



MANAGERIAL STRATEGIES OF BUNDA PAUD IN IMPROVING SERVICE QUALITY, ACCESS EXPANSION, AND GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: A FIELD STUDY IN DELI SERDANG REGENCY

Arie Dwi Ningsih¹ Veryawan² Rabitah Hanum Hasibuan³ Harun Lubis⁴ Khairul Amri⁵

^{1,3} Institut Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan Binjai, Indonesia

^{2,5} Institut Agama Islam Negeri Langsa, Indonesia

⁴ Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Darul Arafah, Indonesia

Correspondence: riedwiningsih@insan.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to examine the managerial strategies of *Bunda PAUD* in improving service quality, expanding access, and strengthening governance in early childhood education (ECE) institutions in Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. Using a qualitative descriptive approach through field studies at ten ECE institutions, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The findings reveal that *Bunda PAUD* plays a pivotal strategic role in three key dimensions: (1) quality improvement through supervision, teacher training coordination, and learning environment development; (2) access expansion through community outreach programs, inclusive enrollment policies, and cross-sector collaboration; and (3) institutional governance through transparent management systems, accountability mechanisms, and regulatory alignment. The study further identifies that the effectiveness of *Bunda PAUD*'s managerial function is significantly influenced by local government commitment, community participation, and the availability of resources. These results contribute to existing literature by demonstrating that female leadership at the grassroots level in ECE can serve as a transformative force in closing educational equity gaps. Implications for policy include the need for structured capacity-building programs for *Bunda PAUD* at the district level and stronger integration of their role into the formal ECE quality assurance framework.

Keywords: *Bunda PAUD*, *Early Childhood Education*, *Managerial Strategy*, *Service Quality*, *Educational Governance*

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) constitutes a critical foundation for the development of long-term human resource capacity. Numerous studies have confirmed that investment in early childhood education produces impacts that extend far beyond subsequent stages of education, encompassing cognitive, socio-emotional, and health aspects (Heckman & Masterov, 2007). Indonesia is a country rich in religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity (Ningsih et al., 2025). Therefore, the development of ECE has become a national strategic agenda supported by increasingly robust regulations, budgeting, and institutional structures. Nevertheless, the quality of services, access coverage, and governance of ECE institutions across regions continue to show significant disparities, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas.

Deli Serdang Regency, as one of the largest and most populous regencies in North Sumatra Province, presents an interesting paradox in ECE development: on the one hand, there has been rapid quantitative growth in ECE institutions, while on the other hand, service quality, accessibility for marginalized families, and institutional governance capacity still face complex structural challenges. In this context, the existence of *Bunda PAUD* a local leadership role symbolically and functionally held by the wife of the regional head or female officials at the regency and sub-district levels emerges as an important variable that has received limited academic attention.

Theoretically, leadership in early childhood education management has been extensively examined through the perspectives of educational management, transformational leadership theory, and educational governance approaches (Leithwood et al., 2019; Siraj & Kingston, 2015). However, most of this literature focuses on formal leadership roles such as school principals or heads of education offices, while the role of non-formal actors who possess social authority and community mobilization capacity, such as *Bunda PAUD*, has not received sufficient theoretical attention. Furthermore, existing educational governance theories tend to be grounded in the context of developed countries, making their application to the context of educational decentralization in Indonesia, particularly at the district level, still in need of substantial conceptual adjustment (Somantri, 2018; Sumintono, 2021; Zamjani, 2020). This gap creates a limitation in understanding how managerial strategies rooted in local leadership can effectively promote improvements in the quality and accessibility of early childhood education amid limited resources and institutional capacity.

