Learning Quality, School Leadership, and Parent Partnerships in Institutional Reputation and Public Trust: An Early Childhood Education Case Study

Arvinda Hanugraheningtias*, Ali Formen

Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia
*Corresponding author, email: vinda.hanung@gmail.com

https://doi.org/10.17977/um065.v7.i3.2027.14

Article history
Submitted: 24 August 2026
Revised: 22 September 2026
Accepted: 28 September 2026
Published: 30 September 2026

Keywords
Early childhood education
Institutional reputation
Parent partnership
Public trust
School leadership

Abstract
Institutional reputation and public trust are consequential for the sustainability of early childhood education (ECE) institutions, yet prior research has generally examined pedagogical quality, leadership, family engagement, trust, and digital communication as separate domains. This qualitative single-case study examined how learning quality, school leadership, parent partnerships, and digital communication were perceived and enacted in relation to institutional reputation and public trust in one ECE institution in Indonesia. Fifteen purposively selected participants one principal, five teachers, six parents, and three school-committee or community representatives contributed data through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Data were examined iteratively through condensation, display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Six themes were identified: learning quality as visible evidence of institutional competence; leadership as a source of credibility; parent partnerships as a relational basis for confidence; digital communication as both visibility and reputational exposure; reputational challenges requiring responsiveness; and integrated strategies for sustaining stakeholder confidence. Across the case, stakeholders interpreted reputation and trust through the perceived alignment of pedagogical quality, transparent leadership, reciprocal family engagement, responsive communication, and continuous improvement. The study therefore proposes a case-derived interpretive framework rather than a tested causal model. The relationships identified should be understood as context-bound, qualitative associations among institutional practices and stakeholder perceptions that require examination in multi-site and longitudinal research.

1. Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) is evaluated by families through both formal program characteristics and children's everyday educational experiences. Stakeholders associate ECE quality with trained teachers, effective pedagogy, family–community partnerships, and enabling institutional conditions (Davis et al., 2021), while parents value communication, play-based learning, accessibility, and understandable information about children's progress. These judgments have managerial relevance because parental confidence can influence continued participation, collaboration, and informal recommendations. In Indonesia, parents generally report trust in kindergarten teachers, although communication and participation require deliberate strengthening (Sipayung & Cheng, 2023); structured partnership, reflection, and sustained communication are also important for school–family collaboration (Safitri, 2023), and parental understandings of ECE quality vary across communities (Jeti & Manan, 2022). Accordingly, institutional reputation and public trust are treated here as stakeholder judgments grounded in recurring educational and relational experiences rather than as automatic consequences of enrollment.

School leadership provides an organizational context for those judgments by coordinating pedagogical quality, professional learning, accountability, communication, and responses to stakeholder concerns. Research on Indonesian school leadership emphasizes context-sensitive leadership development and organizational capacity (Lumban Gaol, 2023), while meta-analytic evidence identifies a substantial association between school leadership and teacher trust (Sun, Zhang, & Forsyth, 2023). Within ECE, pedagogical leadership includes guiding curriculum, supporting educators, and sustaining a shared professional orientation to quality (Fonsén et al., 2023). Related work in the target journal further emphasizes leadership that combines service, accountability, and continuous development (Safwandi, Komariah, Suryana, & Prihatin, 2026). These studies suggest that

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

families may encounter leadership indirectly through the consistency, transparency, educator quality, and improvement capacity of the institution.

Parent partnership is a complementary relational mechanism. In Indonesian kindergartens, trust and communication are closely connected to parent–teacher partnership (Sipayung & Cheng, 2023), while structured school–family–community collaboration benefits from explicit partnership arrangements and reflection (Safitri, 2023). International evidence similarly links communication quality with children's classroom engagement (Ochoa, Li, Kiyama, & McWayne, 2024), and program-level family-engagement practices indicate that communication can support attendance and participation, although effects vary across contexts (Pilarz, Lin, & Premo, 2024). For ECE institutions, therefore, parent involvement is relevant not only to children's learning but also to the opportunities families have to observe practice, discuss concerns, and form informed judgments about institutional responsiveness.

Digital communication extends these evaluative processes beyond face-to-face interaction. Digital platforms can broaden information exchange and parental involvement in family–school partnerships (Hsu & Chen, 2023), and mobile applications can support parent–teacher communication in preschool settings when adapted to local conditions (Chen & Lin, 2023). At the same time, social media increases the speed and visibility with which organizational information is circulated and reinterpreted (Wang, Cheng, & Sun, 2021). Digital communication therefore creates a dual condition for ECE institutions: it can make educational practice and responsiveness more visible, while also increasing exposure to complaints, misinformation, and inconsistencies.

