalam pertemuan orang tua.... Syarat administrasi tidak ada, identitas digunakan untuk pendataan dan kalau nanti memungkinkan untuk dibantu, sekolah akan membantu” . -M

Understanding the principles of community-based schools is essential for addressing educational inequity in developing nations such as Indonesia, as these schools offer a promising approach to providing equitable access to education in underserved communities (Cole, 2010). Yogyakarta is

4 known as the “ City of Students” with a variety of educational communities that play a role in the development of children and society (Purwanta, 2015). However, most of these communities operate sporadically, with activities limited to certain times, such as once or twice a week. To address this, Kemendikbudristek (2024) calls on education communities to collaborate to create more inclusive educational spaces. This article aims to explore and analyze how Sekolah Gajahwong in Yogyakarta, as a community-based school, plays a role in creating inclusive spaces and addressing educational inequalities among children from the urban poor.

When public or local schools are less accessible to certain subgroups of the population (e.g. poverty subgroups, disabled persons, remote islanders), improving education equity will rely on local communities and the common sense solution would be a community based education (Melaville, Berg, & Blank, 2006). Community-based schooling is a model of education that involves the active participation of local communities in the organization, management and development of learning activities. It aims to empower communities through critical awareness of social realities and experiential learning relevant to everyday life (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970). In practice, community-based schools work by building collaborative relationships between schools, families and communities, where the social environment plays an important role in supporting educational success (Coleman, 1988). In addition, this model enables informal learning by utilizing local resources that are not tied to the formal system (Illich, 1971). Small community-based schools also create more personalized relationships between students and educators, while making education a tool for social transformation and achieving community aspirations (Meier, 1995; Giroux, 1983; Appadurai, 2004). Thus, community-based schools are not only places of learning, but also centers of community development, where local needs, culture and aspirations are at the core of the curriculum and educational activities.

2 Community schools are expected to address opportunity gaps by integrating community members into the classroom, creating learning spaces outside the classroom, and aligning school and community resources (Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016; Sanders, 2018). This may help enrich the classroom experience, make the curriculum relevant to students' lives, and support students and communities in areas outside of school. Additionally, collaborative professional learning environments can support teachers in improving their practice and maintaining their positions (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016).

2 In order for teachers to support students in historically underserved communities, they must understand the community's cultural background, political economy, and bureaucratic structure of the school, as well as the network of community support and social services available (Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002). Although there is an increasing amount of research on community schools, there is not enough research on teaching and learning in community schools (Daniel, Quartz, & Oakes, 2019). This study aims to explore and analyzes how Sekolah Gajahwong in Yogyakarta, as a community-based school, plays a role in addressing educational inequality among children from poor urban communities. By identifying the school's current practices, this study will generate more focused research questions that can be addressed through a more robust research design with new measures for a key phenomena, i.e. an educational program that caters to underprivileged or marginalized groups via communicable collaboration.

3 From a critical education perspective, the educational curriculum is often seen as a tool to indoctrinate the power system. Schools are perceived as bureaucratic instruments that reinforce the government's power structure. The government directs education through various regulations, directives, and instructions to achieve specific patterns (Sihono, 2011). In response to this perspective, the concept of democratization in education has emerged as a solution. The democratization of education refers to providing education that originates from, is conducted by, and is intended for the community without government intervention. Within the critical paradigm, Ivan Illich's idea of a deschooling society in the 1970s is particularly relevant. According to Illich, society needs to free education from the dominance of formal schooling. Therefore, it is necessary to reform

classroom governance in the school system, promote free learning in communities, and transform society into a large classroom (Illich, 2000).

8 Communities need to independently develop education that is more democratic, planned, and implemented according to the needs of learners to ensure truly beneficial outcomes. The democratization of education can be realized through the application of the concept of community-based education (CBE) in the implementation of national education (Suharto, 2013). CBE enables communities to participate in designing learning spaces, carrying out educational actions, and reflecting on the learning process in line with their character and needs (Sujarwo, 2017). Additionally, CBE allows for educational models tailored to the community's needs.

3 Community-based education is considered a responsible approach to planning education, with the community acting as facilitators in the learning process. This process includes fostering community awareness to develop, manage, and utilize their potential to improve their quality of life (Fitriana & Elshap, 2015). In this context, society functions as both the agent and the goal of education. CBE also aligns with the concept of lifelong education, where learning extends beyond formal schooling. This model is not intended to replace formal schools but to complement them in preparing students to adapt to social changes and progress toward a civil society (Sulfan & Mahmud, 2018).

