

Research article

Communication Challenges in Implementing Anti-Bullying Policies in East Java's Capital Agglomeration City

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Abstract

This research consists of two main purposes: 1) to examine stakeholder interactions, power dynamics, and communication strategies in the implementation of anti-bullying policies in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java, 2) to identify gaps in the current communication and governance frameworks and provide actionable recommendations to strengthen the implementation process and enhance the effectiveness of anti-bullying initiatives. Using qualitative methods and thematic analysis, data were gathered from 22 respondents, including school principals, teachers, and NGO representatives involved in the initiative. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used as primary tools for data collection. The results of the research were found: 1) Stakeholder interactions in Sidoarjo's anti-bullying policy implementation are characterized by informal coordination, limited trust, and communication dominated by top-down directives. Intermediary actors like INOVASI and UMSIDA bridge national and local levels, but feedback mechanisms remain weak. 2) The research identified gaps such as unclear role distribution, sectoral egos, digital disparities, and culturally mismatched messaging. Recommendations include establishing a district-level coordination task force, integrating ICT tools, engaging religious leaders, and developing culturally sensitive, localized communication strategies with structured, inclusive feedback loops for adaptive governance. Based on these findings, the study recommends strengthening formal communication channels, encouraging inclusive participation from all stakeholders, expanding digital infrastructure in rural areas, and applying culturally responsive communication strategies. In

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addition, regular professional development for teachers and improved inter-agency coordination are essential to support more effective and sustainable anti-bullying efforts in Sidoarjo Regency.

Keywords: Anti-Bullying Policy, Collaborative Governance, Stakeholder Engagement, Communication Challenges, Public Policy in Education

Introduction

Education serves not only as a driver of economic development but also as a foundation for social stability and equitable growth. In a diverse and populous nation such as Indonesia, ensuring inclusive and quality education is paramount to advancing national development and social sustainability. However, despite policy-level efforts to promote child-centered learning, inclusive curricula, and safe learning environments, bullying remains a persistent and underreported issue. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2018), 41.1% of Indonesian students have experienced bullying, placing the country fifth out of 78 assessed nations (Jayani, 2019). The psychosocial impact of bullying including emotional trauma, increased absenteeism, and heightened dropout risks undermines educational access and attainment, particularly among vulnerable student populations. In East Java Province, Sidoarjo Regency has drawn national attention due to its disproportionately high rates of school-based violence. The Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Family Planning Office recorded five child violence cases in elementary schools in 2023 exceeding similar reports in more populous neighboring cities such as Surabaya, which reported only three cases (Sahal, 2023). To address this concern, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of Australia initiated an Anti-Bullying Program through the INOVASI (Innovation for Indonesia's School Children) initiative. This initiative brought together the University of Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo (UMSIDA), ten pilot public elementary schools in the Candi Sub-District, and the Sidoarjo Education Office, with support from local government stakeholders.

Sidoarjo's inclusion in the Gerbangkertosusila metropolitan region, an integrated urban agglomeration surrounding Surabaya, further elevates its strategic relevance in addressing social issues such as school-based bullying. Urban agglomeration, as defined by Chuanglin Fang and Danlin Yu (2017), refers to the integration of adjacent cities such as Sidoarjo and Surabaya through shared infrastructure, services, and collaborative governance. This interconnected urban development offers economies of scale, improved access to services, and enhanced regional coordination. In theory, such agglomeration should strengthen the governance of cross-cutting social issues like bullying. However, in practice, the implementation of anti-bullying initiatives in

Sidoarjo remains hampered by weak institutional coordination, fragmented communication channels, and misaligned stakeholder priorities. These governance and communication gaps reduce the effectiveness and sustainability of existing anti-bullying programs, despite Sidoarjo's centrality in East Java's urban landscape. To illustrate the program's geographic scope and strategic positioning, Figure 1 provides an administrative overview of the Anti-Bullying Program's implementation area in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java Province. The top section of the map situates Indonesia's expansive archipelago, zooming into Java Island and East Java Province. The middle panel outlines major urban centers Surabaya, Malang, and Pasuruan, highlighting Sidoarjo's location within the Gerbangkertosusila metropolitan area. The bottom-right section focuses on Sidoarjo Regency, with the Candi Sub-District shaded in red to denote the specific sites of program implementation.