Despite these contributions, the literature largely treats ECE quality, school leadership, family engagement, digital communication, institutional reputation, and trust as separate analytical domains. What remains insufficiently explained is how these domains are integrated in everyday organizational practice and how stakeholders interpret their alignment within a single ECE setting. This gap is particularly relevant because quality may provide evidence of competence, leadership may provide consistency and accountability, parent partnership may provide reciprocal access to institutional practice, and digital communication may increase both visibility and reputational exposure. Accordingly, this study asks: how are learning quality, school leadership, parent partnerships, and digital communication perceived and enacted in relation to institutional reputation and public trust in an ECE setting? The study aims to develop a contextually grounded, non-causal interpretation of these relationships and to identify implications for educational management, family engagement, and continuous institutional improvement.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design and Setting

The study used a qualitative single-case design to examine how reputation and trust were interpreted through routine organizational practices and stakeholder interactions. The case was a purposively selected ECE institution in Indonesia, referred to here as School A to protect institutional and participant confidentiality. The site was selected because the source study documented stable enrollment and positive community perceptions during the previous three years while the institution explicitly emphasized learning quality, leadership, and parent engagement. The case boundary comprised the institution and its immediate stakeholder relationships; the unit of inquiry was the set of practices through which stakeholders interpreted educational quality, credibility, communication, reputation, and trust. The case designation and reporting intentionally omit the institution's name and precise geographic location.

2.2. Participants and Data Collection

Fifteen participants were selected purposively because they occupied different positions in the institution's service and trust relationships: one principal (PR1), five teachers (T1–T5), six parents (P1–P6), and three school-committee or community representatives (CR1–CR3). The principal contributed an organizational and strategic perspective; teachers described pedagogical and family-facing practices; parents provided evaluations of learning quality, communication, and confidence; and community representatives offered perspectives beyond the classroom. This role diversity enabled comparison across stakeholder positions rather than reliance on a single institutional voice.

Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and explored learning quality, leadership, parent partnership, communication, and reputation-related experiences. Non-participant observations were conducted in seven sessions, each lasting approximately 30 minutes, yielding approximately 3.5 hours of observational data. Observations focused on classroom practices, leadership activities, parent-engagement programs, and stakeholder interactions. Document analysis comprised 15 institutional documents, including institutional reports, school policies, strategic plans, parent-communication records, social-media publications, and other materials relevant to reputation-building practices. The

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

researcher functioned as the primary instrument and used an interview guide, observation protocol, and document-review checklist to maintain procedural consistency while allowing emergent issues to be pursued.

2.3. Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Analysis followed an iterative process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, consistent with Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The primary researcher conducted the coding and theme development. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials were first read comparatively to identify recurrent meanings, contrasts, and discrepancies. Initial codes were grouped into categories and organized in thematic matrices that compared participant groups and data sources. Theme revision involved merging overlapping categories, clarifying conceptual boundaries, checking negative or discrepant evidence, and repeatedly returning to the original interview, observation, and documentary materials to verify that each theme remained grounded in the case data. The final structure comprised six themes: learning quality, school leadership, parent partnerships, digital reputation, reputational challenges, and integrated strategies for sustaining stakeholder confidence. Because coding was conducted by the primary researcher, no claim of inter-coder reliability is made; credibility instead rested on cross-source comparison, member checking, and an auditable record of analytic decisions. The analysis is interpretive and does not claim statistical generalizability or causal effects.

Trustworthiness was addressed through methodological and source triangulation, explicit comparison across stakeholder groups, member checking with selected participants, maintenance of an audit trail, and reflexive notes. Triangulation required theme-level claims to be checked against more than one source type where the available material permitted, while discrepancies were retained for interpretation rather than treated as errors to be removed. Transferability was supported through contextual description of the case and participants; dependability was strengthened by documenting coding and theme-revision decisions; and confirmability was supported by retaining links between claims, coded interview material, observation notes, and documentary evidence.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The analysis produced six interrelated themes. Across stakeholder groups, reputation was not described as an image-management activity detached from educational practice. Instead, it was inferred from visible learning quality, the credibility of leadership, the quality of school–family relationships, and the institution's responsiveness in both face-to-face and digital communication. Table 1 summarizes the cross-source structure.

