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Barriers to the Formalization of Partnerships between TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja in Digital Literacy Programs

Widia Lestari[1], Elnovani Lusiana[2], Nurmaya Prahatmaja[3]

[1,2,3]Library and Information Science Study Program, Universitas Padjadjaran

Corresponding Author: Widia, Lestari, e-mail: widia22002@mail.unpad.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

The study purpose was to identify the factors inhibiting the formalization of the partnership between TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja, as the existing collaboration remains informal despite its important role in supporting digital literacy programs.

Materials and methods. This study employed a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and literature review involving three purposively selected informants. Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data reduction, data display, and the formulation as well as verification of conclusions.

Results. The findings indicate that the barriers to formalization arise from several key factors. First, the dominance of trust-based relational governance encourages reliance on informal coordination without clear documentation of roles and responsibilities. Second, the strong focus on program implementation prioritizes immediate impact over administrative processes such as monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. Third, limited administrative capacity, particularly due to dependence on volunteers, hinders the preparation of formal agreements and systematic documentation. Fourth, the low perceived urgency of formalization, influenced by operating under the same institutional foundation, reduces the need for formal contracts. Lastly, formalization tends to occur only when triggered by external demands, such as funding or reporting requirements, rather than through proactive planning.

Conclusion. The barriers are multidimensional, involving structural, organizational, and relational aspects. Future research should explore hybrid governance models to strengthen sustainable literacy partnerships.

Keywords: Partnership barriers; formalization process; community reading center; digital literacy programs

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INTRODUCTION

Partnerships between community reading centers and Islamic elementary schools represent a strategic form of collaboration in developing community-based literacy ecosystems. This perspective aligns with the view that effective educational interventions require integration among curriculum-based learning, the school environment, and the involvement of families and communities (Goldberg et al., 2019). In this context, partnerships function not only as mechanisms for resource sharing but also as adaptive strategies to address limitations in institutional capacity, particularly within community-based literacy institutions. Community-based organizations play a crucial role within the support ecosystem by providing additional resources and services that complement formal education, such as tutoring and access to reading materials (Teng et al., 2025). Therefore, partnerships become an essential mechanism for sustaining literacy services, especially in contexts characterized by constraints in funding, infrastructure, and program continuity.

The partnership between TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja reflects a complementary and mutually beneficial model of collaboration. In this partnership, the community

reading center contributes by providing instructors, operational facilities, and flexible community-based services, while the school offers financial support and program participants, demonstrating a reciprocal exchange of resources and capacities. This form of collaboration illustrates how community-based organizations can function as complementary actors within the educational support system, particularly in addressing service gaps that cannot be fully met by formal institutions (Teng et al., 2025). By leveraging their respective strengths, both institutions are able to overcome internal limitations and enhance the effectiveness of literacy services. Accordingly, this partnership serves as a complementary mechanism that strengthens both the sustainability and impact of community-based literacy services.

Nevertheless, the partnership is still informal, meaning that it has not been legitimized through a formal agreement such as a memorandum of understanding (MoU) or other cooperation documents. Conceptually, an informal partnership is a form of cooperation that is not legally binding and is not officially documented, but rather is built on mutual understanding, trust, and a collective spirit among actors (Arba'atun & Saniah, 2020). In practice, informal partnerships often emerge spontaneously in response to contextual and urgent needs, and therefore are not followed by a structured formulation of roles, responsibilities, or coordination mechanisms (Harrison et al., 2024). This condition makes the partnership flexible, but at the same time vulnerable to uncertainty.

The vulnerability of informal partnerships can be observed in terms of program sustainability and effectiveness. Informal partnerships tend not to have continuity guarantees because they depend heavily on the stability of the actors involved and the policies surrounding them. Leadership changes, shifts in institutional priorities, and regulatory dynamics can directly affect partnership sustainability (Syahputra, 2024). In the context of TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja, the absence of an MoU may result in uncertainty regarding the continuity of the digital literacy program when leadership changes occur. In addition, the absence of formalization also creates ambiguity in the distribution of roles and responsibilities, which in turn weakens coordination, increases the potential for conflict among actors, and reduces efficiency in achieving program objectives.