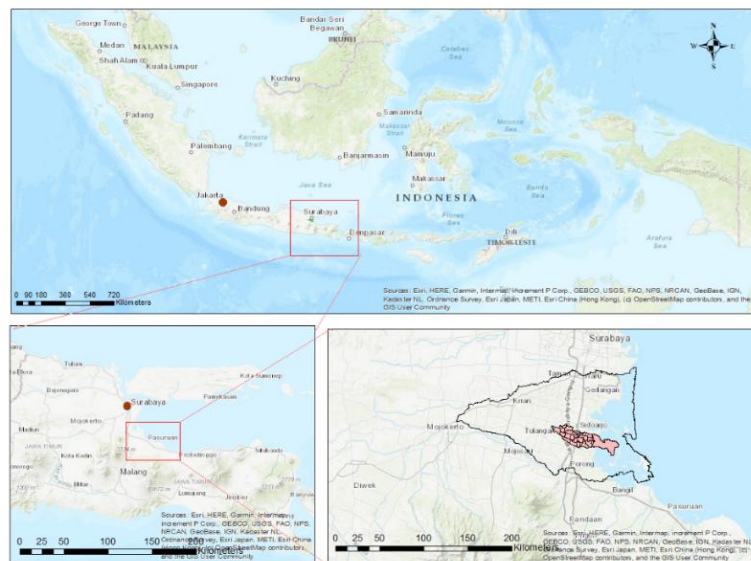


Figure 1 Administrative map of Candi Sub-district, showing the location of the Anti-Bullying Program implementation in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia. (Author, 2025)

The Candi Sub-District is home to ten pilot schools participating in the Anti-Bullying Program initiated by DFAT Australia through INOVASI East Java. This initiative was developed in collaboration with the Center for Gender Studies and Child Protection at the University of Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo (UMSIDA), public elementary schools under the Sidoarjo Education Office, and local government authorities. The program was designed to address Sidoarjo's alarming rates of reported bullying, which are significantly higher compared to neighboring cities, raising concerns about disparities in reporting systems and the "tip of the iceberg" phenomenon, where

unreported cases remain hidden due to fear or social stigma. Despite the program's urban setting and institutional partnerships, bullying persists. This reveals critical gaps in governance structures and communication processes, particularly in sustaining stakeholder collaboration and adapting policies to school-level contexts. To explore these issues, this study adopts Emerson and Nabatchi's (2015) Collaborative Governance Regime (CGR) framework, which provides a holistic model for analyzing how public, private, and civil society actors interact within complex governance systems. The CGR framework includes four key dimensions: system context, drivers, collaborative dynamics, and outcomes. In Sidoarjo, the system context is shaped by bureaucratic rigidity, overlapping mandates, and entrenched sectoral egos, all of which inhibit coordinated responses to bullying. While external support from DFAT-INOVASI has acted as a driver of initial collaboration, these partnerships remain externally induced and often unsustainable once donor support ends.

The collaborative dynamics particularly principled engagement, shared motivation, and joint capacity for action have been constrained by informal communication norms, low stakeholder trust, and uneven participation. Interviews with teachers and principals reveal that despite shared objectives, implementation often suffers from fragmented leadership and a lack of structured feedback mechanisms. These challenges are exacerbated by Indonesia's top-down governance tendencies, as conceptualized in the Principal-Agent model (Howlett & Ramesh, 2021), which limits adaptive learning and grassroots co-production. While collaborative governance theory (Ansell & Gash, 2020) advocates for inclusive dialogue and shared ownership, the practical application in Sidoarjo continues to reflect power asymmetries, resource imbalances, and institutional silos. As a result, the outcomes of the Anti-Bullying Program, such as the creation of school-level SOPs and increased awareness remain fragile and unevenly implemented across schools. Furthermore, communication challenges are pronounced. The over-reliance on informal, politically influenced channels hinders alignment and resource efficiency (Girman & Kodatska, 2020). A lack of structured feedback mechanisms such as workshops, evaluations, and stakeholder consultations stagnates policy refinement (Zhou & Guan, 2024).

Moreover, the limited adaptability of hierarchical governance structures reduces responsiveness to local needs and erodes stakeholder trust. Network-based governance models, while more participatory in principle, still face constraints in practice due to limited resources and persistent institutional power imbalances (Lynn et al., 2022; Dyer et al., 2021). Addressing these communication and coordination gaps requires formalized structures, such as interagency task forces, joint planning bodies, and inclusive monitoring frameworks. Additionally, culturally sensitive

interactive feedback systems, such as public consultations and local messaging strategies, are essential for building trust, improving transparency, and encouraging community buy-in.

Research Objectives

Therefore, this study aims to critically examine the collaborative governance and communication processes underlying anti-bullying policy implementation in Sidoarjo, with specific reference to Emerson and Nabatchi's CGR model. The research objectives are:

1. To examine stakeholder interactions, dynamism, and communication processes in implementing anti-bullying policies in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java;
2. To identify gaps in the current communication and governance framework and provide actionable recommendations for strengthening the implementation process to enhance the effectiveness of anti-bullying initiatives.