Table 1. Cross-source Synthesis of Themes and Representative Evidence

Theme	Empirical pattern	Sources	Representative evidence
Learning quality	Child-centered activities, teacher professionalism, and observable developmental progress.	I/O/D	Parent interviews and classroom observations converged on children's engagement and developmental progress; learning activities were also documented institutionally.
School leadership	Transparent communication, teacher development, quality assurance, and consistent decision-making.	I/O/D	Parent and teacher interviews, observed meetings, and planning/quality-assurance documents converged on transparency and continuous improvement.
Parent partnerships	Participation in school programs, two-way communication, and joint responses to children's needs.	I/O/D	Parent and teacher accounts, observed engagement activities, and communication records indicated two-way interaction and joint responses to children's needs.
Digital reputation	Social-media visibility, messaging applications, rapid information sharing, and clarification.	I/O/D	Parent/principal accounts and official digital materials documented social-media visibility, routine messaging, and rapid clarification.
Reputational challenges	Rising expectations, comparison among schools, complaints, and rapidly circulating misinformation.	I/O/D	Interview accounts identified heterogeneous expectations and concern about rapidly circulating misunderstandings; these were treated as perceived risks rather than measured reputational effects.

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

Theme	Empirical pattern	Sources	Representative evidence
Integrated strategies	Alignment of quality, leadership, partnership, communication, evaluation, and feedback.	I/O/D	Interview accounts and institutional evaluation, feedback, teacher-development, and planning materials indicated efforts to align quality, communication, and stakeholder relationships.

3.1.1. Learning Quality as Visible Evidence of Institutional Competence

Learning quality was the most immediate basis on which parents said they judged the institution. Parent interviews emphasized engaging, child-centered activities and teacher practices that supported confidence, independence, communication, social interaction, creativity, and problem solving. Classroom observations provided convergent evidence: children participated actively, collaborated with peers, and demonstrated increasing independence during observed activities. These converging interview and observation materials were interpreted as evidence of how stakeholders perceived institutional competence, not as an objective measure of institutional reputation or public trust.

> "The teachers do not only teach children to read and write, but also help them become confident and independent." (P5)

Parents described improvements in children's communication, social skills, and confidence, while teachers reported that observable progress often prompted informal recommendations to other families. Regular communication about children's development linked classroom processes with parental interpretation by making pedagogical work more visible. The evidence therefore supports the more limited conclusion that stakeholders used observable pedagogical experiences and reported developmental change as cues when forming judgments about the institution; it does not establish reputation or trust as independently measured outcomes.

3.1.2. School Leadership as a Source of Credibility

Participants interpreted leadership as credibility-enhancing when institutional practices appeared predictable, transparent, and improvement oriented. Parent interviews emphasized regular explanations of programs, children's progress, and institutional matters, while teacher interviews emphasized openness in communication and the principal's support for professional learning. Document analysis identified annual development planning, teacher capacity-building activities, and quality-assurance practices, and observations recorded parent meetings and routine information sharing. The convergence of interview, observation, and documentary evidence supports an interpretation of leadership credibility while avoiding a causal claim that leadership produced public trust.

> "We understand that reputation is built through consistent quality, so improvement must be part of our daily practice." (PR1)

Stakeholders did not describe leadership credibility solely in terms of formal authority. They associated it with the principal's willingness to explain decisions, respond to concerns, support teachers, and maintain standards over time. Taken together, the evidence suggests that leadership was one organizational context through which participants interpreted consistency and accountability; it was not measured as an independent predictor of reputation or trust.

3.1.3. Parent Partnerships as a Relational Mechanism for Trust

Parent interviews and observed engagement activities indicated that families were treated as active participants rather than passive recipients of services. Parents joined educational programs, parenting activities, celebrations, and child-development activities, which gave them opportunities to observe school practices directly. Teacher and parent accounts also described frequent two-way communication regarding children's progress and concerns, while communication records documented routine information exchange. Across these sources, partnership reduced informational distance between home and school and provided recurring opportunities for parents to evaluate institutional responsiveness.

> "If there is a concern about my child, the school communicates with us immediately and works together to find solutions." (P5)

Participants described more regular parental participation as accompanying more open communication and stronger support for school initiatives. Several participants also connected positive experiences with informal recommendations within the community. These accounts are best interpreted as perceived relational mechanisms: participation created repeated occasions for dialogue, problem solving, and observation of school

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

practice, while advocacy appeared as a possible behavioral expression of favorable experience rather than as a direct measure of public trust.

3.1.4. Digital Communication as Visibility and Reputational Exposure

Digital platforms extended school–family interaction beyond the school site. Parent interviews indicated that social media contributed to initial impressions of the institution and provided visibility into learning activities, school programs, and children's participation. The principal similarly described social media as an information source for prospective parents, while document analysis confirmed the use of official communication channels and regular online updates. Messaging applications were used for routine questions, progress updates, and rapid clarification. The cross-source evidence therefore supports digital communication as an infrastructure of visibility and access rather than as proof of improved reputation.

