

Gandong School Management for Interfaith Collaborative Learning

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Abstract: Religiously diverse schools require management models that transform difference into collaborative learning rather than merely maintaining formal tolerance. This study analyzes Gandong School Management as a locally grounded model of interfaith collaboration implemented by SMA Kristen Rehoboth Ambon and SMA Al-Hilaal Ambon. The study employed a qualitative multi-site design involving principals, teachers, administrative staff, students, and parents selected through snowball sampling. The study concludes that Gandong School Management functions as a contextual form of collaborative school management that integrates local wisdom, interfaith literacy, and whole-school governance. The study implies that culturally rooted interschool partnerships can serve as a practical strategy for peace education and multicultural school leadership.

Keywords: collaborative school management; Gandong school; interfaith collaboration; local wisdom; multicultural education

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, educational research has increasingly positioned schools as social spaces that are responsible not only for transmitting knowledge but also for forming citizens who are able to live constructively in plural societies. Multicultural education, global citizenship education, and culturally responsive pedagogy emphasize that religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity should be managed as a learning resource and as social capital for schools (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2018; UNESCO, 2015). From this perspective, school success cannot be measured only by academic achievement. It also depends on the capacity of schools to create safe, inclusive, and collaborative climates for all learners.

The context of Maluku, particularly Ambon City, provides a relevant social setting for examining the relationship between educational management, social reconciliation, and local wisdom. Maluku society has historical memories of socio-religious conflict, but it also possesses the cultural heritage of *pela* and *gandong*, which emphasizes kinship, solidarity, mutual assistance, and peaceful coexistence. Studies on peace education based on *Pela Gandong* show that this local wisdom can become a medium for reconciliation, social studies learning, and post-conflict tolerance building (Hasudungan & Sartika, 2020; Wakano & Ag, 2019). In this framework, Gandong School can be understood as an educational management innovation that translates local brotherhood into interfaith school governance.

Although the literature on collaborative school management has developed significantly, many studies still focus on internal cooperation, such as relationships among principals, teachers, students, and parents. Collaborative professionalism emphasizes collective work as a moral practice rather than merely technical coordination (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). Public governance studies also show that schools can improve performance when they build networks with government, families, and communities (Paletta, 2012). However, it remains insufficiently documented how collaborative school management operates between schools with different religious identities, especially when the collaboration aims not only to improve service quality but also to foster tolerance, reduce prejudice, and rebuild social relations.

The central problem addressed in this study is the absence of systematic documentation of Gandong School Management as a model of collaboration between two schools with different religious backgrounds. Before the program was implemented, both schools had forms of internal collaboration, including curriculum coordination, administrative services, teaching and learning activities, and communication with parents. However, direct interschool interaction across religious difference was still limited and had not become a sustained encounter space for teachers and students. This issue is important because intergroup contact theory suggests that equal, purposeful, and institutionally supported interaction can reduce prejudice and strengthen positive relationships (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Conceptually, this study integrates collaborative school management, multicultural education, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Collaborative school management emphasizes shared decision making, implementation, evaluation, and quality improvement among stakeholders (Khurniawan et al., 2021; Lemos, 2017). Multicultural education provides a framework for recognizing diversity, building equity, and organizing schools as inclusive learning communities (Banks, 2015). Culturally responsive and culturally sustaining

pedagogies require teachers to use community identity, language, experience, and values as meaningful learning resources (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012).

This study analyzes Gandong School Management at SMA Kristen Rehoboth Ambon and SMA Al-Hilaal Ambon. Its novelty lies in mapping an interfaith collaboration model based on Gandong local wisdom through seven areas: program planning, internal management, external partnership, impact, supporting factors, inhibiting factors, and good-practice dissemination. The study aims to describe and interpret how Gandong School Management is designed, implemented, understood, and developed by school communities. The scope is limited to managerial and socio-pedagogical practices in two partner schools; therefore, the findings are intended to build conceptual understanding rather than statistical generalization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1) Collaborative School Management in Plural Societies