Literature Review

Communication in Public Policy Implementation

Effective communication in public policy implementation is a multifaceted process, encompassing not only interpersonal exchanges but also broader organizational and socio-political contexts (Rhomas & Sharma, 2017). It plays a critical role in bridging the gap between policy intention and stakeholder comprehension, fostering engagement, trust, and collaborative action (Ekel, 2020). Despite its importance, communication is often reduced to a one-way dissemination of information, overlooking the dynamic interplay of strategic, emotional, and practical dimensions that shape public perception and behavior (Rahmanti et al., 2021). In the case of Sidoarjo's anti-bullying policies, this oversimplified approach has led to significant implementation challenges. Stakeholders including schools, government agencies, NGOs, and local communities often operate in silos due to the lack of effective, empathetic, and adaptive communication mechanisms. This results in fragmented interventions that fail to address the real concerns and lived experiences of the target groups. As a result, a comprehensive communication framework that fosters mutual understanding, adaptability, and trust becomes indispensable for aligning cross-sectoral actions and enhancing policy outcomes. Moreover, while digital platforms present new opportunities for outreach and real-time interaction, their use in Sidoarjo remains limited and uneven. Social media has the potential to amplify awareness and facilitate dialogue; however, disparities in digital literacy and access especially in rural East Java pose serious challenges (Zhou & Guan, 2024). This digital divide contributes further to the fragmentation of anti-bullying initiatives, highlighting the need for context-sensitive communication strategies that are inclusive and accessible.

Communication Process in Collaborative Governance

Within collaborative governance frameworks, communication is not merely a tool for transmitting information but a foundational process for building transparency, legitimacy, and sustained engagement (Quy & Ha, 2017). Consistent and clear messaging strengthens public trust and supports compliance, yet traditional top-down communication models often dominate governance structures, leaving little room for dialogue, flexibility, or stakeholder input (Kim & Shim, 2020). This limits the potential for co-created solutions, especially for complex and evolving problems like bullying. Modern governance demands a shift towards two-way communication, enabling continuous feedback and shared learning among authorities and stakeholders (Guffy & Lovey, 2010). Particularly in the context of anti-bullying programs, where emotional, social, and cultural factors are deeply embedded, responsive communication systems are crucial. However, in Sidoarjo, existing strategies fall short—communication remains fragmented, and real-time feedback mechanisms are absent. Stakeholders often lack the training and capacity to effectively utilize digital media, leading to reactive rather than proactive approaches to bullying prevention (Ardhani et al., 2022). The underutilization of digital platforms and absence of adaptive communication frameworks expose a critical gap in the current policy landscape. Effective policy implementation must integrate strategic communication as a continuous, inclusive process that evolves with community needs and technological advancements.

Conceptual Framework

The challenges in addressing bullying in Sidoarjo illustrate the complex interplay between institutional, social, and communication-related dimensions. As highlighted in previous studies, communication is a critical component in public policy implementation. It not only serves as a medium for disseminating information but also plays a vital role in fostering mutual understanding, emotional connection, and effective collaboration among stakeholders (Rhomas & Sharma, 2017; Ekel, 2020; Rahmanti et al., 2021). Nevertheless, in practice, communication strategies tend to be overly directive, limiting opportunities for dialogue and responsiveness, particularly in areas such as anti-bullying, which demand context-sensitive and participatory approaches. In the case of Sidoarjo, the implementation of anti-bullying initiatives has been hindered by fragmented communication among key actors, including schools, local government institutions, civil society organizations, and the broader community. Current communication practices have often failed to sufficiently address the emotional, cultural, and practical concerns of stakeholders, resulting in inconsistent implementation and diminished impact. Although digital platforms hold great

potential to enhance stakeholder engagement, their utilization remains uneven and limited across different regions (Zhou & Guan, 2024; Ardhani et al., 2022).

This study adopts communication as a critical lens to examine the implementation of anti-bullying policies. It employs Emerson and Nabatchi's (2015) Collaborative Governance Framework, which offers an integrated perspective for analyzing how cross-sector collaboration operates within complex policy environments. The framework consists of four interrelated elements, such as system context, collaborative governance regime, collaboration dynamics, and outcomes. These components provide a structured basis for analyzing the opportunities and challenges that influence the effectiveness of anti-bullying policy efforts in Sidoarjo., as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

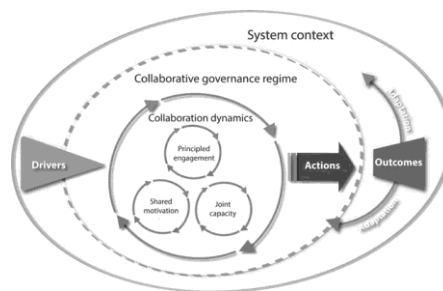


Figure 2 The Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance Source: Emerson & Nabatchi (2015)
Applying this framework to the case of Sidoarjo allows for the following analysis:

The following analysis applies this framework to the case of Sidoarjo, with a clear distinction between independent and dependent variables such as:

1. **System Context (Independent Variable):** This element examines the broader institutional and social landscape, including national policy directives, regional governance structures, and sociocultural norms. In Sidoarjo, gaps between national-level mandates and local operational realities, particularly in communication have created barriers to effective policy translation and coherence, affecting the overall implementation process.
2. **Collaborative Governance Regime (Independent Variable):** Multi-actor forums have been established to coordinate anti-bullying initiatives. However, disparities in influence and participation remain. The communication within these forums is often unidirectional, reinforcing hierarchical dynamics and limiting opportunities for co-creation and shared decision-making. These disparities hinder the collaborative process, affecting the success of anti-bullying policies.

