A different result of community participation in education: an Indonesian case study of parental participation in public primary schools

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Abstract Parental participation in school management is regarded as a good thing according to the rationale that local people know better and are able to be more responsive to their own needs. However, little is understood about the implications of the School Operational Support policy for community participation in education. This study investigated parental participation in the context of education decentralisation with regard to the changing situation in which the Indonesian government provides sufficient funds for school operational costs. Using a qualitative inquiry, researchers collected data through document analyses, questionnaires and interviews with stakeholders of two public primary schools in Depok, Indonesia. The study found that prior to the Free School Program, parental participation was limited to parents' financial contribution and associated matters. However, since school was made free, parents' involvement in school budgeting has become very limited; they are no longer engaged in the planning of allocations, and neither they nor the school committees are able to make inputs into decision making; even the functions of the school committees are limited to rubber stamping the school budget.

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Introduction

The changes in the world situation after World War II led to public dissatisfaction in education (McGinn and Welsh 1999; Daun 2002) throughout the northern hemisphere. Education 'tended to be inefficient and unresponsive to changing circumstances' (Bray 2001, p. 8). At the same time, the private sector produced successful examples with restructuring efforts, devolving authority to lower levels, retaining strategic decisions at central levels and being more client centered in their operations. The changes led to the adoption of efficiency and effectiveness principles in running public institutions, which, in the education sector, are associated with the transfer of authority to the school level.

It is argued that local people know better and are able to be more responsive to their own needs (McGinn and Welsh 1999). Locating authority locally seems more efficient than decision making by central governments whose decisions often miss their targets and take a longer time to implement. People who work in local schools, or who live locally and are the local school's stakeholders, such as parents, the argument goes, will efficiently gather information relevant to their own purposes and will be empowered by their participation.

In Indonesia, the demise of Soeharto's regime in 1998 brought significant change to the education sector. For the first time since modern schooling was introduced by the Dutch colonial government, the education sector was managed at the district level, having previously always

been managed centrally (Kristiansen and Pratikno 2006; Raihani 2007). In 2002, the government enacted a new regulation about community participation at the school level, creating a new 'governing body' called the school committee (SC) that would change the previous practice of excluding the community, especially parents, from power (Sumintono 2009). Another significant change occurred in 2005, when the government introduced the School Operational Support (BOS) policy (*Bantuan Operasional Sekolah*, or School Operational Support) which was intended to eliminate parents' financial contribution to a school's operational costs and make basic educational services (years 1–9) completely free (SMERU 2006).

The main objective of the present study was to investigate school stakeholders' perspectives and practices regarding the implementation of the BOS policy toward parental participation at the public primary school level. This study's further objective was to determine the impact of the BOS policy on the roles of school committee as well as to investigate how the schools managed to overcome the challenges. This paper begins with a theoretical approach to community participation in education as discussed in international literature, followed by a historical review of societal participation in Indonesian education. We then describe our methodology, report our findings and discuss their implications; the papers ends with a conclusion.

Community participation in education

The concept of participation has become mainstream in contemporary development discourse (Rahnema 1992). It has a significant place in the rhetoric of development coming from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), development institutions and the governments of developing countries (Michener 1998). In academic studies, the concept has been employed widely and to some extent has come to serve as a panacea in resolving the complex collection of development problems.

Salient to the participation discourse is the notion of power, which cannot be separated from participation. For example, according to many Participatory Action Research (PAR) theorists such as Rahman (1995) and Chambers (1997), the aim of participation is to achieve power, 'a special kind of power—people's power—which belongs to the oppressed and exploited classes and groups and their organizations' (Fals-Borda, as cited in Rahnema 1992, p. 120). It is clear that their interpretations of participation should include the notion of power or control as the ultimate goal of participation. This is also noted by Nelson and Wright (1995, p. 1), who commented that 'shifting power is inevitable as a consequence of participation.'

On the other hand, others define participation merely as the involvement of people or as making a contribution. According to Oakley (1991), participation is involvement in the decision-making processes of the implementation of development programs, sharing in the benefits of such programs, and involvement in the evaluation of such programs.