Collaborative school management refers to the collective involvement of school leaders, teachers, administrative personnel, students, parents, communities, and external partners in planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement. In plural societies, this approach is not limited to efficiency or administrative coordination. It also becomes a governance mechanism for building trust, mutual recognition, and social cohesion. Collaborative professionalism frames teacher and leader collaboration as a shared moral responsibility for student learning and well-being (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

For schools serving diverse communities, collaboration requires institutional structures that allow different groups to interact safely and purposefully. Memoranda of understanding, joint committees, shared work programs, and regular reflection can help transform informal goodwill into accountable organizational practice. Such mechanisms are important because interfaith collaboration can generate misunderstanding if it is not clearly communicated to school members and families.

2) Multicultural Education and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Multicultural education emphasizes the restructuring of school culture, curriculum, and learning experiences so that students from different backgrounds can participate equitably (Banks, 2015). It challenges schools to move beyond symbolic celebration of diversity toward institutional practices that promote justice, recognition, and meaningful interaction. In this sense, multicultural education requires managerial support because classroom innovation alone is insufficient without school-wide policy, leadership, and stakeholder alignment.

Culturally responsive pedagogy strengthens this perspective by arguing that students' cultural identities and community experiences should be treated as assets in learning (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In the Maluku context, Gandong local wisdom can serve as a culturally meaningful resource for tolerance education, social learning, and character formation. When school leaders integrate such values into programs, rituals, learning modules, and reflection activities, local wisdom becomes part of the school's pedagogical infrastructure.

3) Gandong Local Wisdom, Peace Education, and Intergroup Contact

Gandong is a local cultural concept in Maluku that emphasizes kinship, brotherhood, solidarity, and mutual support across social boundaries. In a post-conflict society, this value is significant because it provides a familiar ethical language for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. Peace education based on local wisdom is more likely to be accepted when it is rooted in community memory and everyday social values rather than imposed as an abstract external concept.

Intergroup contact theory provides an additional lens for understanding Gandong School Management. Contact is more likely to reduce prejudice when interaction occurs under conditions of equal status, common goals, cooperation, and institutional support (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The Gandong School program is relevant to this theory because it creates structured and repeated encounters among students and teachers from different religious school communities through collaborative activities, visits, teaching exchanges, and shared reflection.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach with a multi-site study design. This design was chosen because the study sought to understand in depth the practice of Gandong School Management in two school contexts that have different religious bases but are bound by the same partnership. A multi-site study allows researchers to compare patterns, variations, and themes across sites to develop stronger conceptual propositions than a single-case description (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018). A qualitative approach was appropriate because the focus of the study was on experiences, meanings, social relations, and managerial processes that cannot be adequately understood through numerical measurement alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

The study was conducted at SMA Kristen Rehoboth Ambon and SMA Al-Hilaal Ambon. These two schools were selected because they had established a formal partnership in the Gandong School program through a cooperation document, a joint declaration, interschool

activities, and the development of tolerance-based learning programs. The research informants consisted of 16 participants: two principals, seven teachers, one administrative staff member, five students, and one parent or school committee representative. Informants were selected through snowball sampling, beginning with key informants who understood the planning and implementation process and continuing with other informants recommended because of their direct experience in the Gandong School activities.

Table 1. Research Informants

Informant Category	Number	Role in the Study
Principal	2	Decision makers and program directors
Teacher	7	Learning implementers, student mentors, and activity facilitators
Administrative staff	1	Administrative and technical communication support
Student	5	Activity participants and data sources on socio-pedagogical impact
Parent/school committee	1	Data source on family support and community perception

Data were collected through three techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, administrative staff, students, and parents to explore perceptions, experiences, management strategies, impacts, and program constraints. Second, participatory observations were conducted during activities that demonstrated interschool interaction, such as meetings, Panas Gandong activities, community service, religious-cultural activities, visits to houses of worship, and collaborative learning. Third, documentation was conducted by reviewing the memorandum of understanding, activity agendas, meeting notes, attendance lists, student reflections, teaching modules, photographs, and supporting documents. The memorandum of understanding between the two schools covered cooperation in religious literacy, cultural literacy, collaborative projects, teacher and student exchange, learning facilities and infrastructure, and learning-community collaboration.