Strengthening digital literacy in the context of digital transformation has become increasingly urgent as public access to technology continues to expand. A survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia, 2025) shows that internet penetration in Indonesia has reached 229,428,417 people out of a total population of 284,438,900, or 80.66%, indicating a high level of public connectivity to the digital ecosystem. However, this increased access has not been accompanied by stability in the quality of digital skills, as reflected in fluctuations in the digital skills pillar of the Indonesian Digital Society Index (IMDI) over the past four years, namely 49.35 in 2022, increasing to 56.59 in 2023 and 58.25 in 2024, and then declining again to 49.28 in 2025 (Kementerian Komunikasi dan Digital Republik Indonesia, 2024, 2025; Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika, 2023; Pahlevi et al., 2023). This pattern indicates that public digital competence has not yet developed consistently, thereby requiring sustained support for digital literacy. In this context, partnership models between community reading centers and madrasah ibtidaiyah are relevant to examine, as they have the potential to serve as a strategic approach to strengthening community-based digital literacy.

At the local level, Ciamis Regency demonstrates a complex condition in the development of digital literacy. The regency shows relatively strong performance in digital literacy indicators, with a score of 60.27 in 2025 and an increase of 4.46 points from the previous year (Kementerian Komunikasi dan Digital Republik Indonesia, 2025). However, based on the updated measurement framework of the Community Literacy Development Index (IPLM) in 2025, Ciamis records a considerably lower score of 18.42. This score is derived from relatively low values in collection (0.108), human resources (0.115), and services (0.169), despite a relatively higher score in management (0.261), resulting in a compliance dimension of 0.111 and a performance dimension of 0.216 (Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2026). This condition indicates that literacy activities are being implemented but are not yet supported by strong institutional capacity and governance structures.

Furthermore, the implementation of the Computer-Based National Assessment (ANBK) in Ciamis Regency, with 896 elementary and Islamic elementary schools conducting the assessment online and 11 schools semi-online (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025), further

emphasizes that digital literacy is an essential competency for students. The gap between relatively strong digital literacy performance and weak institutional literacy indicators highlights a structural issue, underscoring the importance of examining community reading centers and Islamic elementary schools partnerships, particularly in understanding the factors that hinder partnership formalization as an effort to support the sustainability of digital literacy programs.

Digital literacy itself is a set of interrelated skills or competencies required for success in the digital era (List, 2019). These skills require individuals to adapt and thrive in a dynamic digital environment. Furthermore, digital literacy encompasses the ability to use information and communication technologies (ICT) effectively, including finding relevant information, evaluating its reliability, using it optimally, creating content, and communicating it through analytical thinking and technical proficiency (Malik et al., 2023). Thus, digital literacy is not limited to technical skills but reflects an individual's holistic capacity to become a critical, creative, and responsible technology user.

In addition, digital literacy is not merely related to ownership of devices or basic technological operation, but also includes the ability to optimize the use of technology in various life contexts (Wang, 2025). Individuals with strong digital literacy are able to transform access to technology into tangible benefits in educational, occupational, and social contexts. In education, digital literacy plays a highly important role because it is directly linked to students' ability to engage with digital learning resources and face future challenges (Yang et al., 2025). Reddy et al. (2020) even positions digital literacy as a vital linking element in the synergy between education and technology for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), thereby strengthening the position of digital literacy as a strategic competency in development.

Several prior studies have addressed this topic. First, Pham & Williamson (2020) examined collaboration between academics and librarians using Giddens' Structuration Theory. Their findings show that structural factors such as governance and resource availability are the dominant factors influencing the success of collaboration. On the other hand, agency-related factors such as trust and interpersonal relationships play an important role in overcoming existing structural barriers. This study also reveals contextual differences between institutions in Australia and Vietnam, enriching the understanding of collaboration dynamics. Thus, collaboration is understood as a process determined not only by structure but also by actors' ability to build social relations.