Community participation is a more specific conception of community-level involvement. It has been widely promoted by the United Nations since the 1970s and connotes the direct involvement of ordinary people in local affairs (Midgley 1986). However, the contribution of community participation to the empowerment of people is in doubt. Botes and Van Rensburg (2000) argued that in some instances, community participation is an occasion merely for selling preconceived proposals rather than for genuinely empowering communities. For the state, community participation appears to be a means of maintaining power relations in society and ensuring the silence of the poor; it certainly pays less attention to benefiting the poor. Similarly, formal channels of community participation do not necessarily benefit local communities (Rahman 1993). In particular, when community organizations are not democratically elected, the involvement of local leaders may not represent and reflect the views and perspective of the broader community (Botes and Van Rensburg 2000). One of the biggest challenges of promoting community participation is to ensure that marginalized people, who may have neither the capacity nor the desire to participate, are involved in the process (White 1996).

A broad distinction captured by the vast literature on and practices of participation is that between participation as a means and as an end. Where participation is interpreted as a means, it is essentially described as a state or an input into a development program; where it is interpreted as an end in itself, it is referred to as a process with the outcome of meaningful participation (Oakley and Marsden 1984). To put this into perspective, Bray (2001) quotes Arnstein's 'ladder' of community participation (1969 as cited in Bray 2001) that divided the level of participation into three groups with a total of eight rungs. The first group is called 'non-participation' and consists of two rungs: manipulation and therapy; the second group is 'degrees of tokenism' with three rungs, which consecutively are informing, consultation and placation; the last three rungs that belong to 'degrees of citizen/community power' are partnership, delegated power and citizen control. The first two groups (five rungs of the ladder) can be regarded as participation as a means; and the group of 'degrees of community power' can be regarded as both participation as a means and as an end in itself.

Community participation in education has an extensive history around the globe, beginning long before the twentieth century, with educational services provided

mainly by churches (or other religious organizations) and voluntary agencies (Bray 2003). However, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, advocacy for community participation again came to the fore, as the government delegated certain powers to the school level as part of educational decentralization movement known as school-based management (SBM). In the context of SBM, the schools exercise power with regard to curricula, personnel, and budgets which was previously held by their superiors at district or provincial/state level.

Murphy and Beck (1995, p. 14) noted that a 'central feature of SBM is the site council.' While site councils vary in composition and responsibilities, most writers agree that it is within a site council that the decision-making authority has been extended down the professional hierarchy to stakeholders who have not traditionally been involved—the teachers and parents. Once empowered, these groups—the ones closest to the students—can make better decisions, and school performance has the potential to improve (Wohlstetter et al. 1994). Through this process, parents and local communities become active stakeholders in educational governance at the school level. The community is expected to be involved in the decision-making process and to be aware of any school issues that arise, such as budget allocations. Some developing countries have experienced successful implementation such Escuela Nueva in Colombia and Guatemala (Kline 2002), while other countries show some progress like in Mexico (Ornelas 2000), Chile (Schiefelbein and Schiefelbein 2000) and Nepal (Parajuli 2003).

Bauch and Goldring (1998), in their article on parents and teachers in school governance, define participation as the involvement of parents to the degree of providing input or being consulted about school affairs or the children's progress, but without the opportunity to exercise influence. On the other hand, empowerment is defined as parents' ability to exercise influence within a school, typically through decision-making forums, which is usually accompanied by legitimated sources of power and authority (Goldring and Shapira 1993). It is the notion of power that distinguishes between these two definitions of participation and empowerment. However, Deshler and Sock's (1985) definitions are somewhat different in that participation, and empowerment is considered as a continuum rather than two separate concepts. This study utilizes Deshler and Sock's concept of participation as a continuum with empowerment as the final point to explain parents' access to and control over school financial resources.

Indonesia's education: the context of the study

In 1901, the Netherlands government which occupied Indonesia as a Dutch colonial territory started implementing an ethical policy (*ethische politiek*) to fulfill their perceived responsibility to improve the social and economic situation of the indigenous population (van der Veur 1969; Lee 1995). From this beginning, formal schooling in Indonesia mushroomed with a complicated and segregated education system for local people (*pribumi*), and public schools for eastern foreigners and descendants of Europeans controlled by the colonial government (Raihani and Sumintono 2010). Public schools in this era provided good-quality education fully supported by the colonial government, while most *pribumi* could only can attend village primary schools for 3 years funded mainly by native princes (Bray and Thomas 1998). During the Japanese occupation (1942–1945), the segregated education system was abolished to give educational opportunity to *pribumi* mostly at the primary school level, which was extended to 6 years and is still operating today (Djajadiningrat n.d.). During both colonial governments, parental involvement as part of community participation in the school was non-existent (Poerbakawatja 1970).