Data analysis used constant comparative analysis. Data from interviews, observations, and documentation were transcribed, read repeatedly, and coded openly according to the research focus. Codes with similar meanings were grouped into categories and compared across data sources and sites. This process was conducted iteratively to obtain stable themes, such as

reflective leadership, internal coordination, external partnership, impacts on student attitudes, supporting factors, technical barriers, and dissemination of good practices. Thematic analysis helped identify patterns of meaning systematically, while constant comparison was used to assess similarities and differences between the two sites (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2014; Miles et al., 2014).

Trustworthiness was maintained through source, technique, and time triangulation; member checking with key informants; peer debriefing with supervisors and colleagues; and an audit trail consisting of field notes, transcripts, coding records, and research documents. The criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were used to ensure that the findings had traceable empirical foundations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethically, the researchers explained the purpose of the study to informants, protected personal data, and used informant codes such as KS, G, T, M, and OT to reduce the risk of personal identification

RESULTS

The results show that Gandong School Management does not operate as an incidental program but as a managerial process that connects school leadership, local wisdom, cross-cultural religious literacy, organizational structure, and stakeholder participation. The findings are presented through six interrelated themes.

1) Planning and Institutionalization of Gandong School

Program planning began with the reflective awareness of school leaders regarding the need to build a safe and educational interfaith encounter space. At SMA Kristen Rehoboth, the idea became stronger after teachers and principals participated in cross-cultural religious literacy activities. This experience encouraged a commitment to do something concrete for students' character formation, especially so that students could understand their own faith, respect the beliefs of others, and cooperate in social life.

At the planning stage, the principal did not work alone. Teachers, public relations staff, foundations, school committees, and partner institutions were involved in formulating activities that could be accepted by both schools. The memorandum of understanding became an important instrument because it provided formal legitimacy for cooperation. In managerial terms, the memorandum changed goodwill into a work agenda with direction, boundaries, and shared responsibilities.

Planning also demonstrated the integration of local and religious values. SMA Kristen Rehoboth used the cultural language of Gandong as a symbol of brotherhood, while SMA Al-Hilaal emphasized moderate Islamic values, *ukhuwah*, and peaceful living. These different

value bases did not create contradiction; instead, they enriched the program orientation and positioned Gandong School as a bridge between multicultural education and local-wisdom-based character education.

2) Internal Management: Structure, Coordination, and Reflection

Internal management in both schools was marked by task distribution, teacher coordination, administrative support, and reflection-based evaluation. The principal served as the program director, but implementation depended on the collective work of teachers, public relations officers, homeroom teachers, and administrative staff. Teachers not only conducted activities but also integrated tolerance and collaboration values into learning.

Internal coordination was conducted through meetings, role distribution, administrative preparation, and the development of shared understanding before interschool activities took place. Administrative staff contributed to correspondence, documentation, and technical communication. Teachers served as student mentors, discussion facilitators, and guardians of the learning atmosphere so that interfaith activities remained within a framework of mutual respect.

Student reflection became a crucial practice after activities. Reflection was used to identify what students learned, felt, and committed themselves to after participating in the program. In intercultural education, reflection works as a metacognitive mechanism that helps students transform encounters across difference into awareness, empathy, and openness.

3) External Management and Stakeholder Partnership

External management was realized through intensive communication among principals, public relations staff, teachers, foundations, committees, parents, and supporting institutions. The relationship between SMA Kristen Rehoboth and SMA Al-Hilaal did not stop at the signing of the memorandum of understanding. It developed into concrete activities, including the Gandong School declaration, Panas Gandong, iftar, community service, visits to houses of worship, environmental cleaning, teacher exchange, mobile teaching, and joint module development.

Stakeholder support was essential because interfaith activities may raise questions among parents or community members. Information was provided to parents so that activities would not be misunderstood as attempts to homogenize religious beliefs, but rather as learning opportunities to respect difference and live together. Support from foundations, committees, local government, Institut Leimena, religious figures, and communities strengthened program legitimacy and sustainability.