> "Many prospective parents obtain information about our school through social media before they visit the institution." (PR1)

The same visibility was perceived as creating reputational vulnerability. Participants expressed concern that incomplete information, negative comments, or misunderstandings could circulate quickly before clarification, and institutional communication materials showed the importance of official channels for routine updates. This evidence indicates a perceived tension between greater visibility and greater exposure to rapidly circulating judgments; the study does not independently measure the magnitude or direction of digital reputational effects.

3.1.5. Reputational Challenges and the Need for Continuous Responsiveness

Across interviews, participants described rising parental expectations regarding academic preparation, character development, social skills, facilities, individualized support, and communication. They also reported that families compare institutions closely. Because expectations differed among parents, satisfaction could not be treated as a fixed or uniform condition. This variation is analytically important: parental satisfaction refers to evaluations of service experience, whereas public trust concerns broader confidence in institutional competence and reliability.

> "Parents often have different expectations, and meeting all of them can be challenging." (T3)

The principal and teachers perceived digital communication as shortening the time available for clarification when concerns circulated online. Their accounts emphasized rapid, accurate responses and consistency between online messages and offline practice. Accordingly, reputation is interpreted here as a cumulative stakeholder judgment that may be vulnerable to unresolved discrepancies, rather than as an outcome demonstrated by the study itself.

3.1.6. Integrated Strategies for Sustaining Stakeholder Confidence

The final theme integrated the preceding findings at the level of stakeholder interpretation. Participants repeatedly indicated that learning quality alone was insufficient when leadership was perceived as opaque, family relationships were weak, or communication was unresponsive; conversely, communication was not described as a substitute for weak pedagogy. Documented evaluation routines, teacher development, parent feedback, and strategic planning provided organizational practices through which these dimensions were reviewed together. The evidence therefore supports an integrated interpretive proposition about perceived alignment, not a tested causal pathway from institutional practices to reputation or public trust.

> "Our reputation grows when educational quality, communication, and stakeholder relationships are maintained consistently." (PR1)

Figure 1 presents the case-derived interpretive framework. It should be read as a conceptual synthesis of patterns identified within this single institution, not as a validated model or a causal sequence. Learning quality, leadership, parent partnerships, and digital communication represent domains through which participants interpreted institutional credibility; institutional reputation and public trust represent related but analytically distinct stakeholder judgments; and feedback and continuous improvement describe organizational practices that may help maintain alignment among those domains. Testing the direction, strength, and temporal ordering of these relationships requires multi-site and longitudinal research.

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

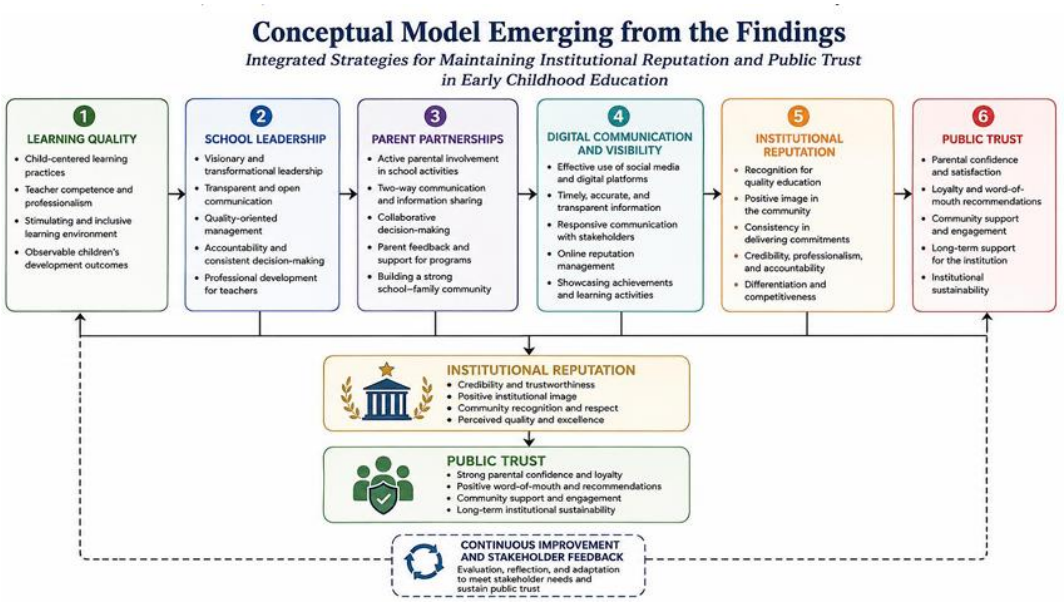


Figure 1. Case-derived Interpretive Framework of Institutional Reputation and Public Trust in Early Childhood Education

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Learning Quality Functions as Reputational Evidence

The central finding is that reputation was anchored in what parents could repeatedly observe: children's engagement, the professionalism of teachers, and developmental progress. This interpretation is consistent with cross-national qualitative evidence showing that ECE stakeholders define quality through teacher preparation, pedagogical practice, family partnership, and enabling conditions (Davis et al., 2021). It also helps explain why parents in a universal early-learning program placed considerable value on communication about play-based learning and children's progress (McIsaac, Smith, Turner, McLean, & Harkins, 2023). The present case extends those findings by showing how observable quality can become a reputational resource: pedagogical processes become socially consequential when families can recognize, interpret, and communicate their value.