After Indonesia declared independence on August 17, 1945, and during the 1950s, the student enrollment increased at the elementary school level until the number of students reached more than 6 million in more than 31,000 schools across Indonesia (Poerbakawatja 1970). The number was five times higher than enrollments during the Japanese occupation. The rapid development of education needed to be funded but the new republic did not have sufficient funds. In terms of helping schools to run, the government relied on community support and required parents to pay a school tuition fee. The MoEC (Ministry of Education and Culture) issued decree number 58438/Kab on December 6, 1954, concerning *Panitia Pembantu Pemeliharaan Sekolah* (committee for school maintenance and assistance) for a more operational and detailed implementation of the stipulation in Article 28 of the Education Law (Law 4/1950) about community support to schools (Poerbakawatja 1970). Later, the name of this new committee was changed to match the parent–teacher organizations in the United States. Translated into Indonesian, it became *Persatuan Orang tua Murid dan Guru* (POMG).

The decree stated that the POMG was the only body which could collect money from parents. Principals and teachers were not officially involved. However, Poerbakawatja (1970) notes that the intention not to involve the principal was difficult to maintain, and the POMG became the principals' instrument. In addition, in order to make the work of the POMG easier, the role of principals was widened and the principal became the person who in practice collected money from parents. This sometimes occurred regardless of parents' economic background (Poerbakawatja 1970). Reports show that money gathered from parents by the POMG was 'paying a major share of

the upkeep of schools including the allowance of teachers' (Lee 1995, p. 171).

Another significant change in the New Order era began in 1974 when, with the rising oil revenues, the government increased the education budget in the next 5-year development plan by 12-fold of the previous 5 years (Beeby 1979). The government launched the *Inpres* (presidential instruction) program which aimed to build one school in each village (Duflo 2004).

In the MoEC decree number 17/O/197 (Satori 2001) issued in 1973, the POMG was abolished and the BP3 (acronym for *Badan Pembantu Penyelenggaraan Pendidikan* or educational assistance body) became the vehicle to accommodate community participation at the school level in the New Order era. The BP3 had responsibility for community participation such as establishing relationships and cooperation, representing parents in school activities, and collecting subscriptions from parents (Cohen 2001; Sidi 2001). The members of the BP3 were the school principal (as supervisor), teachers' representatives, parents' representatives and community members. However, because the principal had most power in the school, people who joined the BP3 (parents, teachers and community members) were selected and appointed by him/her. Then, as Cohen (2001, p. 73) points out, 'the role of BP3, in most cases, has become one of establishing fees that parents are to pay for their children to participate in school,' which was similar to the POMG roles in the previous era (Lee 1995). One of the reasons for this situation was that the normal financing patterns provided by the government were far from adequate to cover even basic expenditures such as paper and ink, water, electricity, chalk/markers, building maintenance and salaries for non-permanent teachers (Bray and Thomas 1998; Yonezawa and Muta 2001).

Ghazali's (2005) intensive study of the unit cost of education across Indonesia found that parents' contribution to education was higher than the government contribution at the primary school level. A study conducted by Supriadi (2003) found the interesting fact that money from parents through the BP3 for some public primary schools in large cities contributed up to 89 % of the non-salary budget annually. Moreover, the principal (with some of the teachers) controlled the school budget of which money from parents formed a substantial part, but the school usually did not report the use of these funds, or make a transparent financial report to parents. According to Cohen (2001, p. 74), this kind of activity 'becomes corrupted in actual implementation.'

The Asian financial crisis of 1997 had a unique impact on Indonesia, causing a regime change, with Soeharto stepping down in May 1998 after 32 years in power. Thereafter, the country underwent significant change with the implementation of the autonomy law, which transferred the managerial and financial responsibilities of nearly all public sectors, including education, to the district level, abolishing the centralization that had been practiced since the colonial era (Kristiansen and Pratikno 2006; Sumintono 2009). Ideas about SBM became popular and the accepted strategy for improving educational quality. The Minister of Education in April 2002 released a decree (number 044/U/ 2002) stipulating the formation as 'governing bodies' of an Education Council (EC) at the district level and a school committee (SC) to replace the BP3 at the school level. According to the regulation, SC is more than the BP3 whose only function was to collect money from parents. The SC roles, for example, include being an advisory agency, supporting agency, controlling agency and mediator (Sumintono 2009).