The external partnership also generated direct contact among students and teachers from different school communities. The activities created cooperative goals, institutional support, and repeated interaction, which are important conditions for reducing prejudice and building positive intergroup relationships.

Table 2. Synthesis of Gandong School Management Findings

Focus	Main Findings	Managerial Implications
Planning	Participatory, value-based, legitimized by a memorandum of understanding, and guided by cross-cultural religious literacy.	Collaborative planning requires reflective leadership and formal agreement.
Internal management	Task distribution, teacher coordination, administrative support, and student reflection were implemented systematically.	Schools need to make reflection part of monitoring character and intercultural competence.
External management	Interschool partnerships were realized through communication, declaration, social activities, and shared learning.	Stakeholder networks strengthen program legitimacy and sustainability.
Impact	Students became more open and tolerant; teachers became more collaborative; school services became more inclusive.	Interfaith programs can serve as school-based peace education strategies.
Supporting factors	Leadership, Gandong values, communication, consistency, foundation support, parental support, and external institutions.	Success requires synergy among values, structures, and community support.
Inhibiting factors	Scheduling and logistical constraints, initial awkwardness, and the need to clarify the program to parents.	Obstacles can be reduced through open communication and repeated activities.
Good practices	Panas Gandong, iftar, community service, visits to houses of worship, teacher exchange, and joint module development.	The model can be disseminated through teacher forums, seminars, school networks, and local policy.

4) Impact on Students, Teachers, Services, and School Culture

The main impact of the program was visible in changes in student attitudes. Informants stated that students became more open, less suspicious, less likely to choose friends based on religion, and more able to cooperate with students from another school. Some students who initially felt awkward gradually became accustomed to greeting, discussing, taking photographs, and joining activities with peers from the partner school.

At the teacher level, the program increased openness to collaboration and broadened pedagogical insight. Teachers began to view schools with different religious affiliations as learning partners rather than outsiders. Teacher exchange and joint module development encouraged teachers to build professional communication across institutions and to use local context and diversity as meaningful learning resources.

The impact on school culture appeared through the growth of a safer, friendlier, and more harmonious atmosphere. The schools became not only places for academic learning but also spaces for peaceful character formation. The integration of tolerance values into teaching modules and extracurricular activities strengthened the connection between management programs and learning processes.

5) Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The main supporting factors included visionary principal leadership, teacher commitment, intensive communication, support from parents and foundations, Gandong values as local wisdom, and involvement of external institutions. Leadership was important because principals translated local cultural values and cross-cultural religious literacy into concrete programs. Teachers operationalized activities, and stakeholders strengthened continuity.

The inhibiting factors were not fundamental; they were mostly technical and cultural. Technical constraints included schedule adjustment, logistics, facilities, and coordination between schools. Cultural constraints appeared in the early stages through student awkwardness, parental concern, and the need to clarify the meaning of interfaith activities. These obstacles were reduced through communication, program explanation, repeated activities, and trust building.

The findings show that successful collaboration does not mean the absence of obstacles. Collaboration requires the ability to negotiate differences, manage perceptions, and build trust gradually. Therefore, the sustainability of Gandong School depends on program consistency, leadership regeneration, documentation of good practices, and integration into school work plans.

6) Good Practices and Dissemination of the Model

Good practices generated by the program included Panas Gandong, iftar, joint community service, visits to houses of worship, vihara cleaning, teacher exchange, mobile teaching, cross-school English learning, joint module development, and the insertion of tolerance values into learning. These practices show that Gandong School does not focus only on ceremony, but also on social, academic, spiritual, and cultural activities.