3. Collaboration Dynamics (Independent Variable): Effective collaboration relies on trust, shared motivation, and collective capacity. In Sidoarjo, limited inter-organizational trust, inconsistent training, and underdeveloped communication pathways have hindered the formation of strong, adaptive partnerships. The untapped potential of digital tools further exacerbates these challenges.
4. Outcomes (Dependent Variable): The study assesses the outcomes of anti-bullying policies, such as the level of public awareness and the reduction of bullying incidents. While awareness has increased, tangible improvements in bullying reduction have been limited due to inconsistent feedback mechanisms, monitoring systems, and lack of community-based inputs. These gaps in the system prevent the development of adaptive, locally responsive strategies.

The study reveals that the limited success of anti-bullying outcomes in Sidoarjo is closely connected to weaknesses in the system context, collaborative governance regime, and collaboration dynamics. Although national policies exist, gaps in communication and coordination between levels of government have hindered local implementation. Moreover, while multi-actor forums are in place, unequal power dynamics and low trust reduce meaningful participation. As a result, these independent variables undermine the dependent variable by preventing adaptive and inclusive solutions. Therefore, stronger collaboration, mutual trust, and effective communication are key success to achieve better outcomes.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to investigate the communication dynamics, stakeholder roles, and governance mechanisms in the Anti-Bullying Program in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java. As noted by Yin (2011), qualitative research helps uncover how individuals make sense of social phenomena, while Walter (2010) emphasizes its strength in interpreting complex real-world interactions. The study was guided by Emerson and Nabatchi's (2015) Collaborative Governance Regime (CGR) framework, which structured the analysis across four core elements: system context, drivers, dynamics, and outcomes. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 22 informants, including 10 school principals, 10 elementary school teachers, the East Java Coordinator of the INOVASI Program, and the Head of the Center for Gender and Child Protection at UMSIDA. Purposive sampling ensured that participants had substantial knowledge or involvement in the program (Lohr, 2021). The interview protocol was developed around the CGR framework and tailored to each stakeholder group's role.

To ensure quality and validity, the instruments were reviewed by public administration experts from universities in Northeastern Thailand. Feedback from experts contributed to refining question clarity, flow, and relevance. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and returned to participants for member checking to validate accuracy and authenticity. Thematic analysis was conducted manually through repeated readings of the transcripts. Open coding was performed to extract significant phrases, which were then grouped into thematic categories. These were aligned with the CGR framework and literature gaps such as weak local ownership, donor dependency, and limited policy continuity. Inter-coder reliability was strengthened by involving a second researcher to double-code selected data. Verbatim quotes in Appendix A (pp. 208-209) substantiate the findings and provide grounded evidence for the study's interpretations.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Research Ethics Center at a public university in northeastern Thailand. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. A consent form, along with a cover letter outlining the researcher's affiliation, was provided to each participant. The research ethics committee ensured that participants' rights, confidentiality, and privacy were fully protected throughout the research process.

Findings and Discussion

Communication in Public Policy

The implementation of anti-bullying policies in Sidoarjo Regency highlights the crucial role of communication structures and stakeholder interactions in shaping the outcomes of collaborative governance. Drawing on Emerson and Nabatchi's (2015) framework, this section examines how system context, collaboration dynamics, and communication mechanisms impact policy coherence and sustainability. Intermediary actors, such as INOVASI East Java and UMSIDA, play essential roles in mediating national policies and translating them into local actions. As noted by I1, INOVASI East Java acts as a "mediator or channel" for policy dissemination, while UMSIDA functions as both a "messenger" and local implementer, bridging the gap between national priorities and the specific needs of schools. Furthermore, G1 emphasized that UMSIDA uses school-level data to shape training and policy proposals, fostering evidence-based practices. However, communication across levels is not always smooth. I1 acknowledged instances of miscommunication, particularly when local actors were involved in developing learning modules. This highlights a lack of shared expectations and the absence of effective feedback mechanisms. While the collaborative governance framework includes a wide range of stakeholders, such as

universities, civil society organizations, school leaders, and local education offices, engagement remains uneven. For example, P1 observed that school principals have made efforts to promote inclusive coordination, yet weak support from district education services continues to hinder the consistency of the program. As P4 pointed out, minimal involvement from local offices weakens coordinated implementation, reflecting a power imbalance in which regional actors dominate the agenda-setting process, while local schools and education services have limited influence. Communication practices also exacerbate this imbalance. The dissemination of training and materials often follows a linear, top-down model, with insufficient channels for bottom-up feedback.

Despite P2's expressed intention to distribute training resources more equitably, disparities between schools indicate inconsistent implementation. Furthermore, feedback from T7 revealed that students often did not fully understand the messages, suggesting that the anti-bullying content was neither age-appropriate nor culturally relevant. This observation aligns with Emerson and Nabatchi's (2015) argument that effective collaborative governance depends on mutual understanding and shared knowledge. Coordination between schools and homes, while supportive, remains informal and underdeveloped, with teachers handling in-class implementation and parents reinforcing messages at home. However, the lack of a formal communication framework limits the potential for synergy between these stakeholders.

