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Home-School Partnership for Accelerating Malaysia B40 Pupils' Literacy and Numeracy Skills

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Abstract
Although studies found that low-income (B40) pupils struggle to master multilingual literacy and numeracy (ML&N) skills and that establishing Home School Partnerships (HSP) is viable, there is no HSP model to restore and accelerate B40 Stage 1 (Years 1-3) pupils' ML&N skills. This study aimed to develop an HSP model. Semi-structured interviews with 24 principals, 28 teachers, and 24 B40 parents from four primary national, indigenous, Tamil, and Chinese suburban schools in Malaysia revealed 12 drivers for a sustainable home-like school, school-like home, and school-and-home-like community ecosystem aligned with SDGs 4 and 10, where parents and teachers work as partners.

Keywords: School Partnership Model; Parental Involvement; Literacy and Numeracy skills; SDGs 4 and 10

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1.0 Introduction

School closures during the COVID-19 pandemic considerably widened early learning gaps in Malaysia, particularly for Stage 1 (Years 1-3) pupils, who rely heavily on adult guidance and predictable learning routines. This challenge was intensified for lower-income households, classified as below 40 (B40) income, namely households that earn up to RM5,249 per month (USD 1,270) in Malaysia. Many B40 pupils struggle to master multilingual literacy and numeracy (ML&N) skills, and this struggle prevails in the post-COVID era. B40 pupils continue to be at a disadvantage compared to their peers from other income groups. At the policy level, the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013–2025) positions parents as essential partners in their children's learning. Globally, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and 10 reiterate the commitment to ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education. Additionally, Malaysia's latest development blueprints, including the Thirteenth Malaysia Plan and the *Ekonomi MADANI* framework, continue to emphasise the importance of improving language skills, numerical literacy, and active parental involvement in education. The documented persistent struggles of B40 pupils in mastering ML&N skills demonstrate the need to expand learning responsibility beyond schools and for parents and teachers to work as active partners. Involving parents would create a meaningful, supportive, and positive learning environment both in school and at home, where pupils are scaffolded to become independent learners (Rosales, 2023). Parental involvement is a key predictor of students' success (Sharma, 2024); therefore, schools and homes can "leverage each other's strengths to support

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students, particularly those at risk of educational disengagement" (Anazia et al., 2025, p. 1). However, a Home–School Partnership (HSP) model that actively involves parents in restoring and accelerating the ML&N skills of B40 pupils is unavailable in Malaysia.

To address the lack of an HSP model for the Malaysian context, the following research questions are addressed in this article:

1. How willing are parents and teachers to form a home-school partnership?
2. What are the drivers of a Home-School Partnership model?
3. What constitutes a sustainable home-school partnership model?

2.0 Literature Review

Research suggests that literacy and numeracy (L&N) skill development is, in the long run, linked and predictive of each other (Khanolainen et. al., 2020). Children who struggle in one domain are often found to experience difficulties in another (Purpura et al., 2019), and those from lower-income households are also at a disadvantage in acquiring these skills (Hendrix et al., 2017). It is said that children should be able to read by age 10, and being unable to read will constrain their opportunities for further learning and later mathematical outcomes (Koponen et al., 2019). As mastery of ML & N (Malay, English, Chinese, Tamil) skills is paramount, the mechanism for restoring and accelerating B40 pupils' mastery of these skills should be prioritised in the early years of education in Malaysia.

Studies have found that home-school links have a positive impact on literacy development among low-achieving students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Luo et al., 2021). Additionally, parents with limited literacy skills (Mundy & Hares, 2020) or lower educational levels (Won-Tack, 2021) can enhance their children's learning at home. Parental involvement, direct and indirect support, informal home literacy (shared storybook reading/related activities) and numeracy (numeracy-related practices) education (Khanolainen et al., 2020) are more meaningful in supporting ML&N development. Researchers highlighted critical drivers for effective HSPs, including developing awareness of HSP, learning environment (Masondo & Mabaso, 2025), communication, collaboration, community involvement (Anazia et al., 2025), guidance (Hart et al., 2024), trust (Hummel & Anders, 2026), and resources (Rosales, 2023).