Second, Nguyen & Tuamsuk (2020) aimed to identify the factors influencing collaboration between faculty members and librarians at Vietnamese universities using a quantitative approach. The findings show that the individual dimension is the most dominant factor influencing collaboration. In addition, factors such as time and space, roles, resources, organizational structure, power, work culture, information technology, collaboration networks, incentive policies, organizational values, and external pressure also have significant effects. These findings indicate that collaboration is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by a range of interrelated factors.

Third, Nursari et al. (2023) examined partnerships between community reading centers and community organizations in the dissemination of health information. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study method through interviews, observation, and document analysis. The findings show that the partnership proceeded through stages of initiation, implementation, monitoring and learning, as well as development and maturation. In addition, the active role of community reading center managers was identified as an important factor in partnership success and sustainability. However, this study focused more on partnership strategies and implementation stages and did not specifically address barriers in the process of formalizing the partnership.

Lastly, Suchá et al. (2021) focused on social innovation in public libraries and examined the factors that stimulate and hinder it. The study used a qualitative approach through interviews with 27 librarians to understand innovation dynamics in the library environment. The findings show that barriers and drivers of innovation can be classified into four levels: structural, local, organizational, and personal. This model illustrates that innovation success is determined not only by internal factors but also by broader external conditions. Thus, partnership and innovation dynamics in libraries need to be understood comprehensively across multiple levels.

Although previous studies have examined various factors influencing collaboration and partnerships, research that specifically addresses barriers to the formalization of partnerships remains

limited, particularly in the context of community reading centers and private Islamic elementary schools. This limitation indicates a significant gap in understanding why partnerships that operate informally do not always evolve into sustainable formal arrangements. This study examines the factors that hinder the formalization of the partnership between TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja, conceptualizing it as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by structural, organizational, and relational factors. The central problem addressed in this study is the lack of comprehensive identification of the factors that inhibit the formalization process. Accordingly, this study aims to identify and analyze these inhibiting factors in order to better understand partnership dynamics and their implications for the sustainability of digital literacy programs. Therefore, this article contributes by specifically addressing partnership formalization within the context of community reading center and private Islamic elementary school, an area that remains underexplored in the scholarly literature, while also offering a conceptual contribution to the development of partnership studies within a community-based literacy ecosystem.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the factors inhibiting the formalization of partnerships between a community reading center and private Islamic elementary school. The research was conducted at TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja in Ciamis Regency, West Java Province, Indonesia. This approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of the context, processes, and dynamics underlying the non-formalization of the partnership between the two institutions.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and literature review. The research informants consisted of 3 individuals selected using purposive sampling, based on their involvement, knowledge, and experience regarding the partnership practices implemented by the two institutions. Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data reduction, data display, and the formulation as well as verification of conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). In addition, this study applied source triangulation and technique triangulation to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Thus, this study is expected to generate a comprehensive understanding of the factors inhibiting the formalization of the partnership.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja, which operate within the administrative framework of Yayasan Galuh Kinasih, constitute the focus of this study in understanding barriers to partnership formalization. This discussion aims to identify and analyze in depth the factors that inhibit the formalization process of the partnership between TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja. The analysis is not limited to administrative aspects alone, but also considers broader structural, organizational, relational, and contextual dimensions that shape the partnership dynamics in the field. This discussion seeks to explain how a partnership grounded in trust and operational flexibility may, paradoxically, delay formalization. Therefore, the factors discussed below should not be understood as isolated barriers, but rather as part of an interconnected system that influences partnership sustainability and accountability.

Dominance of Trust-Based Relational Governance

The dominant governance pattern in the partnership between TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja is relational governance, which places trust and personal relationships as the main coordination mechanisms. This is similar to TBM SP, which used personal closeness as one of its partnership strategies (Nursari et al., 2023). Many operational decisions are made through informal communication and internal forums, so formal administrative procedures are underdeveloped. This is partly because TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja are under the same foundation. Furthermore, relationship-based interaction accelerates program implementation by reducing the need for bureaucracy, but it also means that roles and responsibilities are often not documented. As a result, there is a risk of task ambiguity, dependence on certain individuals, and difficulty replicating practices when managers change.