The emphasis on teacher–child interaction is also supported by recent developmental evidence. Specific teacher behaviors can support or undermine gains in self-regulation (Phillips, Hutchison, Martin, Castle, & Johnson, 2022), and teacher skill in recognizing effective interactions is associated with gains in children's language, literacy, and learning behaviors (Cash & Pianta, 2023). Research further shows that classroom quality is heterogeneous at the level of individual children and depends on emotional and instructional support as well as teacher–child relationship quality (Paschall, Barnett, Mastergeorge, Li, & Vasquez, 2023). For younger children, higher-quality interactions are likewise associated with working memory and social-emotional behavior (Grosse et al., 2022), while a meta-analysis of teacher language practices identifies responsive and conceptually rich talk as important features of early-learning environments (Burke Hadley, Barnes, Wiernik, & Raghavan, 2022). These studies reinforce the interpretation that parents' trust is more defensible when reputation rests on substantive pedagogical quality rather than visibility alone.

3.2.2. Leadership and Parent Partnership Operate as Relational Governance

Leadership in this case did not strengthen trust through charisma or promotion; it did so by making quality commitments credible. Transparent explanations, consistent decisions, teacher development, and visible improvement reduced uncertainty for stakeholders. This aligns with the Indonesian leadership literature, which emphasizes the importance of contextual capacity and sustainable leadership development (Lumban Gaol, 2023), and with meta-analytic evidence that supportive school leadership is strongly related to teacher trust (Sun et al., 2023). International case synthesis similarly identifies successful principalship as context responsive, relational, and focused on improving teaching and organizational conditions (Sun et al., 2024). In ECE specifically, pedagogical leadership requires the coordination of curriculum, professional practice, and shared responsibility for quality (Fonsén et al., 2023).

The findings also support a distributed view of ECE leadership. Early educators can develop leadership capacity as frontline change agents (Lee, Douglass, Zeng, Wiehe Lopes, & Reyes, 2022), while ECE leaders' ability to sustain relationships and high-quality practice can serve a protective function under organizational stress

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

(Neilsen-Hewett, Lindsay, Warren, Tonge, & Cronin, 2022). Policy analysis further warns that leadership is often insufficiently recognized as a distinct component of ECE workforce sustainability (White, 2023). At the broader school level, recurrent administrative challenges include communication, collaboration, staffing, resources, and excessive responsibilities, making continuous improvement dependent on institutional support rather than individual effort alone (Karakose, Ozdogru, & Malkoc, 2024). The target journal's recent work on discipline-based servant leadership likewise highlights the productive combination of service, accountability, and continuous development (Safwandi et al., 2026).

Parent partnership complements leadership by making governance relational rather than one-directional. In this case, parents described greater confidence when they could observe practice, receive timely information, and participate in solving concerns regarding their children. The mechanism is not simply participation frequency. Rather, structured communication creates repeated opportunities for information exchange; family involvement gives parents direct access to educational practice; and joint problem solving allows institutional responsiveness to be evaluated over time. This interpretation is consistent with Indonesian kindergarten evidence linking parent–teacher trust and communication with stronger partnership (Sipayung & Cheng, 2023), with findings that communication quality is associated with preschool classroom engagement (Ochoa et al., 2024), and with program-level evidence that family communication practices can support attendance and participation, although effects vary across children, families, and contexts (Pilarz et al., 2024). The present case therefore treats parent partnership as a relational process through which confidence can be formed and revised, not as a proxy measure of trust.

The case also resonates with research showing that families value connection and educator support, particularly when conventional participation is disrupted (Levickis et al., 2023), and with Indonesian studies emphasizing structured school–family–community partnerships and systematic reflection (Safitri, 2023). A recent Indonesian blended-partnership model similarly argues for combining face-to-face and online participation to accommodate diverse family circumstances (Putri, Rozi, Handrianto, & Rahman, 2024). Within the target journal, Martin et al. (2026) likewise identify open communication and parental involvement as enabling conditions for early-childhood collaboration. Together, these studies reinforce the case interpretation that trust, structured communication, and family involvement are related but not interchangeable: communication is a process, involvement is a form of participation, and trust is an evaluative judgment that may develop through repeated relational experience.