The educational landscape has witnessed a surge in global research on the positive outcomes of HSP (Çalışkan & Ulaş, 2022). Similarly, studies aimed at developing young learners' literacy demonstrate the viability of HSP in the Malaysian context. The Smart Partnership in Reading in English (SPIRE) project (Bava Harji et al., 2019; 2017; 2016; 2014) and the Multilingual Mobile Storybook Reader (MMSR) study (See et al., 2019) used printed English storybooks and multilingual e-storybooks, respectively, to develop the literacy skills of five-year-old pre-schoolers. These studies found a positive correlation between parental involvement and children's multilingual literacy development. Being illiterate or a non-native speaker did not hinder parents from being involved. It was more their willingness to forge a partnership with the school and actively scaffold their child's literacy skills at home that mattered. The signed PACT (Parent, Children and Teacher partnership) forged the seal to work as partners (Bava Harji et al., 2017)

Other studies found that parents in Malaysia are willing to be involved (Ngadni & Chen, 2024) and recognise the importance of being involved (Abdullah Kamal & Alias, 2025). However, B40 primary pupils (Kashfi et al., 2022) and Form 1 students (Zamri Mahamod et al., 2021) demonstrate limited literacy skills. Their persistent struggles to master ML&N skills thus call for parental involvement and for expanding learning responsibilities beyond formal classroom boundaries. In line with the teachers' and principals' positive views on the importance of HSPs, establishing sustainable HSPs can be a critical strategy in ways that schools alone may not achieve.

The HSP model proposed in this article is theoretically grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) key concepts of language, social interaction, scaffolding, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It embodies a hybrid paradigm in which teachers and parents, as partners, scaffold B40 pupils' mastery of ML&N skills through social and physical interactions with storybooks or ML&N-related activities within their ZPD, from dependent to independent learners. Critical drivers for parents and teachers to work together in restoring and accelerating ML&N skills were identified. This model reduces instructional dependencies on schools and creates sustainable learning habits supported by home-school ML&N-rich environments.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the factors and core components of a home-school partnership model.

3.1 Participants

This qualitative study was conducted in Klang Valley, Malaysia, using semi-structured interviews. An integrative review and qualitative synthesis two-stage approach was adopted for the study. The first stage included problem framing, prior working documents, and relevant literature on Stage 1 primary school learning loss, B40 household constraints and parental engagement. This enabled us to situate the study within the existing policy priorities and empirical findings. The second stage involved semi-structured interviews with parents from four primary schools: National, Indigenous, Tamil, and Chinese. Interviews were conducted with 24 principals, 28 teachers and 24 B40 parents from four primary schools. To ensure credibility, the sample was chosen from national, indigenous, Tamil, and Chinese suburban schools. This aimed to reflect the composition of the Malaysian school community and society in Klang Valley, where the schools are primarily suburban, and the proportion of B40 pupils is higher.

3.2 Instruments

Qualitative data analysis (QDA) Miner Lite Version 3.0, a qualitative software, was used to conduct the thematic analysis. The narratives provided insights into parents' constraints, readiness to engage, and preferred modes of communication and partnership. Parents' responses were coded into four themes: (a) willingness and readiness to partner, (b) constraints, (c) communication channels, and (d)

enabling factors. These themes were translated into the design features of a sustainable HSP model.

4.0 Findings

This section is organised to answer the research questions. Within the limitations of this article, three quotes reflecting the principals, teachers and parents' feedback are cited for each theme. The quotes are verbatim, and translations are provided wherever the native language was used. The themes are sequenced based on frequency of mention. Principals, Teachers and Parents are labelled Pr, T, and Pa, respectively, to ensure confidentiality.

4.1 Willingness to form a Home-School Partnership

All members of the school community expressed their willingness to form an HSP.

> …the school is willing to form HSP and share information on this matter…(Pr1)
>
> ... to form and implement the program to enhance basic literacy and numeracy skills…(T15)
>
> …Yes. I am willing because I believe that a partnership between parents and schools can help improve my child's academic achievement…(Pa13)

Although some parents noted that work commitment hindered their direct participation in HSP, they are willing to scaffold their children at home. This willingness stems from the belief that cooperation between parents and the school can significantly help improve a child's academic achievement.