These findings can be explained by the concept of relational governance, which emphasizes social capital as the binding force of cooperation. In this context, trust, shared norms, and interpersonal networks function to facilitate coordination and reduce conflict without relying on formal instruments. Such trust can strengthen inter-community relationships, facilitate cooperation between partners, and promote the development of joint initiatives (Wojciechowska, 2021). Consistent with this, highly effective relational governance enables partnering parties to develop mutual understanding and solve problems together, thereby maximizing resource coordination (Leona & Helmi, 2023). Therefore, although this relationship supports short-term effectiveness, the actors need to complement relational practices with minimal documentation to reduce long-term risk.

Orientation Toward Program Implementation and Impact

TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca's emphasis on program implementation and impact achievement affects the completeness of the partnership stages. Ideally, a mature partnership progresses through the stages of initiation, implementation, monitoring and learning, and development and maturation (Nursari et al., 2023). In practice, this TBM has performed the initiation and implementation stages well, but it is still lacking in formal monitoring and evaluation. The TBM managers prefer to focus resources on direct services, so administrative processes such as evaluation planning, the development of monitoring and evaluation systems, and reporting formats are often postponed. Although this service-oriented focus is effective in delivering immediate benefits to participants, the absence of a formal agreement framework greatly limits the TBM's ability to assess long-term effects and claim its contribution.

On the other hand, this focus on accelerating implementation functions as an effective strategy for building initial trust between partners through tangible evidence of achievement. Commitment can become strong before rigid evaluation rules are imposed. This approach is consistent with literature recommending that organizations set simple goals at the beginning of collaboration in order to secure quick wins, because such successes immediately increase partners' trust and confidence in the benefits of collaboration (Dickinson & Glasby, 2010 in Krczal & Behrens, 2024). Early success in the implementation stage has been shown to enhance collaborative motivation and strengthen social capital. Nevertheless, if the orientation toward implementation continues without corresponding improvements in evaluation and governance, the partnership risks becoming trapped in short-term activities without a sustainability plan. Therefore, it is recommended that this already effective implementation practice be complemented with monitoring and evaluation documentation so that all partnership stages become complete and their impacts can be accounted for.

Limited Administrative Capacity

The sustainability of community reading centers programs as nonprofit organizations with limited resources depends heavily on volunteers who share the same values and goals in supporting their mission (Zboja et al., 2020). The administrative capacity of TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca itself is limited due to the lack of volunteers focused on documentation, reporting, and formal agreements. This causes partnership document drafting to be frequently omitted, delayed, or completed hastily when needed, resulting in inadequate documentation quality. Therefore, capacity strengthening through the appointment of a partnership coordinator and basic management training is necessary to improve administrative readiness.

Administrative limitations also have an impact when collaboration intensity increases and external reporting requirements become more complex. Increasing demands from partners regarding accountability models may increase administrative burdens and reduce the flexibility and idealism of nonprofit organizations (Löfström, 2025). This condition is closely related to the phenomenon of projectification, which significantly affects collaboration between nonprofit and public organizations, as more activities are organized as projects, thereby necessitating administrative professionalization and the adoption of formal management models to meet funder requirements (Löfström, 2025). In the field, this projectification phenomenon demands professional project management and enhanced monitoring and evaluation capabilities, which many community reading centers do not yet possess.

Without simple digital tools, standard templates, and a clear division of administrative tasks, TBMs will struggle to meet partner requirements. Practical solutions such as a centralized document repository, a concise MoU template, and a spreadsheet-based monitoring dashboard can reduce administrative burden without compromising service delivery.

Low Perceived Urgency of Formalization

The perception of low urgency regarding formalization in the partnership between TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja is a central finding that indicates the functioning of the foundation as an institutional coordination mechanism. Being under a single institutional umbrella fundamentally reduces the urgency of preparing a separate partnership document such as a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Field findings show that both institutions rely more on integrated policies and internal foundation communication to manage collaborative activities. This phenomenon is consistent with Putri (2019), who argued that in library cooperation practices there are often operational and contextual supporting and inhibiting factors, so collaboration is frequently governed through internal organizational mechanisms. Therefore, the low sense of urgency toward formalization results from the foundation's hierarchical structure, strong relational practices, and community reading centers' operational focus on services.