3 CBE is often associated with adult education to develop competencies, attitudes, and skills, ultimately enabling individuals to take control of various aspects within their local communities (Galbraith, 1995). CBE possesses dimensions that are more humane, democratic, and practical, as it is designed for communities as educational participants. Over time, CBE has evolved beyond a purely critical pedagogical paradigm to incorporate functional approaches within historical and sociological perspectives. The historical perspective views CBE as an extension of school-based education, while the sociological perspective regards it as an educational process to develop community potential and participation. This concept is particularly suitable for development in Indonesia, where the existence of CBE is legally recognized through the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, Article 55.

## Metode

The method of this study was a qualitative case-study at Gajahwong School in Yogyakarta, a community-based school located in an illegal settlement near a river bank. The case study method was chosen because of the contextual characteristics of this school that must be understood in depth before applying more advanced evaluative methodologies, as described by Yin (2009). Case studies allow researchers to investigate phenomena in natural context and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics that occur within the Gajahwong school environment and Kampung Ledhok Timoho. Gajahwong School is a school that provides inclusive education to children in underserved neighborhoods, so it is very relevant for further research. The research data was collected during the period June 2023 to June 2024 through several methods, including participatory field observation, in-depth interviews and documentation. In the observation, the researcher was actively involved in classroom activities for the first six months, then moved on to engage in various community activities involving the school, such as community meetings, fundraising bazaars, and collaboration with school administrators and volunteers in the following six months.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a sample selection technique that focuses on individuals who have certain criteria relevant to the research objectives. Palinkas et al. (2015) explain that purposive sampling is used in qualitative research to select participants who have in-depth knowledge and experience of the phenomenon being studied. In this study, the participants selected were individuals who had been involved in the school for more than one year to gain a more in-depth perspective on the school and its impact on the community. Interviews were conducted with one community leader, two school administrators, two teachers, and two classroom volunteers, and parents all of whom had knowledge and experience related to school activities.

Data analysis was conducted by source triangulation, combining information from multiple data sources to ensure validity and reliability of findings (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2013). Merriam (2009) also emphasizes the importance of triangulation in qualitative research to overcome bias and increase the credibility of findings. The results of this study are expected to provide a clearer picture of the classroom structure, programs, practices and teaching methods implemented at Gajahwong school and how they influence the development of education in the community. As a research based on case study theory, it will also provide important insights for the development of other community-based schools with similar characteristics. Furthermore, the verbatim data obtained was also analysed using the N-VIVO application.

## Results and Discussion

### Results of Verbatim Analysis with N-VIVO

The table 1 summarizes the themes identified from the verbatim data provided. Each theme is categorized and accompanied by a brief description. The themes highlight various aspects of school activities, decision-making processes, parental involvement, collaboration, and the school's approach to inclusive education and resource management. This summary provides an overview of the key elements observed in the school's practices and interactions with children, parents, and external stakeholders.

Table 1. Theme from verbatim data

| Theme   | Description  |
|---|--|
| <b>Collaboration in decision-making</b>       |  |
| Subtheme:                                     | Joint Decision-Making and Collaboration  |
| Parent activities can be adjusted             | Activities involving parents, such as determining trips, are adjusted based on class or specific themes.                                 |
| Decisions discussed together                  | Decisions, such as project themes and trips, are discussed collectively with children, parents, and facilitators.                        |
| Decisions based on deliberation and consensus | Projects are chosen based on deliberation and consensus with children, according to their developmental stages.                          |
| Decisions not based on one person             | Decisions are made collectively by multiple parties, not just one person.  |
| Collaboration in small teams                  | Small teams collaborate due to limited manpower and time constraints.  |
| <b>Inclusive education for all children</b>   |  |
| Subtheme:                                     | Educational and learning activities  |
| Interactive storytelling education            | Interactive storytelling is used in collaborative activities with external parties, such as World Water Day celebrations.                |
| Sexual education                              | Children receive sexual education according to their developmental stages.   |
| Exploring the neighborhood                    | Children explore their surroundings to learn about the community, neighbors, and physical environment, such as rivers and urban forests. |
| Emphasizing social and                        | The school emphasizes social and emotional aspects of child development.   |