> … At this time, I am not in a position to actively partner with the school on reading/math support. I trust and appreciate the school's approach, and I'll continue to support in the ways I can at home…(Pa15)
>
> …Time constraint…working 8 am to 8 pm. We can do informal lessons at home. The teachers can communicate with me and share materials, which I can do with my daughter…(Pa17)
>
> …As long as time permits, it's fine…willing to cooperate whenever time is available at home and on weekends**...**(Pa8)

4.2 Drivers for Home-School Partnership Model

Based on the interviews, 12 distinct themes emerged as drivers of the HSP model: *awareness of HSP, communication, collaboration, trust, home-school learning environment, guidance, resources, volunteerism, financial support, recognition and appreciation, community involvement and monitoring HSP.*

Awareness of HSP

Pertinent to the conception of an HSP is the need to develop awareness of its importance and motivate parents to be involved.

> *…providing awareness and motivating parents to be involved in the partnership…*(Pr10)
>
> *…awareness campaign…parents must be made aware through briefings, workshops about the importance of the home-school partnership…*(T15)
>
> *…Parental understanding of the program, awareness of the importance of the program to children's development…*(Pa7)

Communication

The need for bidirectional communication was frequently cited, with emphasis on two-way communication, using multiple channels.

> *…foster open,* clear, *consistent, respectful two-way communication. Use multiple channels…Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram to share students' progress and feedback…*(Pr3)
>
> *…Formal and informal discussions…provide ideas for parents to do at home…to encourage them to be involved at home…*(T7)
>
> …home visit, written communication…information sharing…(Pa7)

Collaboration

Collaboration is essential for both parties to work together towards a common objective.

> *… collaboration on how to help their children at home*...(Pr1)
>
> *…create a culture of continuous cooperation through combined activities to unite both parties as partners…*(T18)
>
> *…Collaboration between parents and schools can help improve my child's academic achievement. With the support of both parties, the child will be more motivated and receive more effective guidance in reading and mathematics…*(Pa12)

Trust

All the principals shared about building trust, respect, educational goals and expectations in HSP.

> *…build trust, strong relationships and partnerships…*(Pr3)
>
> *…trust and mutual respect for partnership…*(Pr1)
>
> *…share educational goals and expectations…*(Pr2)

Home-School environments

The need for schools to create a conducive learning environment, such as a dedicated literacy space/reading room, to facilitate HSP.

> *…Create a welcoming, inclusive environment…*(Pr 1)
>
> *…conducive infrastructure…reading room…*(T3)
>
> *…Literacy Space. The school can have a special HSP room for parents…*(Pa10)

Principals and teachers also urged parents to create an ML&N-rich learning environment.

> *…create multiple language and maths-rich environment…prepare materials and monitor children at home…*(Pr2)

…have shared reading and interactive story creation at home… (Pr3)

…parents need to monitor and always provide feedback on their child's progress at home…(T8)

Guidance

Provision for guidance through training and workshops for parents and motivating teachers was highlighted.

…organise workshops to train us how to help children at home…(Pr3)

…for awareness of importance of parental involvement…train on parenting, emotional support, emotional intelligence…(T3)

…sessions on motivating parents and teachers...(T8)

Resources

All parties remarked on making provisions for ML&L-related materials and training resources to scaffold their children at home:

...use materials accessible anywhere… so parents can support their child's reading and mathematics at home…(Pr3)

…prepare resources for reading and mathematics activities that can be carried out anywhere …(T19)

…providing activity materials, additional reading and numeracy training resources for parents to do with children at home …(Pa8)

Recognition and Appreciation

The school community called for recognition and appreciation of volunteerism and involvement:

…recognition given to parents who contribute to HSP…(Pr1)

… give awards or certificates for active parents and teachers who are involved in HSP...(T19)

…celebrate parent involvement in any form of home learning and volunteering…(Pa5)

Financial support

All principals mentioned financial support for HSP. They noted that funds can be sourced from the government, parents, and NGO's.