Furthermore, the absence of a formal document in the partnership between TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja does not appear to delegitimize the continuity of the partnership. The sustainability of collaboration is not dictated solely by written contracts, but is supported by clear ground rules, effective communication, and trust capital among actors that has been consolidated from the outset. This paradigm is reinforced by Garner (2025), who states that within collaborative governance, partnerships require clear ground-rules and transparency and are strongly influenced by pre-existing levels of trust. This allows the partnership relationship to remain resilient without relying on rigid formal agreements. In the context of TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja, the foundation acts as a guiding structure that facilitates integrated decision-making and flexible role distribution. Consequently, the actors involved do not perceive the absence of a formal document as an institutional risk or operational obstacle. It can therefore be concluded that the absence of a formal document in this partnership is caused by strong mutual trust and a shared vision.

Reactive Formalization in Response to External Pressure

The formalization process of the partnership between TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja shows the dominance of relational governance mechanisms, causing formalization to occur only reactively in response to external pressure. In the context of partnership governance, Sun & Qu (2025) distinguish between formal and relational mechanisms, where formal mechanisms include formal regulations and management processes and explicit contractual forms, whereas relational mechanisms rely on shared values and rules that are not legally formal. This is consistent with the study's finding that the partnership between TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja is based on mutual understanding, closeness, and shared goals, so formal documents have not yet become an urgent internal need. As a result, formalization only occurs when external triggers emerge, such as funding needs or other administrative requirements, indicating a trigger-based formalization pattern. This pattern suggests that the internalization of formal governance practices has not been systematically established, so the partnership still depends on informal mechanisms that are flexible but less supportive of accountability, long-term planning, and readiness to meet reporting and impact evaluation demands.

Administrative reactivity in the partnership between TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja is reinforced by weak administrative capacity and the absence of a structured governance framework. The literature shows that organizations often focus more on implementing activities than on ensuring data lifecycle quality, even though processes such as data collection, management, and reporting are essential foundations of accountability (Bernardo et al., 2022 in Bernardo et al., 2024; Janssen et al., 2020 in Bernardo et al., 2024). This condition causes the stages of data management, which require substantial time, human resources, and effort, to receive less attention, resulting in administrative documents being prepared hastily and lacking quality. In addition,

many organizations do not yet have adequate data governance frameworks, structures, and planning, nor are they supported by clear policies, procedures, and monitoring mechanisms (Bernardo et al., 2024), which makes it difficult to produce valid documented evidence for partnership contributions. Therefore, intervention is needed in the form of rule-based procedures that ensure minimal formalization is carried out systematically, accompanied by the use of simple technology to maintain data quality, integrity, and compliance so that documentation becomes more planned, accountable, and sustainable.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the partnership between TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja is still dominated by relational governance based on trust, personal closeness, and internal understanding under the same foundation. This condition allows the partnership to operate flexibly and quickly, but at the same time delays the need for formalization through written documents. The main inhibiting factors in partnership formalization are a stronger orientation toward program implementation than toward administrative governance, limited capacity in documentation and reporting management, and the perception that a formal agreement is not yet urgently needed. In addition, formalization tends to emerge reactively when external pressure arises, rather than as a result of systematic institutional planning. Thus, it can be concluded that barriers to partnership formalization are not only administrative in nature, but are also related to relational structures, organizational culture, and the ways in which actors interpret cooperation.

It is recommended that TBM Komunitas Gada Membaca and MIS Winduraja begin developing a simple form of formalization, such as an MoU that defines role distribution, working mechanisms, and partnership evaluation without reducing the flexibility of the collaboration. In addition, administrative capacity needs to be strengthened through improved documentation practices and the appointment of a partnership coordinator. Future research may examine partnership governance models for libraries or community reading centers that integrate relational and formal approaches to support program sustainability.

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