| Theme   | Description   |
|---|---|
| emotional aspects                               |   |
| Subtheme: Inclusion and special needs           |   |
| Facilities not sufficient for visually impaired | Visually impaired children cannot be admitted due to lack of facilities, such as books with special scripts.                          |
| Accepting children with special needs           | The school accepts children with special needs with certain adjustments.  |
| Subtheme: External collaboration                |   |
| Collaboration with external parties             | Collaboration with external parties is conducted on issues like period poverty or educational activities during special celebrations. |
| Trips for special days                          | Trips are organized to commemorate special days, such as Waisak celebrations or themes like strawberries or flowers.                  |
| Fundraising division                            | The school has a fundraising division to support operational needs.   |
| Facilitating children assists teachers          | The child facilitation division assists teachers in classrooms.   |
| School has divisions                            | The school has several divisions, such as fundraising, public relations, child facilitation, and media information.                   |
| Small team multitasking                         | Small teams multitask to meet the school' s needs.  |
| <b>Parents' role in school activities</b>       |   |
| Subtheme: Community involvement                 |   |
| Parents with specific skills (e.g., cooking)    | Parents with skills, such as cooking, often participate in school activities.   |
| Parents' role                                   |   |
| Children become better                          | Children become more responsive and interactive after participating in school activities.   |
| Parenting challenges                            | Parenting challenges are discussed in parent meetings to support child development.   |
| Bi-weekly parent meetings                       | Bi-weekly meetings are held to discuss child development and parenting challenges.  |

The table 1. provides a detailed breakdown of themes derived from the verbatim data, offering insights into key aspects of the school' s collaborative and inclusive practices. Complementing this analysis, Picture 1: Mindmapping of verbatim themes visually organizes these themes, illustrating the interconnected relationships between various elements such as decision-making, parental involvement, and educational activities. The mind map serves as a conceptual framework that highlights the central ideas and their subcategories, presenting a holistic view of the school' s operational and educational strategies. This visualization further enriches the understanding of the themes and their dynamics within the school context.



### *Community-based Education Model*

Sekolah Gajahwong in Yogyakarta adopts a community-based education model designed to address educational injustice for the urban poor. Community-based education, as defined by Illich (1971), criticizes formal education that limits individual creativity and freedom. As an alternative, flexible and community-based informal education is proposed, where learning occurs through everyday experiences and social interactions, emphasizing the importance of learning networks without institutional boundaries. Freire (1970) introduced the concept of liberation education that opposed the traditional education model by proposing dialogical education. This model encourages active and critical participation of learners through dialog and reflection, and engages critical consciousness to understand and change social reality.

“ ...di sini, siapa saja boleh terlibat, keputusan tidak hanya diambil berdasarkan satu keputusan, saya contohnya sebagai koordinator itu tugasnya memfasilitasi semua pihak. Di kelas teman-teman juga berperan aktif, contoh pada saat pemilihan proyek dengan tema danau, keputusan memilih proyek tetap didasari oleh musyawarah-mufakat, kalau teman-teman di kelas akar umumnya dengan usulan dan voting sesuai dengan tahap perkembangan anak, perihal aktivitas dengan orang tua juga sama, semisal mau menentukan trip, mau kemana juga bisa disesuaikan semisal trip tema stroberi di kelas rumput dan kuda di kelas akar gimana yah bisa difasilitasi keduanya ohh tripnya ke kendang kuda dan bawa bekal dengan bahan dasar stroberi atau berbentuk stroberi. Terus pernah juga kelas akar tema bunga dan kelas rumput tema kereta, kami ke Solo naik kereta terus bawa bekal dengan bahan edible flower. Keputusan itu lagi-lagi kami diskusikan bersama baik dengan anak-anak, orang tua dan teman besar lainnya -C ...”

At Sekolah Gajahwong, the curriculum is designed based on the needs and characteristics of the local community, most of whom have backgrounds as beggars, scavengers and buskers. The 3R principle (reduce, reuse, recycle) is applied in the use of used materials as learning media, reflecting a creative approach that is environmentally friendly and appropriate to the context of the surrounding community (Husna, 2018). Sekolah Gajahwong's curriculum is designed to build students' courage to recognize their potential and contribute to society, in accordance with the principle that education should not only focus on academics, but also on developing children's character (Karolin et al., 2019).

“ ...kalau di sini, lebih menekankan pada sosial dan emosi” -I

The importance of education that is not only carried out in the classroom, but also outside the classroom involving extensive community interaction (Comenius & Kearinge, 1967). Dewey (1938) emphasized that effective education should involve practical experiences relevant to everyday life, leading to the development of skills and a deeper understanding of the world around us.