...financial support needed…budget allocation from PPD [district officer] to finance materials, workshops and infrastructure…(Pr1)

…PIBG or NGO to financially support HSP…(Pr2)

…good financial resources are important…home visit we bring some food items for the B40 families…(Pr3)

Community involvement

Expanding the school community to involve external parties, including NGOs and alumni.

…involve NGO and the community to support HSP…(Pr1)

...involvement by teachers, parents, community and external parties…(T5)

…suggesting former students who have been successful to involve and teach new children…(T8)

Volunteerism

Teachers requested parental volunteerism at school and reading mentorship. In response, working parents who are keen to be involved suggest flexible involvement strategies.

…parental volunteerism is needed in school…(T14)

…volunteer as 'reading mentors' or assist in reading sessions weekly or supervise reading corner in school…(T5)

…offer flexible opportunities for involvement…(Pa10)

Monitor HSP

Regarding sustainability, the need to assess HSP was also highlighted.

... conduct structured assessment on effectiveness of home-school partnership…(T15)

…evaluate effectiveness, involve parents in identifying challenges to co-create…(Pa7)

Other pertinent feedback included a call for "school leaders and teachers must actively support the partnership vision, empower children to be responsible for their learning both at school and home," (Pa14) and "engagement in decision making with parent involvement in school governance and setting goals" (Pa4). Another parent concluded, "Parental understanding of the program, parental awareness of the importance of the program to children's development. Parents play an important role in the education of every child to create a quality generation" (Pa10)

4.3 HSP Model

Drawing on Vygotsky's social-cultural theory and the interviewees' feedback, the proposed HSP model outlines FOUR key processes:

- Process 1: Creating ML&N Environments
  Creating physical ML&N learning environments with storybooks and related activities.
- Process 2: Parents' and Teachers' Mediated ML&N Learning.
  As 'designers', adults create learning environments, and as 'coaches', they scaffold children's mastery of ML&N skills through social interactions and experiences that are internalised within the ZPD.
- Process 3: ML&N-Related Activities.
  Children use ML&N-related activities to practice their newly acquired ML&N skills, with or without adult assistance.
- Process 4: Restoration and acceleration of ML&N skills.
  Children gradually become independent readers and mathematics readers.

Figure 1 presents the HSP model.