Moreover, the absence of structured feedback channels, especially those connecting schools with policymakers, restricts adaptive responses and continuous learning. To avoid further complexity, improvements should include the establishment of a district-level, multi-sectoral coordination task force, comprising representatives from INOVASI, UMSIDA, local education offices, school leaders, teachers, and parents. This would help clarify roles and enhance collaborative decision-making. Additionally, a formal communication framework with structured feedback loops featuring regular consultations, transparent reporting, and safe spaces for dialogue should be introduced to facilitate more inclusive communication, both online and offline. Training modules should be localized and co-developed with educators and psychologists, incorporating role-plays, scenario-based learning, and culturally relevant content. Furthermore, utilizing digital engagement strategies, such as micro-campaigns for parents, interactive apps for teachers, and engaging content for students, should complement face-to-face interactions, with following by strengthening the capacity of local education services through financial, technical, and governance support is crucial for enhancing leadership and reducing external dependency.

Communication Process in Collaborative Governance

The communication process in Sidoarjo's anti-bullying initiative, when examined through Emerson and Nabatchi's (2015) Collaborative Governance Framework, reveals notable progress alongside persistent structural gaps that influence policy outcomes. At the system context level, communication continues to be shaped by a predominantly top-down flow, primarily initiated by DFAT (I1, P9, P10). Although this approach provides administrative clarity and control, it often restricts opportunities for adaptive communication and local participation. The reliance on procurement mechanisms such as tenders reflects a procedural model of communication that limits space for dialogue and reduces responsiveness to local needs and contexts. Moving into the collaborative governance regime, intermediary institutions such as INOVASI East Java and UMSIDA (P8) play an essential bridging role. They translate international and national directives into localized actions, facilitating a more contextualized policy design. However, despite this positive role, significant challenges remain. Communication during the capacity-building phase is inconsistently executed (P2), and many schools rely on informal peer-sharing systems (T4) rather than structured dissemination channels. This suggests that communication mechanisms lack both strategic planning and equity in reach. In particular, teachers in under-resourced schools are disadvantaged by limited access to training, which impedes consistent implementation.

At the level of collaboration dynamics, trust, shared motivation, and joint capacity are vital elements for successful multi-stakeholder engagement. While examples of school-community collaboration (T1) and supportive partnerships with the Education Office and PGSPA UMSIDA (T3) reflect positive intentions, these interactions often remain informal and fragmented. The absence of structured platforms for regular communication among stakeholders leads to inconsistent policy translation and limits opportunities for shared learning. Although gender-sensitive training (T5) has proven beneficial, it is not yet embedded into a long-term communication strategy that is inclusive and sustainable. With regard to outcomes, there has been an increase in public awareness and school-level policy adaptation, yet tangible results in terms of bullying reduction remain limited. School principals are actively supervising program implementation (P6), while some schools have initiated feedback mechanisms to the local government (T8). Nevertheless, without an integrated monitoring and evaluation system, these efforts lack coherence and impact. Furthermore, these feedback loops are often underutilized due to the absence of digital infrastructure and institutional support for community-based evaluation.

In instance, the hierarchical nature of communication from DFAT to local schools, fails to support the principles of horizontal engagement and co-production that are central to effective collaborative governance. Local actors are primarily positioned as implementers rather than active contributors to policy formulation. This not only weakens ownership but also risks reducing policy relevance in diverse socio-cultural settings. Moreover, digital inequalities further exacerbate gaps in participation and information flow, particularly in rural areas. Therefore, to strengthen communication as a foundational pillar of collaborative governance, it is essential to develop a more inclusive, dialogic, and adaptive communication framework. Investment in digital literacy and infrastructure, combined with the creation of structured peer-learning forums, can support equitable knowledge sharing. Furthermore, enabling platforms for school-community dialogue and embedding feedback loops into policy cycles would enhance both legitimacy and responsiveness. Ultimately, by transforming communication from a unidirectional process into a participatory mechanism, anti-bullying initiatives in Sidoarjo can become more sustainable, context-sensitive, and impactful.

Challenges in Public Policy Communication Process

Socio-Geographic Challenges

The implementation of anti-bullying policies in Sidoarjo faces significant challenges stemming from socio-geographic and institutional factors, complicating efforts to establish effective collaborative governance. These challenges highlight the importance of communication, trust, and shared capacity, which are often underdeveloped components in the policy process, as outlined by the Collaborative Governance Framework (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). One major issue is geographic isolation and limited infrastructure, especially in rural areas. The Head of INOVASI for East Java (I1) emphasized that logistical constraints, such as the remote locations of schools, complicate regular monitoring and support, which are vital for the successful implementation of anti-bullying programs. Additionally, as mentioned by the same interviewee, aligning the program with school schedules and reaching remote areas often leads to scheduling conflicts, making it difficult for schools in these locations to fully participate in the program without adaptive planning and flexible scheduling. Another challenge is the need for cultural and religious adaptation in communication strategies. In areas like Madura, coastal area in Sidoarjo Regency, Urban Agricultural, where cultural values and religious beliefs play a central role, the approach to raising anti-bullying awareness must align with local customs and values (I1). This underscores the importance of tailoring messages to fit specific community contexts, as standardized communication strategies may not be effective across all areas. The cultural complexity is further compounded by resistance

within schools. The Head of PGSPA (G1) highlighted that some school staff initially resisted adopting new practices, reflecting a broader issue of reluctance to change that can impede the program's success.