“ Anak-anak itu sering juga belajar ke luar khususnya pada saat aktivitas lingkungan selain belajar lingkungan sosial seperti mempelajari anggota keluarga, masyarakat, tetangga tetapi lingkungan fisik seperti yang paling dekat bagian tubuh mereka masing-masing, ada edukasi seksual juga di situ, kemudian keliling kampung memberikan pemahaman kalau mereka tinggal di sekitar sungai dan hutan kota, jadi ketika ada anak-anak yang cerita tentang rumahnya kedatangan biawak atau ular atau hewan lain, kita sebagai fasilitator juga bisa mengedukasi bahwa itu lumrah terjadi sebab habitatnya memang mereka berdampingan, termasuk memberi tahu hal apa yang perlu dilakukan saat berhadapan dengan hewan-hewan tersebut” -M

“ ....waktu webbing awal, sering keluar jalan-jalan sekitar kampung cari tema, waktu trip sesuai teman, terus waktu special day, perayaan hari-hari besar. Pernah ke Wihara waktu itu perayaan hari waisak terus belajar bersama dengan TK lain yang kebanyakan anak-anaknya beragama Buddha...” -K

The school, located in the middle of the Ledhok Timoho community village, selectively chooses partners who share the same vision or who can meet the specific needs of the local community in every collaboration opportunity.

“...kalau sekarang kolaborasi juga mulai dipilih karena tim kami kecil dan tenaga, dan waktu juga terbatas, jadi yang punya kesamaan nilai, visi, misi.... seperti kemarin, sama teman-teman yang fokus pada isu period poverty, dan memang sarannya adalah perempuan, baik ibu-ibu atau remaja dan kita tinggal berdampingan dengan sungai. Jadi bikin workshop bikin pembalut kain.”  
-C

The community-based education model provides access to inclusive education that is relevant to local needs and encourages active community participation in learning. Collaboration between schools, families and communities is key to addressing education challenges in marginalized areas, creating more equitable spaces and building collective awareness of the importance of education in the future.

### *Influence on access to education*

Sekolah Gajahwong embraces the value of inclusivity that ensures access to quality education for all students, whether they have physical or mental needs, not only related to economic aspects, but also social issues and quality of education. The requirement to enter the school is not administration or fees, but the willingness of parents to facilitate their children's rights. Parents' involvement in activities such as cleaning the classroom, attending meetings and providing healthy provisions creates participatory learning. This approach reflects the principle of inclusive education which seeks to provide equal learning opportunities for all children (Ainscow, 2005; Slee, 2011).

“... ya, di sini menerima anak berkebutuhan khusus baik itu fisik maupun mental, tetapi tetap disesuaikan dengan teman-teman besarnya sebagai fasilitator di kelas. Khususnya kebutuhan fisik karena fasilitasnya belum mempunyai, jadi pernah ada anak yang tuna netra daftar tetapi kami belum punya fasilitas yang akan membantu seperti buku dengan huruf khusus jadi kami hanya membantu mencarikan sekolah yang bisa memfasilitasi kebutuhannya.” -C



**Figure 3.** School archives, parent meeting activities at the beginning of the new school year 2024/2025

“...di sekolah ini ada pertemuan orang tua setiap dua minggu sekali, untuk memonitoring tumbuh-kembang anak, masalah anak di rumah, bagaimana interaksinya, permasalahan orang tua dalam pengasuhan, aktivitas di sekolah, dan kebutuhan pengetahuan orang tua untuk memfasilitasi tumbuh-kembang anak.” -M

At the meeting at the beginning of the new school year, matters discussed relate to the values and mission carried out to ensure parents have an understanding and goals that are in line with the school. Meanwhile, regular parent meetings every two weeks provide a means for the school to monitor children's development on an ongoing basis, by involving parents in fortnightly evaluations and discussions. This model of parental involvement supports more holistic learning, where families and schools work together to support children's social, emotional and academic development (Epstein, 2001). Parental involvement has also been shown to improve the quality of education and student learning outcomes, as described in research by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), which emphasizes the important role of parents in creating a supportive learning environment at home and at school.

" ...sangat terbantu, anak saya dulunya sangat pendiam. kalau dipanggil sama orang asing itu seringkali tidak menjawab, setelah sekolah, sudah jauh lebih baik interaksinya. Kalau dipanggil orang tu, Waaa Waa. sudah mau nyaut dan ngajak ngobrol. Belum lagi sekolahnya gratis jadi sangat terbantu dengan biaya hidup yang lumayan banyak" -M

The main principle of Sekolah Gajahwong is to create a shared learning space, where every individual acts as a teacher, the environment becomes a school, and experience becomes knowledge. This approach opens access to education that is inclusive and relevant to local needs, by involving students, parents and communities in the learning process. This is in line with the concept of community-based education which emphasizes family and community involvement to support children's development (Maier et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2019). Sekolah Gajahwong proves that participatory education can address educational inequalities for children from poor urban families.