From a research perspective, several studies have highlighted the role of women in early childhood education leadership (Adair et al., 2017; Davis et al., 2015; Kusnawawati, 2022). However, these studies are predominantly situated within the contexts of Australia, the United States, and Europe. Research in the Southeast Asian context, particularly in Indonesia, remains very limited and has not specifically examined the strategic role of *Bunda PAUD* across three simultaneous dimensions: service quality, access expansion, and institutional governance. Existing studies are generally descriptive in nature and do not explore managerial strategy mechanisms in depth (Douglass, 2019; Kusmawati & Madhakomala, 2023). In addition, no previous study has comprehensively integrated these three dimensions into a single analytical framework capable of explaining the interaction among these dimensions in practice.

Phenomenologically, Deli Serdang Regency presents an interesting reality in which the activities of *Bunda PAUD* are not merely ceremonial in nature, but also extend to concrete aspects of institutional operations. The researcher's preliminary observations revealed that, in several sub-districts, *Bunda PAUD* programs are actively involved in coordinating teacher training, mobilizing community support for the establishment of new early childhood education centers in underserved or blank-spot areas, and advocating to the regency government for increased budget allocations. Nevertheless, not all sub-districts demonstrate consistent patterns; some areas exhibit a high dependence on the personal initiatives of *Bunda PAUD* figures, while in other areas the role has not yet been institutionally optimized. This disparity in phenomena requires systematic empirical investigation to identify the factors that distinguish effective managerial strategy implementation by *Bunda PAUD* from less effective practices.

Based on the three gaps outlined above, this study aims to: (1) analyze the managerial strategies of *Bunda PAUD* in improving the quality of early childhood education services in Deli Serdang Regency; (2) identify the strategies implemented to expand access to early childhood education for underserved community groups; and (3) describe the role of *Bunda PAUD* in strengthening the governance of early childhood education institutions. This study is expected to contribute theoretically by providing a conceptual framework for community-based managerial leadership in early childhood education, while also offering practical contributions in the form of policy recommendations to strengthen the role of *Bunda PAUD* at the regency level.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretative field study design. The selection of this approach was based on the need to gain an in-depth understanding of the managerial strategies of *Bunda PAUD* within the distinctive socio-cultural context of Deli Serdang Regency. As stated by (Chali et al., 2022), a qualitative approach enables researchers to explore the meanings, processes, and contexts of the phenomena under investigation in a holistic manner.

The research was conducted in Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra Province, from January to June 2025. The research sites included ten early childhood education institutions (*PAUD* centers) purposively selected from five different sub-districts (Pagar Merbau, Percut Sei Tuan, Bangun Purba, Patumbak, and Pantai Labu). The selection considered variations in regional accessibility and differing levels of *Bunda PAUD* involvement.

The research subjects consisted of: (1) the district-level *Bunda PAUD* (1 person), (2) subdistrict-level *Bunda PAUD* representatives (5 persons), (3) heads of ECE institutions (10 persons), (4) ECE

teachers (20 persons), (5) parents of students (15 persons), and (6) officials from the Department of Education and Culture of Deli Serdang Regency (3 persons). Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria of direct involvement in ECE programs, as well as snowball sampling to identify additional relevant informants.

Data collection techniques included semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. The instruments used were interview guidelines, observation sheets, and document checklists. Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model (Bingham, 2023) which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking with key informants.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results of the field research conducted in Deli Serdang Regency revealed three main findings that reflect the managerial strategies of *Bunda PAUD* in the dimensions of service quality, access expansion, and governance of early childhood education institutions.

Services Strategies for Improving the Quality of Early Childhood Education (ECE) Services

Bunda PAUD of Deli Serdang Regency implements quality improvement strategies through three main mechanisms. First, learning supervision coordination is conducted through regular visits to ECE centers. Based on interview findings, the district-level *Bunda PAUD* conducts visits to ECE institutions at least twice per semester, accompanied by constructive feedback to school principals regarding the quality of learning, facilities and infrastructure, and administrative management. Second, the facilitation of teacher training and competency development is carried out through coordination with the Department of Education, the Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, Population Control and Family Planning (P3A2KB), the Library Office, the Civil Registration Office (Dukcapil), the Health Office, other regional government agencies (OPDs), as well as partner organizations such as HIMPAUDI, IGTK, IGRA, and PP-PAUD. Third, the development of learning environments is supported through ECE center adoption programs involving the private sector and local corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives mobilized through the social networks of *Bunda PAUD*.