To mitigate miscommunication and address more complex challenges, a more adaptive communication strategy is essential to foster trust and demonstrate the program's relevance to educators and the community. One of the key obstacles identified is the variability in participation and awareness among staff and parents, which undermines the program's overall effectiveness. As noted by one teacher (T5), differences in understanding and engagement among staff members, coupled with difficulties in involving all parents, lead to fragmented efforts that weaken the program's impact. This highlights the need for continuous, inclusive communication to foster a shared understanding, as emphasized by Guffy and Lovey (2010). In the context of cultural diversity, communication strategies must be culturally adaptive, aligning with local values to enhance stakeholder involvement and understanding. Without such a tailored approach, program outcomes are at risk of falling short, particularly when cultural clashes arise between conservative communities and more progressive institutions. Resource and logistical constraints, in addition to cultural barriers, further complicate the implementation process. Teachers have emphasized the importance of consistency in applying policies across schools (T6), but the lack of uniform enforcement has led to inconsistent implementation, making it difficult to evaluate the policy's effectiveness. This highlights the need for a more robust monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure all stakeholders adhere to the policy and maintain consistency in its application. Another major barrier identified is parental involvement.

Teachers have noted that many parents lack a clear understanding of what bullying entails, which limits their ability to fully engage in the program and reinforce its messages at home (T6). To address this, targeted awareness campaigns tailored to educate parents on the signs and consequences of bullying are necessary to encourage more active participation and support for the program. Moreover, the emotional and psychological diversity of students presents additional challenges. As observed by one teacher (T9), students at different educational stages have varied emotional needs, requiring differentiated communication and tailored strategies. Weak institutional support further exacerbates these challenges, as indicated by another teacher (T10), who noted that limited backing from education services reduces schools' capacity to effectively implement anti-bullying policies, the implementation of anti-bullying policies in Sidoarjo is hindered by a variety of socio-geographical, cultural, and institutional challenges. To address these issues, communication strategies must be more inclusive and culturally sensitive, ensuring all

stakeholders are adequately informed and engaged. With strengthening institutional support and establishing stronger feedback mechanisms will be crucial for the sustained success of the program. By addressing these gaps, Sidoarjo can create a more supportive, effective, and inclusive anti-bullying environment.

Overcoming the Communication Challenges

The complexity of communication challenges in implementing anti-bullying legislation in Sidoarjo Regency highlights the interaction between sectoral egos, cultural diversity, and technological limitations. As revealed through the interviews, one significant barrier to effective communication is the unclear division of roles and the dominance of sectoral egos, which hinder coordination and result in persistent misunderstandings. For instance, one teacher emphasized that clarifying job responsibilities and reducing institutional egos are critical to the program's success (T1), while another respondent supported this by stating that stakeholder egos must be minimized to avoid miscommunication (T3). These observations underline the importance of transparent role allocation and the need to reduce competition between sectors. To overcome these issues, fostering a culture of collaboration and humility among stakeholders is essential, as it enables more open dialogue and effective joint decision-making. The second major communication challenge involves cultural misalignment, particularly between national policy messages and local norms. A school principal highlighted the importance of involving religious leaders to foster alignment between schools and the broader community (P2). This suggests that in rural areas where traditional values remain strong religious figures act as trusted intermediaries who can strengthen community acceptance of anti-bullying policies. Furthermore, another respondent stressed that policy messages must be tailored to local cultural contexts to ensure community acceptance (H4). In addition, engaging religious leaders, such as the heads of religious organizations and local religious teachers, is seen as an effective way to support the communication process by ensuring that policy narratives are consistent with local beliefs (H5).

These insights point to the urgent need for culturally sensitive communication strategies and the strategic engagement of religious authorities to strengthen policy legitimacy and community trust. Geographical isolation also presents a significant communication barrier, especially in remote areas of Sidoarjo. One teacher proposed that this issue could be addressed by integrating digital technology and providing ICT training for teachers (H7). This highlights the potential of digital platforms to close communication gaps between rural schools and central education authorities. However, the success of this approach depends on sustained investment in digital infrastructure, equitable internet access, and ongoing support for teacher capacity

development. Integrating ICT tools into communication systems can enhance stakeholder engagement and allow for real-time feedback, thereby supporting a more adaptive and responsive policy implementation process. Emerson and Nabatchi's (2015) collaborative governance framework provides a valuable lens for analyzing these challenges. The "system context" element draws attention to structural barriers such as unclear roles and sectoral egos, which contribute to fragmented communication. Although multi-actor forums have been established, communication within them often remains hierarchical and unidirectional, limiting opportunities for inclusive decision-making.