Dissemination was carried out through cross-cultural religious literacy seminars, subject-teacher forums, training facilitation, publication of activities, and direct communication with other schools. Conceptually, the model emerging from this study can be formulated as a cycle: local values and interfaith literacy provide the foundation; reflective leadership designs the program; internal management organizes resources; external management builds networks; collaborative activities generate meaningful contact; reflection transforms experience into learning; and dissemination expands good practices

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that Gandong School Management expands the meaning of school management in multicultural and post-conflict educational contexts. School management is not merely a technical activity related to program administration, documentation, scheduling, supervision, or institutional reporting. Rather, it functions as a socio-pedagogical design that organizes values, relationships, learning experiences, institutional partnerships, and stakeholder participation. In this study, the two partner schools transformed the local wisdom of Gandong into a practical governance principle that guided interfaith collaboration, student interaction, teacher cooperation, and community engagement. This finding strengthens the view that effective school management must be responsive to the sociocultural realities of the community in which the school operates (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2020). In the Maluku context, Gandong is not only a cultural symbol of brotherhood but also a social ethic that can be translated into educational leadership, school culture, and collaborative learning practices.

The study also confirms that culturally grounded school management can become an important strategy for strengthening multicultural education. Multicultural education is often understood as the inclusion of cultural diversity in curriculum content, but the results of this study show that diversity becomes more meaningful when it is embedded in school routines, interschool programs, teacher collaboration, and student experiences. Banks (2015) argues that multicultural education requires the transformation of school structures and learning environments, not merely the addition of diversity-related topics. This is visible in the Gandong School Management model, where diversity was institutionalized through interschool

agreements, joint religious-cultural activities, student reflection, collaborative projects, and shared learning resources. Thus, Gandong School Management demonstrates that multicultural education can be strengthened when schools connect universal values of tolerance and justice with local cultural meanings that are familiar and acceptable to the community.

Another important implication concerns culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogy. The findings show that the two schools did not treat local wisdom as a decorative cultural element, but as a foundation for designing meaningful learning encounters. This is consistent with Gay's (2018) argument that culturally responsive teaching uses students' cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, and community values as resources for learning. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasizes that culturally relevant pedagogy should support academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. In the Gandong model, students learned tolerance not only through classroom instruction but also through direct encounters, shared activities, and reflection with peers from another religious school community. This confirms Paris's (2012) notion of culturally sustaining pedagogy, in which education should sustain the cultural and linguistic practices of communities while preparing students to participate in plural societies.

The findings further support the concept of collaborative professionalism. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) define collaborative professionalism as a form of professional work in which educators collaborate deeply, purposefully, and ethically to improve learning and student well-being. In this study, collaboration among principals, teachers, administrative staff, students, parents, foundations, and external institutions was not limited to formal coordination. It included shared planning, role distribution, cross-school teaching, mentoring, administrative support, student reflection, and dissemination of good practices. This indicates that sustainable interfaith collaboration requires internal organizational readiness before external partnership can be effective. Without internal trust, clear responsibility, and shared moral commitment, cross-school collaboration may remain ceremonial. Therefore, the Gandong model strengthens the argument that collaboration in education is not only a managerial technique but also a moral and professional practice (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Fullan, 2016; Rytivaara, 2012).

From the perspective of educational leadership, the findings show that reflective and value-based leadership played a central role in initiating and sustaining the program. The principals acted not only as administrative leaders but also as cultural translators and moral agents who connected local wisdom, religious literacy, and school development. Leithwood et al. (2020) explain that successful school leadership influences learning by setting direction, developing people, redesigning organizations, and improving instructional programs. These

dimensions are evident in the Gandong program: school leaders established the moral direction of interfaith collaboration, empowered teachers to participate, reorganized school activities around shared programs, and promoted learning experiences that fostered tolerance and empathy. This finding is also consistent with Bryk et al. (2010), who emphasize that school improvement depends on relational trust, professional capacity, family-community ties, instructional guidance, and leadership as an organizational driver.

The results also align with intergroup contact theory. Allport (1954) argues that contact between groups can reduce prejudice when it occurs under favorable conditions, such as equal status, common goals, cooperation, and institutional support. Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analysis further confirms that intergroup contact generally contributes to prejudice reduction, especially when supported by structured and positive interaction. Gandong School Management created these conditions through formal interschool agreements, repeated encounters, cooperative activities, and shared student projects. Students did not merely receive verbal messages about tolerance; they participated in structured encounters that allowed them to interact, cooperate, and reflect with peers from a different religious background. Through these experiences, religious difference could be reinterpreted not as a social boundary but as a basis for friendship, mutual respect, and shared responsibility.