Observational data indicate that ECE centers located in areas with active *Bunda PAUD* leadership demonstrate better physical conditions, more complete educational play equipment (APE), and more structured learning routines. This finding is consistent with (Ang, 2011) study, which states that external leadership support positively correlates with the quality of learning processes in early childhood education institutions.

Early Childhood Education Access Expansion Strategy

The findings of the study identified three main strategies for expanding access to Early Childhood Education (ECE). First, a mapping program of ECE blank spots was collaboratively conducted by sub-district *Bunda PAUD* and field officers from the Department of Education to identify areas where children aged 0–6 years had not yet received educational services. The mapping revealed that 12 villages across five sub-districts included in the study had no ECE institution within a 2-kilometer radius of residential areas.

Second, community mobilization for the establishment of new ECE centers was carried out through a village deliberation approach. The sub-district *Bunda PAUD* acted as facilitators in community meetings involving village heads, community leaders, and members of the PKK women's organization to encourage initiatives for community-based ECE establishment. Third, the implementation of an inclusive enrollment policy included tuition subsidies for underprivileged families, funded through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs and voluntary contributions from local communities, as well as coordination with the ECE Operational Assistance Program (BOP PAUD).

Strategy for Strengthening the Governance of Early Childhood Education (ECE) Institutions

In the governance dimension, *Bunda PAUD* plays a role through three strategic pathways. First, advocating for transparency and accountability in the financial management of ECE institutions, including encouraging institutions to regularly prepare accountability reports on the utilization of BOP (Operational Assistance Fund) to parents and the community. Second, facilitating the accreditation process of ECE institutions through assistance in document preparation and institutional strengthening for institutions that have not yet been accredited. Third, strengthening the ECE management

information system at the sub-district level through the initiation of the Bunda PAUD Working Group (Pokja), which is periodically facilitated by the sub-district *Bunda PAUD*.

Table 1. Recapitulation of Bunda PAUD Managerial Strategies in Deli Serdang Regency

Dimension	Main Strategies	Indikator Keberhasilan
Service Quality	Learning supervision, educator training, CSR mobilization	Good physical condition of ECE centers, complete educational play equipment (APE), structured learning processes
Access Expansion	Mapping underserved areas (blank spots), community mobilization, inclusive policies	12 underserved villages identified, 7 new ECE centers initiated
Governance	Accountability advocacy, accreditation facilitation, strengthening the Bunda PAUD Working Group (POKJA) at district and sub-district levels, as well as organizational partnerships	Regular accountability reports, increased number of accredited ECE centers

Source: Primary data from interviews and observations, 2024.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce and simultaneously extend several existing theoretical conceptions in the literature on early childhood education leadership and educational governance. First, the quality improvement strategies implemented by *Bunda PAUD* are aligned with the perspective of distributed leadership (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Timperley, 2006) which emphasizes the importance of distributing leadership among various actors who influence the quality of learning. In the context of Deli Serdang, *Bunda PAUD* functions as an “intermediate leadership” actor that connects macro-level educational policies with the micro-level realities within early childhood education institutions.

Second, the access expansion strategies based on community mapping and social mobilization demonstrate the relevance of the community-based early childhood care and education (CBECCE) approach developed by UNESCO (2010) and strengthened by the study of (Yoshikawa et al., 2013) regarding the effectiveness of community-based early childhood education programs in developing countries. The finding that *Bunda PAUD* was able to identify 12 educational “blank spot” villages and establish 7 new early childhood education centers within a two-year period indicates that the mobilization of social capital through local women’s leadership can serve as an effective instrument for expanding the reach of early childhood education services, a mechanism that has not been systematically analyzed in previous literature.