The "collaboration dynamics" component highlights the need for trust and shared motivation; however, inconsistent communication pathways and weak inter-organizational trust impede the development of cohesive partnerships. Lastly, within the "outcomes" dimension, it is evident that although awareness of bullying has increased, the absence of structured feedback mechanisms hinders the formulation of adaptive strategies. To address these communication challenges, several recommendations are proposed. Such as, clearly defining roles and reducing sectoral egos is essential for improving coordination. Establishing a district-level coordination task force, involving stakeholders from education offices, schools, religious communities, and civil society, could foster better alignment. Culturally sensitive messaging should be prioritized, with active involvement of religious leaders to ensure that anti-bullying policies resonate with local values. Moreover, the adoption of adaptive technologies is crucial, particularly in rural areas, where ICT training for teachers and the development of accessible digital platforms can significantly enhance communication. Finally, structured feedback mechanisms must be introduced to support continuous learning and ensure that policies evolve in response to local needs.

Conclusion

The implementation of anti-bullying policy in East Java faces ongoing challenges, particularly due to geographic isolation, cultural diversity, and weak inter-sectoral coordination. Remote schools often lack access to support and monitoring, leading to inconsistent enforcement. Digital platforms are underutilized, limiting timely communication and evaluation. In conservative areas like Madura and coastal Sidoarjo, anti-bullying messages face resistance; involving *ustadz* in campaigns helps align messages with local values. Meanwhile, urban areas such as Surabaya and urban Sidoarjo are more receptive to direct communication strategies. Other key barriers include low parental involvement, inadequate teacher training, and fragmented collaboration among schools, governments, NGOs, and universities. Teachers report current training is superficial

and lacks follow-up. To improve sustainability, structured feedback systems, data-driven evaluations, and increased use of ICT tools are essential—particularly for remote schools. Strengthening these aspects can foster deeper partnerships, ensure cultural relevance, and enhance the practical enforcement of anti-bullying policies across diverse settings.

Suggestion

To effectively implement anti-bullying policies, a comprehensive approach involving communication, collaboration, and context-sensitive strategies is essential.

- a. **Effective Communication Strategies:** A formal district-level coordination task force should be established, comprising education offices, schools, NGOs, universities, and religious leaders. This fosters joint decision-making, clarifies roles, and builds trust through regular meetings and shared reporting.
- b. **Collaborative Governance and Stakeholder Engagement:** Multi-stakeholder collaboration ensures effective policy dissemination. Continuous feedback, trust-building, and shared resource use help address enforcement gaps. Active involvement of local actors, including parents and NGOs, encourages community ownership and reduces resistance.
- c. **Low-Cost, Culturally Sensitive Strategies:** Post-INOVASI sustainability relies on local resources, such as student-led initiatives, updated school SOPs, and digital tools like WhatsApp and Google Forms. In culturally sensitive regions like Madura and coastal Sidoarjo, collaboration with religious leaders helps adapt messages to local values through training and campaigns. Their involvement enhances legitimacy and community acceptance, ensuring lasting impact.

With this approach, combining communication, collaboration, and tailored strategies, ensures the successful implementation and sustainability of anti-bullying initiatives.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Summary Table of the Study Results

No	Theme/Code	Sub-Theme	Respondents	Verbatim Quotes	Interpretation
1.	Communication in Public Policy Implementation	Role of Intermediaries	I1	"INOVASI East Java acts as a mediator or channel to distribute this program throughout East Java."	INOVASI East Java serves as a communication bridge in policy dissemination.
			I1	"Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo plays a key role as a messenger or implementer of the policy."	UMSIDA is a critical actor in relaying and implementing education policies.
2.		Miscommunication	I1	"There may have been miscommunication... when they asked for involvement in writing the modules."	Misunderstandings can occur between stakeholders during collaborative processes.
3.		Policy Translation	I1	"They help translate the draft policies developed by INOVASI Indonesia and INOVASI East Java."	Local actors assist in contextualizing and translating policy content for implementation.
4.		Knowledge Transfer	G1	"We train teachers and principals... and use the data to create academic material for policy proposals."	Data-informed training supports evidence-based policy advocacy and dissemination.
5.		Inclusive Coordination	P1	"I ensure all parties are appropriately involved in the program's implementation."	School leaders emphasize inclusive communication among stakeholders.
6.		Equity in Communication	P2	"We aim for more equitable distribution of training."	Efforts are being made to ensure fairness in access to policy-related information and training.
7.		Weak Stakeholder Engagement	P4	"There's minimal support from education services in some areas."	Communication breakdown occurs due to lack of engagement from local education authorities.
8.		Student Reception	T7	"Sometimes students don't understand or accept the message."	Students' understanding of policy messages is inconsistent, indicating communication gaps.
9.		Home-School Coordination	P5	"Teachers implement policies in the classroom, while parents support from home."	Clear division of communication roles between school and family in policy implementation.