3.2.3. Digital Communication is Both Trust Infrastructure and Reputational Risk

Digital communication amplified the visibility of educational practice in this case. Parents could review activities before visiting the school, receive updates after enrollment, and contact educators quickly. This is consistent with evidence that digital platforms can strengthen family–school partnerships through parental involvement, teacher–child interaction, and online communication (Hsu & Chen, 2023). Action research in a preschool context also demonstrates the feasibility of mobile applications for parent–teacher communication when implementation is adapted to local needs (Chen & Lin, 2023). The present study adds a reputational dimension: digital communication does not simply transmit information; it makes institutional behavior more continuously observable and therefore more continuously judged.

That visibility also creates risk. Social-media research shows that organizations now operate in communication environments where publics can rapidly circulate and reinterpret information (Wang et al., 2021). Participants' concern that a complaint or incomplete message could spread before clarification is therefore not incidental. It indicates an asymmetry between the slow accumulation of trust and the rapid circulation of negative information. A strategically sound response is not defensive image management but communication governance: use official channels, communicate accurately and promptly, protect children's privacy, distinguish routine questions from high-risk issues, and document how concerns are resolved. Digital credibility is consequently strongest when online messages are congruent with the learning quality, leadership, and parent relationships experienced offline.

3.2.4. An Integrated Interpretation: from Service Quality to Public Trust

The integrated framework requires four related concepts to be distinguished. Institutional reputation refers here to accumulated stakeholder judgments about the institution's educational credibility and consistency. Public trust refers to stakeholder confidence that the institution will act competently, reliably, and responsively across recurring interactions. Parent satisfaction is narrower: it is an evaluation of a particular service experience or the degree to which expectations are met. Advocacy refers to a possible behavioral expression of favorable experience, such as informal recommendation to other families. These concepts may overlap empirically, but they are not treated as equivalent outcomes in this study. Within the case, learning quality supplied observable evidence of competence, leadership supplied perceived consistency and accountability, parent partnership supplied reciprocal access and dialogue, and digital communication supplied

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

visibility and responsiveness. The framework therefore summarizes how participants connected these domains; it does not establish that any domain caused reputation, trust, satisfaction, or advocacy.

The findings further contextualize parental expectations. Research on participation in ECE shows that families weigh multiple facilitators and barriers when deciding whether and how to engage with programs (Beatson et al., 2022), while parental perceptions of ECE policy and quality can be uneven even where programs are formally established (Tang, Chew, Abdul Rahman, & Dhamotharan, 2022). In Indonesia, coastal-community evidence likewise illustrates how understandings of ECE and developmental priorities vary by context (Jeti & Manan, 2022). Consequently, public trust should not be equated with parental satisfaction or uncritical agreement. A more defensible interpretation is informed confidence: stakeholders understand the institution's educational commitments, can question or discuss them, and perceive that concerns are handled consistently and professionally.

The case therefore supports an integrated, non-causal proposition: institutional reputation and public trust are interpreted as more resilient when stakeholder experiences across pedagogy, governance, partnership, and communication are perceived as congruent over time. Because the evidence comes from one qualitative case and relies substantially on stakeholder perceptions, the framework is conceptual and case-derived rather than validated. Its contribution is to specify relationships and distinctions that can be operationalized in future multi-site studies, compared across satisfied and dissatisfied stakeholder groups, and examined longitudinally alongside more objective indicators of digital reputation and institutional performance.

3.3. Implications

For practice, ECE leaders should embed reputation work within the quality-management cycle. First, pedagogical quality assurance should prioritize observable indicators that matter developmentally teacher–child interaction, child engagement, responsive communication, and developmental progress rather than promotional outputs. Second, leadership routines should make decisions, improvement priorities, and follow-up actions intelligible to staff and families. Third, family engagement should include multiple participation routes, including scheduled meetings, progress feedback, joint problem solving, and accessible digital channels, so that partnership is not restricted to parents with greater time or resources. Fourth, digital communication should be governed by clear roles, response expectations, privacy safeguards, and escalation procedures for misinformation or conflict.

Theoretically, the findings position institutional reputation as a relational stakeholder judgment connecting educational management with stakeholder experience. This shifts analysis away from treating reputation as external image and toward examining how organizational credibility is generated through congruence among core service quality, leadership behavior, partnership processes, and communication. For policy and professional development, ECE quality frameworks should therefore give greater attention to leadership capacity, family-partnership competence, and responsible digital communication alongside curriculum and classroom quality. These implications are consistent with the target journal's emphasis on human-centered leadership, family/community engagement, digital transformation, and sustainable educational improvement.