### *The role of community participation*

Sekolah Gajahwong in Yogyakarta operates by involving various parties in an inclusive education ecosystem. Community participation is one of the main elements that form the basis of the school's operations and sustainability. Various individuals and groups play an active role in running the management and learning activities, ranging from administrators, teachers, volunteers, to parents and external collaborators. School administrators have a huge responsibility in running the school management, including managing documents, administration, finances and establishing external relations. Although the number of administrators is limited, they perform a variety of roles, often serving as both administrators and teachers. This reflects the flexibility and high sense of ownership of the community-based school. On the other hand, teachers focus on children's learning and play activities, from planning lessons, creating teaching media, to evaluating children's development. The role of teachers at Sekolah Gajahwong is crucial in creating a learning environment that is fun and relevant to students' daily lives.

" timnya kecil jadi untuk saat itu satu orang bisa melakukan beberapa pekerjaan" -M

Sekolah Gajahwong also involves volunteers in various fields. There are four types of volunteers involved: child facilitation, media and information, public relations, and business funds. These volunteers serve to support school activities and support children's rights to a good education. However, one of the biggest challenges is the issue of volunteer loyalty, as many come just to learn or have some free time. This points to the importance of building long-term commitment in volunteer management, which is often difficult to maintain in the context of community-based education (Piatak & Sowa, 2024).

" .. sekarang itu, sekolah punya beberapa divisi yang muara tujuannya untuk fasilitasi hak-hak anak tadi. Ada fasilitasi anak itu membantu pengajar di kelas, terus ada media dan informasi untuk membagikan aktivitas sekolah sekarang lagi apa ke masyarakat yang lebih luas, ada dana usaha itu divisi yang membantu mencari dana buat oprasional sekolah terakhir ada humas yang fungsinya untuk menjalin relasi dengan pihak-pihak eksternal" -M

Parents are not only involved in routine activities, such as helping children with school activities, but also in more strategic roles, such as filling the school agenda according to their expertise. Parents'

involvement in their children's education can improve the quality of learning and strengthen the relationship between home and school (Epstein, 2001). At Sekolah Gajahwong, collaboration between parents and teachers results in a more supportive environment for children's social and academic development.

" ...ada ibunya A yang sering terlibat kan beliau punya kemampuan dimasak-memasak" -RB

" Papa M juga cukup sigap kalau ada hal-hal yang berkaitan dengan masalah di sekolah, seperti lampu kamar mandi mati" -I

In addition, external collaborators play a significant role in supporting school activities. Collaborators can come from individuals, communities or other institutions that share the same vision as the school. For example, during the World Water Day celebration, collaborators who share the same vision with Sekolah Gajahwong on waste reduction contributed by educating the children about the river through interactive stories. This collaboration not only enriches the children's learning experience, but also allows the school to access additional resources that are not available internally (Bryk, Sebring, & Allensworth, 2010). Schools also welcome collaborations from university students, who are often involved in practicum or research activities, providing hands-on experience for them, while enriching activities in the school. This collaboration is beneficial for both parties, giving students the opportunity to learn and contribute to community-based education.

" ...untuk aktivitas sekolah itu juga sering berkolaborasi, seperti perayaan special day pas hari air sedunia, sama teman-teman A\*\* mereka mengisi kelas dengan edukasi menggunakan cerita interaktif terus juga sering ada mahasiswa yang berkolaborasi." -H

While Sekolah Gajahwong has succeeded in creating an inclusive and participatory learning environment, the community-based education model also faces challenges in terms of more structured management. Collective and voluntary-based management often results in a lack of consistency and sustainability. According to Maier et al. (2017), although school communities can produce sustainable programs, challenges in managing human and financial resources remain. Therefore, it is important for community-based schools to develop strategies that can ensure operational continuity, especially in terms of volunteer management and funding.

Community participation at Sekolah Gajahwong proves that the active involvement of various parties - administrators, teachers, parents, volunteers and external collaborators - can create a learning space that is inclusive and relevant to local needs. Although challenges in management and sustainability remain, this community-based education model has succeeded in creating more equitable education, reducing gaps in access to education and strengthening social relations within the community. Sekolah Gajahwong can serve as an example for other schools that want to adopt a community-based approach to address educational inequality among children from poor urban families.