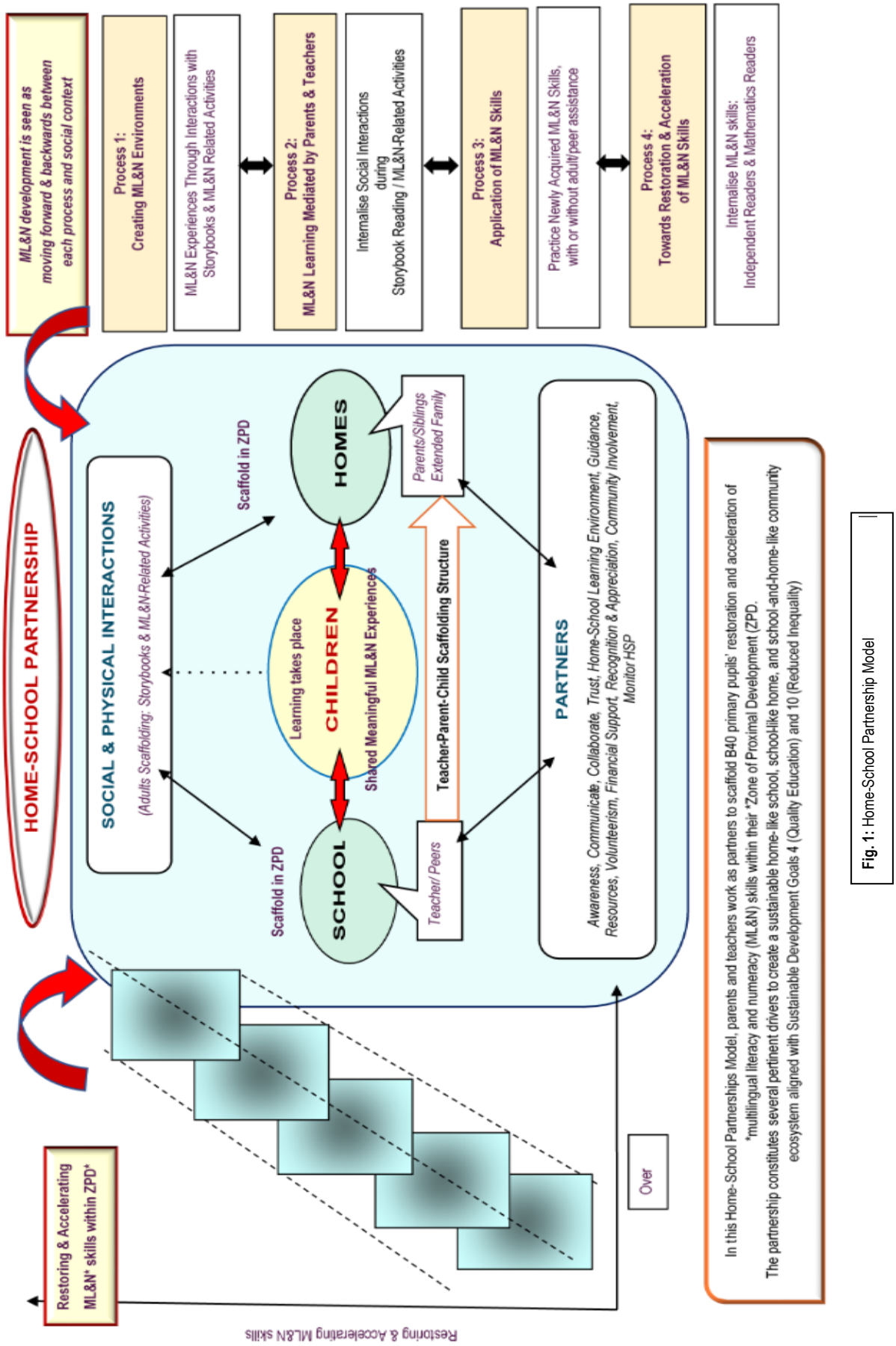
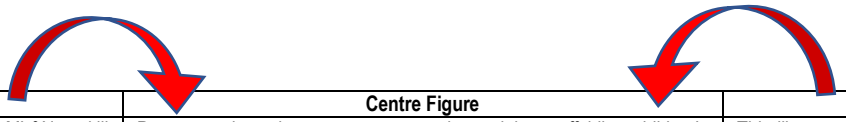


Fig. 1: Home-School Partnership Model

4.3.1 Application of Vygotsky's Social-cultural Theory in the Home-School Partnership Model

Descriptions of individual figures correspond to their placement in the model in Fig. 1.



Left Figure	Centre Figure	Right Figure
This illustrates the ML&N skill restoration and acceleration within ZPD, mediated by teachers and parents. The smaller boxes reflect the upward progression of restoration and acceleration of ML&N skills over time. It is presented as a linear upward progression, and 'time' is a form of simplification. Within the limitations of computer graphics, the processes appear discrete and distinct from one another. However, in actual contexts, there could be more gradual movements and overlaps in the processes of restoring and accelerating ML&N skills.	Parents and teachers are seen as role models, scaffolding children's mastery of ML&N skills within the ZPD. They are 'designers' for physical interactions and 'coaches' during social interactions with children. As 'designers', they create physical ML&N environments (multilingual storybooks and related activities) for learning to take place. As 'coaches', scaffolding through social interactions enables children to engage in active construction and acquisition of ML&N skills. Children are seen as internalising social interactions within the ZPD through shared meaningful experiences with the teacher, peers, parents, siblings and extended family members. Eventually, they will be able to perform reading and mathematics tasks independently. The teacher-parent-child scaffolding structure is a multi-layered support system: schools scaffold parents, who in turn, scaffold their child's ML&N skills. The driving factors for sustainable HSP include awareness, communication, collaboration, trust, home-school learning environments, guidance, resources, volunteerism, financial support, recognition and appreciation, community involvement, and monitoring HSP.	This illustrates the ML&N restoration and acceleration processes. This process is to create environments for ML&N experiences. It aims to create opportunities for ML&N learning through storybooks and related activities. Children internalise social interactions. The process moves forward and backwards between each level of social context in schools and homes. It provides opportunities for children to practice their newly acquired ML&N skills with or without adult assistance. Children gradually move towards mastery and acceleration of ML&N skills *as* independent readers and mathematical readers.