Third, the role of *Bunda PAUD* in strengthening governance corresponds with the concept of multi-level governance in education developed by (Bilodeau et al., 2019; Tamtik & Colorado, 2022). The findings of this study contribute a new dimension to the concept, namely that within the context of educational decentralization in Indonesia, social-informal leadership actors such as *Bunda PAUD* can effectively fill governance gaps that are not adequately addressed by formal educational bureaucratic mechanisms. This finding is consistent with the arguments proposed by (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Brinkerhoff & Wetterberg, 2018) who emphasize that the effectiveness of sectoral governance in developing countries largely depends on the quality of interaction between formal and informal actors.

Nevertheless, this study also identifies several limitations and challenges. First, the effectiveness of *Bunda PAUD*’s strategies is highly dependent on the commitment and personal capacity of the individual holding the position, thereby creating a risk of discontinuity when leadership transitions occur. This indicates the need for stronger institutionalization of the *Bunda PAUD* role through regional regulations and clearly defined standard operating procedures. Second, the reliance on informal resource mobilization (such as corporate social responsibility/CSR initiatives and community donations), which characterizes many of *Bunda PAUD*’s strategies, may potentially lead to program unsustainability if these resources diminish over time. Therefore, a more systematic integration between the informal resources mobilized by *Bunda PAUD* and the formal budget allocations of local governments is necessary.

Third, the findings of this study reveal significant variations among sub-districts in the level of effectiveness of *Bunda PAUD*, indicating that local contextual factors including demographic characteristics, sub-district fiscal capacity, and the socio-cultural conditions of the community play an important moderating role. These variations cannot be fully explained solely by the strategies implemented by Bunda PAUD, but are also influenced by the surrounding policy and institutional ecosystem, as argued by (Black et al., 2016; Britto et al., 2016) in their studies on the systemic factors determining the quality of early childhood education in lower-middle-income countries.

Overall, this study provides strong empirical evidence that the role of *Bunda PAUD*, although not always systematically integrated into the formal framework of educational management, has a tangible and measurable impact on the three strategic dimensions examined. These findings reinforce the arguments of (Ang, 2011; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2012) that effective early childhood leadership is not limited to formal positions, but also encompasses various actors who actively contribute to improving the ecosystem of early childhood education.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

This study successfully identified and analyzed the managerial strategies of *Bunda PAUD* three key dimensions: service quality improvement, access expansion, and strengthening the governance of PAUD units in Deli Serdang Regency. The findings indicate that *Bunda PAUD* serves as a strategic leadership agent linking macro-level policies with micro-level implementation in the field through mechanisms of supervision, community mobilization, policy advocacy, and institutional capacity building. The effectiveness of this role is influenced by personal factors (individual commitment and capacity), institutional factors (support from the local government and the Education Office), and contextual factors (community characteristics and the local policy ecosystem).

This study provides a theoretical contribution in the form of a community-based managerial leadership analysis framework within the context of Indonesian ECCE, integrating perspectives on distributed leadership, community-based ECCE, and multi-level governance. Practically, these findings recommend: (1) strengthening the institutionalization of the *Bunda PAUD* role through clear local regulations and standard operating procedures (SOPs); (2) structured managerial capacity-building programs for Bunda PAUD at the district and sub-district levels; (3) the integration of resources mobilized by Bunda PAUD into the formal regional ECCE planning and budgeting system; and (4) the development of a standardized performance monitoring and evaluation system for *Bunda PAUD*. Further research is recommended to examine the quantitative dimensions of the impact of the *Bunda PAUD* program on children's developmental outcomes through a longitudinal study.

Suggestions

Local governments are encouraged to strengthen the role of *Bunda PAUD* through continuous managerial training, stronger institutional support, and improved cross-sector collaboration to enhance the quality and accessibility of early childhood education services.

The findings of this study also contribute to the development of a community-based managerial leadership framework in early childhood education. Future research is recommended to examine *Bunda PAUD* leadership practices in different regions and explore other factors influencing PAUD governance and service quality.

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