### *School resilience and self-reliance*

School resilience and independence are two important aspects in ensuring the sustainability and quality of education, especially in community-based schools like Sekolah Gajahwong. School resilience refers to a school's ability to survive and adapt to external and internal challenges, including changes in education policy, resource shortages and financial uncertainty. Meanwhile, school independence refers to the extent to which a school can manage and develop itself without relying entirely on external assistance from the government, donors or other institutions.

Community-based schools often face significant challenges, both in terms of human and financial resources. Sekolah Gajahwong, for example, faces limited funding as there is no direct support from the government and relies more on community resources. However, with a management system based on community participation and empowerment, the school was able to overcome these challenges. Programs such as bazaars and rummage sales to support school funding as well as volunteer activities involving parents and the community, give the school a good resilience to continue to grow despite limited funding. In addition, collaboration with various parties such as

external collaborators and students, also strengthens the school's resilience in carrying out educational activities.

School independence is closely related to the school's ability to manage existing resources and create sustainable programs without relying on uncertain external funding. The school developed a funding model that focuses on community economic empowerment, such as through the sale of merchandise made by students and bazaars that involve the active participation of parents and the community such as processed products owned by parents. With this strategy, the school not only supports operational sustainability but also teaches children and parents the importance of self-reliance and utilization of local resources to support education. According to [Maier et al. \(2017\)](#), community-based schools that have independence in resource management tend to be more effective in creating more inclusive and sustainable learning opportunities. This independence also strengthens a sense of belonging and responsibility towards the school, which in turn promotes improved education quality. Independence in management also allows schools to adapt to changing local needs and dynamics, making them more flexible in the face of challenges.

To build resilience and sustainable independence, Gajahwong School needs to continue developing programs that encourage community participation and strengthen parental involvement in school management. There is a need to revamp the school's organizational structure to enable a more effective distribution of tasks and responsibilities among administrators, teachers and volunteers. [Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey \(2018\)](#) suggest that schools that want to be independent should be able to build competent human resources, strengthen local capacity and involve all parties in decision-making. This is in line with the goal of Gajahwong School which encourages participatory learning, not only in teaching but also in management and decision-making related to the sustainability of education in the school. The resilience and independence of Sekolah Gajahwong are two key pillars that enable the school to continue operating despite limited resources. Through community empowerment, external collaboration, and programs involving parents and volunteers, the school is able to create a sustainable and inclusive education model. Independence in resource management and resilience in facing external challenges are the key success factors of Gajahwong School in providing access to quality education for children from urban poor families.

## Conclusions

Sekolah Gajahwong in Yogyakarta exemplifies a community-based education model that addresses educational inequality for urban poor families. By emphasizing inclusivity, participation, and relevance to local needs, the school fosters a holistic learning environment that integrates students, parents, teachers, and external collaborators into its ecosystem. Drawing inspiration from liberation and dialogical education concepts ([Freire, 1970](#)) and experiential learning models ([Dewey, 1938](#)), the school prioritizes social-emotional development alongside academics, tailoring its curriculum to the community's unique characteristics. The school's inclusive approach ensures access to education for all children, transcending economic and social barriers. Active parental involvement, regular meetings, and collaborative decision-making strengthen the connection between home and school, creating a supportive learning environment. Additionally, the school's creative use of resources, such as recycling materials for learning tools, reflects a commitment to sustainability and local relevance.

Sekolah Gajahwong's resilience and independence stem from its reliance on community participation and innovative strategies like bazaars and collaborations. These efforts not only sustain operations but also instill values of self-reliance and collective responsibility in students and parents. Despite challenges in volunteer management and limited resources, the school demonstrates that inclusive, community-driven education can effectively reduce educational disparities and empower marginalized communities. This model serves as an inspiring example for addressing educational injustice, proving that participatory, locally-driven education can create equitable learning spaces while strengthening social bonds and fostering community development.

## Recommendation

More rigorous methodologies are recommended to assess the outcomes of educational systems such as Gajahwong School, and it can be started by conducting ongoing evaluations to measure the effectiveness of the school and make necessary adjustments. Lastly, government, local, or private stakeholders should advocate for policies and funding that support the expansion and sustainability of community-based schools in poor urban areas, with the core aim of increasing equitable and inclusive education opportunities for underprivileged children.

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