Fig. 2. Description of Home-School Partnership Model

5.0 Discussion

HSP is not a peripheral learning aid but a central mediating mechanism in literacy and numeracy development, especially when socio-economic vulnerability continues to restrict comprehensive continuity and home language exposure. The school community's willingness to be involved and forge a partnership reaffirms the directionality of reciprocity towards shared aligned optimism regarding collaborative B40 pupils ML&N skills. Similar to the findings of Bava Harji et al. (2017) and Ngadni and Chen (2024), the school principal, teachers, and parents expressed their willingness to forge a home-school partnership to achieve the common goal of developing their child's ML&N skills. Although working parents are not willing to volunteer at school, they do not hesitate to scaffold their children at home. They called for teachers to continue communicating with them and share materials to scaffold their children's learning at home. Thus, with parents' positive attitudes towards forging HSP, schools need to address this limited involvement. Both schools and working parents must deliberate on possible ways the school can scaffold them, as they, in turn, will scaffold their children at home. In this case, a multi-layered support system by schools is essential; teachers will need to scaffold working parents who, in turn, will scaffold their children. The teacher-parent-child (TPC) scaffolding structure must be embedded in HSP models.

The thematic data clearly outline 12 pertinent drivers of a sustainable HSP model. Similar to previous studies, the school community highlighted the need to develop parents' awareness of HSP, maintain consistent bi-directional communication, form active collaboration between partners, establish trust between partners, create and monitor conducive home-school learning environments, provide guidance, resources, volunteerism and community involvement as drivers for effective HSP. However, additional drivers that must be considered for a sustainable HSP in the Malaysian context include financial support, recognition and appreciation of teachers' and parents' involvement, and monitoring the effectiveness of HSP.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study addressed three-pronged research questions: to explore the school community's willingness and the factors that affect the formation of an HSP Model, as well as the core components that comprise the HSP Model. In conclusion, firstly, the school community displays willingness to form an HSP; secondly, the 12 distinct themes that emerged as drivers for the HSP model are *awareness of HSP, communication, collaboration, trust, home-school learning environment, guidance, resources, volunteerism, financial support, recognition and appreciation, community involvement and monitoring HSP*; thirdly, the HSP model provides for the creation of a sustainable home-school-community ecosystem with parents and teachers working as partners.

The results provide insights into the importance of the HSP Model, where parents and teachers work as partners to scaffold the B40-primary pupils' restoration and acceleration of ML&N skills. Hence, schools should adopt this model to create opportunities for the school community, comprising principals, teachers, families, and pupils, to collaboratively drive the minimisation of learning loss and acceleration of learning gains within a harmonious and sustainable home-school community ecosystem. Applying Vygotsky's social-cultural theory, this HSP model provides a structure for schools and parents to work as partners in enhancing pupils' learning journey towards quality education. This aligns with SDG 4, in achieving *Quality Education*, and SDG 10, in *Reducing Inequality* in Malaysian society by providing equitable education.

7.0 Suggestion for Future Research

The main limitation of this study was its qualitative methodology and the scope of the suburban area in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Additionally, the synthesis draws on existing literature and parent excerpts rather than causal estimates. Therefore, they should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive results. Future studies should incorporate structured surveys and quasi-experimental or mixed-methods approaches to assess the causal impact and cost-effectiveness of HSP components.

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Paper Contribution to the Related Field of Study

The Home-School Partnership model incorporates 12 drivers to create a sustainable home-like school, school-like home, and school-and-home-like community ecosystem aligned with Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education) and 10 (Reduced Inequality). This sustainable home-school community ecosystem may enhance pupils' learning journey towards achieving quality education.

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