3.4. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations delimit the claims. The study examines one institution and 15 purposively selected participants, so the findings are analytically transferable rather than statistically generalizable. Participants were already connected to the institution; prospective parents, families who withdrew, and dissatisfied non-users were not included, which may have narrowed the range of reputational perspectives. Interview accounts are also vulnerable to social-desirability effects, although triangulation with observations and documents reduced reliance on self-report. The digital component was examined through stakeholder accounts and institutional materials rather than independent social-media analytics, and the cross-sectional design cannot establish temporal or causal ordering. Future research should test the integrated model across multiple ECE institutions, include both highly trusting and critical stakeholder groups, combine qualitative evidence with enrollment and communication indicators, and examine longitudinally how trust changes after service failures, leadership transitions, or digital-reputation events.

4. Conclusion

This single-case study develops an interpretive framework for understanding how learning quality, school leadership, parent partnerships, and digital communication are connected in stakeholder judgments of institutional reputation and public trust in ECE. The findings indicate that participants used observable pedagogical quality, transparent and improvement-oriented leadership, reciprocal family engagement, and responsive communication as cues when evaluating institutional credibility. These relationships should not be read as causal effects, and reputation, public trust, parent satisfaction, and advocacy are treated as related but distinct constructs. The contribution is therefore limited to a contextually grounded framework derived from one institution rather than a validated model. Future research should test and refine the framework through

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

multi-site and longitudinal designs that include satisfied and dissatisfied parents, prospective parents, and more objective digital-reputation data, while examining how trust changes following service failures, leadership transitions, or high-visibility communication events.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to this paper. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

No funding support was received.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethics and Consent Declarations

This study involved 15 adult participants recruited for qualitative interviews and related fieldwork. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw without consequence. Pseudonymous codes were used in transcripts and reporting, identifying institutional and participant information was removed, and research data were stored securely.

Data Availability

The qualitative data are not publicly available because interview transcripts and contextual records from a single educational institution may contain information that could enable participant identification. Requests for access should be directed to the corresponding author and will be considered subject to participant confidentiality and applicable institutional restrictions.

Declaration on AI Use

AI-assisted technology was used to support language editing and structural refinement under human oversight. The authors remain solely responsible for the scientific content, interpretation, conclusions, and verification of all references and factual statements.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Master's Program in Early Childhood Education, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Universitas Negeri Semarang, for the academic support and facilities provided during the preparation of this study. The authors also gratefully acknowledge all individuals and parties who provided valuable assistance, feedback, and support throughout the research and manuscript preparation process.

References

Beatson, R., Molloy, C., Fehlberg, Z., Perini, N., Harrop, C., & Goldfeld, S. (2022). Early childhood education participation: A mixed-methods study of parent and provider perceived barriers and facilitators. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 31*(11), 2929–2946. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-022-02274-5

Burke Hadley, E., Barnes, E. M., Wiernik, B. M., & Raghavan, M. (2022). A meta-analysis of teacher language practices in early childhood classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 59*, 186–202. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2021.12.002

Cash, A. H., & Pianta, R. C. (2023). Associations between teachers' skill in identifying effective interactions and children's gains in language, literacy, and early learning behaviors. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 62*, 324–334. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2022.09.008

Chen, K.-Z., & Lin, Y.-H. (2023). Feasibility of preschool's parent–teacher communication using a mobile app: An action research in a remote fishing village. *Interactive Learning Environments, 31*(7), 4619–4635. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2021.1977963

Davis, D., Miller, D., Mrema, D., Matsoai, M., Mapetla, N., Raikes, A., & Burton, A. (2021). Understanding perceptions of quality among early childhood education stakeholders in Tanzania and Lesotho: A multiple qualitative case study. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open, 4*(1), Article 100153. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100153

Fonsén, E., Szecsi, T., Kupila, P., Liinamaa, T., Halpern, C., & Repo, M. (2023). Teachers' pedagogical leadership in early childhood education. *Educational Research, 65*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2022.2147855

Grosse, G., Simon, A., Soemer, A., Schönfeld, R., Barth, S., & Linde, N. (2022). Teacher–child interaction quality fosters working memory and social-emotional behavior in two- and three-year-old children. *International Journal of Early Childhood, 54*, 421–444. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-022-00327-w

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

Hsu, P.-C., & Chen, R.-S. (2023). Analyzing the mechanisms by which digital platforms influence family-school partnerships among parents of young children. *Sustainability, 15*(24), Article 16708. https://doi.org/10.3390/su152416708

Jeti, L. J., & Manan, M. (2022). Coastal parents perceptions of the implementation of early childhood education in Buton Islands. *Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, 6*(4), 2656–2664. https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v6i4.2240