No	Theme/Code	Sub-Theme	Respondents	Verbatim Quotes	Interpretation
1	Communication Process in Collaborative Governance	Program Initiation and Policy Design	I1	"DFAT acts as the program designer, working with developing countries to create gender equality and equity programs."	DFAT initiates policy design, indicating a top-down communication flow in early stages.
			P9	"DFAT opened a tender for this program, and the INOVASI Head Office won the tender."	The communication process includes a formal procurement phase handled by international actors.
2			P10	"Key stakeholders include DFAT Australia because they deliver this policy."	DFAT is recognized as a key communication node in international collaboration.
3.		Policy Operationalization	P8	"INOVASI East Java brings this policy and collaborates with PGSPA UMSIDA to transform the program design into a piloted policy."	INOVASI East Java and UMSIDA operationalize DFAT policies through active local collaboration.
4		Capacity Building Communication	P2	"Not all teachers and staff have had the opportunity to participate in the training. We are trying to ensure this training is more evenly distributed."	Communication efforts in capacity building remain uneven, indicating implementation challenges.
5		Peer Knowledge Sharing	T4	"The knowledge I gained from the UMSIDA training will be shared with my colleagues during meetings."	Teachers act as informal communicators, helping cascade policy knowledge within schools.
6		School-Community Collaboration	T1	"Collaboration between schools, parents, and the community is very important; this cooperation is needed to create a positive culture."	Grassroots communication is vital for cultural change and policy acceptance.
7		Multi-Stakeholder Support	T3	"The support from the Education Office, the INOVASI Team, and PGSPA UMSIDA is very meaningful."	Effective communication among diverse stakeholders strengthens local implementation.
8		Gender-Focused Training Impact	T5	"I gained valuable insights that taught me how to address bullying, especially regarding gender."	Training fosters specific competencies aligned with collaborative goals like gender equality.
9		Program Supervision	P6	"As the principal, I supervise the program's implementation."	School leadership plays a supervisory communication role in policy delivery.

No	Theme/Code	Sub-Theme	Respondents	Verbatim Quotes	Interpretation
1.	Overcoming the Communication Challenges	Sectoral Ego Reduction	T1	"Clear job desk division and the government being able to separate their sectoral egos, I think that is very helpful in running this program well."	Eliminating sectoral egos and clarifying roles improves coordination and communication in program implementation.
			T3	"For us teachers, the ego must be released by stakeholders to minimize miscommunication."	Stakeholder humility and collaboration are key to preventing misunderstandings.
2.		Religious & Community Leader Involvement	P2	"At the school level, we really need the help of religious leaders to create alignment between the school and the community... this is still effective in aligning the minds of parents and us."	Religious leaders are influential mediators in fostering school-community alignment.
3.		Cultural Adaptation in Messaging	H4	"The messages conveyed must also be adjusted to local cultural values... it takes a communication process and a way that aligns with socio-cultural conditions there."	Cultural sensitivity in messaging enhances community receptivity and policy acceptance.
			H5	"Ultimately, inviting and asking religious leaders, such as heads of religious organizations and ustadz to help promote this anti-bullying policy... can facilitate the policy communication process."	Religious figures help bridge the gap between policy and local beliefs, making communication more effective.
4.		Technological Adaptation	H7	"Geographical issues such as our school, which is in a rural area of Sidoarjo, can be overcome by utilization of digital technology based on light applications and ICT training for teachers."	ICT tools and digital platforms can address communication gaps in rural or remote areas.

No	Theme/Code	Sub-Theme	Respondents	Verbatim Quotes	Interpretation
1	Socio-Geographic Challenges	Geographic Isolation & Infrastructure	I1	"Geographical barriers, such as schools located in isolated areas, make regular monitoring and support difficult."	Physical distance limits effective monitoring and timely support from external stakeholders.
			I1	"Program alignment with the timetable of existing schools, and challenges in reaching isolated areas, create scheduling conflicts."	Rural schools face logistical obstacles that affect program implementation and scheduling.
3		Cultural and Religious Considerations	I1	"The approach to raising anti-bullying awareness in the Madura region differs... must be more aligned with religious values and refined speech."	Cultural adaptation is crucial; religious values influence communication and acceptance.
4		Resistance to Change	G1	"Rejection from a number of school staff who were initially hesitant to adopt new practices."	Initial resistance from school staff indicates limited readiness and openness to innovation.
5		Varied Levels of Understanding	T5	"Sometimes, there are differences in understanding and approach between staff members. Additionally, it is sometimes difficult to involve all parents in an active way in these programs."	Inconsistent comprehension among staff and low parent engagement hinder program effectiveness.
6		Participation and Awareness Gaps	T7	"One of them is ensuring that all parties involved are active and understand the importance of this program."	Active participation remains a challenge due to uneven awareness of the program's objectives.
7		Policy Consistency	T6	"Ensuring consistency in applying the regulations that have been made."	Regulations need consistent enforcement across different schools and actors.
8		Parental Awareness	T6	"When guardians are invited to work together for reports or evaluations, there's a lack of understanding because many of them don't really know what bullying is."	Limited knowledge among guardians affects engagement in anti-bullying evaluations.
9		Emotional and Psychological Diversity	T9	"There are many challenges... each level has different emotional states."	Emotional diversity among stakeholders requires differentiated communication and approaches.