The ecological dimension of the program is also significant. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory suggests that students' development is shaped by interactions among school, family, community, and broader sociocultural systems. The Gandong model involved not only students and teachers but also parents, school committees, foundations, local communities, religious actors, and supporting institutions. This broad participation strengthened the legitimacy of the program and reduced the possibility of misunderstanding. Epstein (2018) similarly argues that school-family-community partnerships are essential for improving educational outcomes and building supportive learning environments. In interfaith programs, such partnerships become even more important because religious and cultural sensitivities require transparent communication and community trust. The findings show that stakeholder engagement helped position the program as an educational effort for peace and mutual respect rather than as an attempt to blur religious identity.

The study also contributes to the literature on peace education and religious moderation. In post-conflict or socially sensitive contexts, schools have a strategic role in preventing prejudice, rebuilding trust, and developing peaceful civic dispositions. UNESCO (2015) highlights that global citizenship education should promote respect for diversity, human rights, empathy, and peaceful coexistence. The Gandong model operationalizes these goals within a

local cultural framework. Students were encouraged to understand their own religious identity while respecting others, which reflects the principle that religious moderation does not mean weakening belief but strengthening ethical coexistence. This finding is consistent with studies on Pela Gandong-based peace education, which show that Maluku's local wisdom can support reconciliation, tolerance, and social harmony (Hasudungan & Sartika, 2020; Wakano & Ag, 2019; Afdhal et al., 2024).

The managerial implication of this study is that schools in plural societies need explicit partnership designs that connect leadership commitment, formal agreements, internal coordination, teacher collaboration, stakeholder communication, student reflection, and public dissemination. Interfaith collaboration cannot rely only on goodwill. It requires governance instruments, clear roles, program continuity, documentation, and evaluation. Paletta (2012) argues that collaborative public management can improve school performance when partnerships are supported by accountability and shared governance. Similarly, Lemos (2017) emphasizes collaborative agency as a collective effort to transform social conditions. In the Gandong model, collaboration became effective because it was institutionalized through MoU documents, coordinated activities, and repeated engagement. This suggests that values must be translated into systems if they are to produce sustainable educational change.

Nevertheless, the Gandong model should not be copied mechanically. Each school community has its own local wisdom, social history, religious composition, and community sensitivities. Therefore, the model should be understood as a conceptual pathway rather than a rigid manual. Schools in other regions need to identify culturally meaningful values that can serve as ethical foundations for collaboration. They also need to develop measurable indicators of intercultural competence, such as openness, empathy, perspective-taking, communication across difference, cooperative behavior, and conflict sensitivity (Deardorff, 2006). Future studies should examine whether the attitudinal changes reported in this study are sustained over time through longitudinal or mixed-method designs. Wider school-network participation is also needed to test whether Gandong School Management can be adapted into a broader model of multicultural school leadership, peace education, and interfaith collaborative learning.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Gandong School Management is a local-wisdom-based model of interfaith collaborative school management that integrates reflective leadership, cross-cultural religious literacy, formal interschool partnership, internal coordination, external stakeholder support, collaborative learning activities, and student reflection. The model was implemented by SMA Kristen Rehoboth Ambon and SMA Al-Hilaal Ambon through

structured planning, shared activities, teacher collaboration, and dissemination of good practices. The main impacts were seen in students' openness, tolerance, empathy, intergroup interaction, teachers' collaborative professionalism, inclusive school services, and a more harmonious school culture. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in extending the concept of collaborative school management through the integration of local wisdom and interfaith literacy. The practical contribution lies in offering a contextual governance model for peace education, religious moderation, and multicultural learning in schools. The limitation of the study is its focus on two school sites and a qualitative design, which means the findings are not intended for statistical generalization. Further research should examine the Gandong School model across wider school networks, develop measurable indicators of intercultural competence, and assess the sustainability of the program through longitudinal or mixed-methods designs.

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