Karakose, T., Ozdogru, M., & Malkoc, N. (2024). Leading sustainable school improvement: A meta-synthesis of qualitative research on problems and challenges faced by school leaders. *Frontiers in Education, 9*, Article 1449174. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1449174

Lee, Y., Douglass, A., Zeng, S., Wiehe Lopes, A., & Reyes, A. (2022). Preparing early educators as frontline leaders and change agents with a leadership development initiative. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy, 16*, Article 2. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-022-00095-z

Levickis, P., Murray, L., Lee-Pang, L., Eadie, P., Page, J., Lee, W. Y., & Hill, G. (2023). Parents' perspectives of family engagement with early childhood education and care during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 51*, 1279–1289. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-022-01376-5

Lumban Gaol, N. T. (2023). School leadership in Indonesia: A systematic literature review. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 51*(4), 831–848. https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211010811

Martin, M., Maulana, R., & Sukmawati, E. (2026). Collaboration between school counselors and early childhood teachers in strengthening the character values of the Indonesian Children's Great Habits Program. *Jurnal Pembelajaran, Bimbingan, dan Pengelolaan Pendidikan, 6*(6), Article 10. https://doi.org/10.17977/um065.v6.i6.2026.10

McIsaac, J.-L. D., Smith, M. E., Turner, J., McLean, C., & Harkins, M. J. (2023). The perceived value of a universal early learning program: A parent perspective. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 32*, 977–988. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-021-02214-9

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Neilsen-Hewett, C., Lindsay, G., Warren, J., Tonge, K., & Cronin, L. (2022). Early childhood leadership: Risk and protective factors during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 47*(3), 219–232. https://doi.org/10.1177/18369391221103286

Ochoa, W., Li, L.-W., Kiyama, F., & McWayne, C. M. (2024). Are family-teacher communication quality and child and family characteristics associated with Head Start children's classroom engagement? It's complicated. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 67*, 34–43. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2023.11.007

Paschall, K. W., Barnett, M. A., Mastergeorge, A. M., Li, X., & Vasquez, M. B. (2023). A new look at teacher interactional quality: Profiles of individual teacher–child relationship and classroom teaching quality among Head Start students. *Early Education and Development, 34*(5), 1172–1190. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2022.2094159

Phillips, D. A., Hutchison, J., Martin, A., Castle, S., & Johnson, A. D. (2022). First do no harm: How teachers support or undermine children's self-regulation. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 59*, 172–185. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2021.12.001

Pilarz, A. R., Lin, Y.-C., & Premo, E. M. (2024). Family engagement practices and children's attendance and early learning skills in a public pre-kindergarten program. *Children and Youth Services Review, 163*, Article 107794. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.107794

Putri, L. D., Rozi, M. F., Handrianto, C., & Rahman, M. A. (2024). A conceptual family partnership model with PAUD institutions in developing the potential of early children based on blended learning. *Ensaio: Avaliação e Políticas Públicas em Educação, 32*(125), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-40362024003204444

Safitri, D. G. L. (2023). Building partnerships with families and communities: A case study. *Indonesian Journal of Early Childhood Education Studies, 12*(1), 112–122. https://doi.org/10.15294/ijeces.v12i1.60791

Safwandi, S., Komariah, A., Suryana, A., & Prihatin, E. (2026). Discipline-based servant leadership model for effective school principal leadership: Conceptual framework development and empirical validation. *Jurnal Pembelajaran, Bimbingan, dan Pengelolaan Pendidikan, 6*(2), Article 13. https://doi.org/10.17977/um065.v6.i2.2026.13

Sipayung, E. R., & Cheng, C. C. (2023). Investigating parents' degrees of trust and communication towards teachers in Indonesian kindergartens. *Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, 7*(1), 927–936. https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v7i1.3590

Sun, J., Day, C., Zhang, R., Zhang, H., Huang, T., & Lin, J. (2024). Successful school principalship: A meta-synthesis of 20 years of international case studies. *Education Sciences, 14*(9), Article 929. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14090929

Sun, J., Zhang, R., & Forsyth, P. B. (2023). The effects of teacher trust on student learning and the malleability of teacher trust to school leadership: A 35-year meta-analysis. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 59*(4), 744–810. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X231183662

Tang, D., Chew, F. P., Abdul Rahman, M., & Dhamotharan, M. (2022). Parents' perceptions on policies of early childhood care and education programmes in selected states of Malaysia. *F1000Research, 11*, Article 938. https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.122443.2

Wang, Y., Cheng, Y., & Sun, J. (2021). When public relations meets social media: A systematic review of social media related public relations research from 2006 to 2020. *Public Relations Review, 47*(4), Article 102081. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102081

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174