However, studies show that the establishment of SC and EC seems problematic, and in most cases, the role of the SC is limited. Moreover, the link between the establishment of a SC and its provision of wider room for community participation is not clear yet. According to Sumintono (2009), the policy about the 'governing bodies' which lacked clarity and was centrally conceived, seemed to be politically inspired; furthermore, the policy intent might actually slow the process of decentralization. Regarding the implementation at district level, Amirrachman (2004) and Sumintono (2009) suggested that in actual practice, decentralization does not necessarily result in more community involvement in education.

In terms of practice at the school level, particularly primary schools, several studies presented mixed results. Studies by Heyward et al. (2011) and Bandur (2012) in different locations but both using samples where SC members are nurtured and trained found that even at the early stage of their establishment, primary schools' SCs provided for community participation with potentially positive impact on education quality. Bjork's (2009) study, conducted in several primary schools in Central Java, found that the effects of changes with the establishment of school committee depended on the relationship between the principals, the SC and the parents; if all components trust and support each other, they will have a positive impact or vice versa. However, Chen's (2011) study revealed a different situation, as described below:

> …the level of parental participation and voice in school management is extremely low in Indonesia. While the role of school committees is still limited to community relations, school facilities, and other administrative areas of school management, school principals, together with teachers, are much more empowered to assert professional control of the schools. The accountability system has remained weak in Indonesia's school system, which is reflected

by inadequate information flow to parents, as well as seemingly low parental awareness of the need to hold schools accountable. (p. 1)

The rise of the world's crude oil price in 2004–2005 forced the Indonesian government to adjust the petrol price for domestic consumption, which immediately generated protests and demonstrations by the public. In order to placate the public, the Indonesian government announced that, starting from July 2005, the basic education services of 6 years at primary level and 3 years at junior secondary level across Indonesia would be completely free as part of a program of revocation of the petrol price subsidy (SMERU 2006). The Free School Program (FSP) provides funds called *Bantuan Operasional Sekolah* (BOS, or School Operational Support), directly to each school, based on the number of student enrollments. The FSP marks the new mind-set of the Indonesian government that, for the first time since the colonial era, no differentiation is made between public and private schools in terms of receiving funds from the state. So, public primary schools starting from the academic year 2005 are prohibited from collecting money from parents in any way, particularly through school committees, because they receive enough funds to operate with BOS. This study investigated parental participation in education within this new educational context.

Methodology

This research used the qualitative approach which can be defined as the study of people in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Creswell 1998). Qualitative research draws upon what is known as an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivist social scientists are interested in people's experiences, thoughts, interactions, emotions and the ways they understand a particular issue; in short, an interpretivist researcher intends to reveal 'the rules of the game' (Kilpatrick 1988). In this study, the 'game' is community participation in education, and the 'rules' are the regulation regarding school committees and the associated school stakeholders' opinions and expectations. The settings of this study were two public primary schools in Depok, West Java, Indonesia, that have been implementing the policy for more than 6 years.

A case study design was applied for this study because it is appropriate for understanding a contemporary phenomenon, such as participation, within a real-life context, when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posted, and the investigator has little control over events (Yin 1994). In essence, it is a methodology capable of opening the door to the 'sense making' process created and used by individuals involved in the phenomena, events, groups or organizations under study (Berg 2007). For this study, the phenomenon of participation was assumed to consist of social interaction as it occurs within the particular contexts of educational decentralization policy and the FSP.

One major issue to be addressed concerning case study methodology is where to draw the boundaries. For this particular study, the boundaries were defined as follows: firstly, it was conducted in Depok, Indonesia; secondly, it involved public, not private, primary schools; thirdly, community participation in this study was limited to the parents' participation and did not include other stakeholders' participation; and fourthly, parental participation in this study was limited to the factors of access to and control over financial resources. By setting these boundaries, it was expected that this case study would produce a particular descriptive, inductive and ultimately heuristic set of data that would succeed in illuminating understanding of the specific issues under investigation (Merriam 1998).

The case study location for this study was Depok, a municipality in the south of Jakarta, Indonesia. Depok at that time was the newest municipality in West Java Province, as well as the most rapidly developing district, a typical district throughout the country, which made it an interesting case with regard to the issue under discussion. Two public primary schools were selected, one located on the outskirts of the city and the other near the city center. The researchers spent a total of 2 months in both schools for data collection.

The main data collection method used in this study was the semi-structured interview, specifically individual interviews and a focus group discussion (FGD). Semi-structured interviews were selected as they provide a flexible structure for the interview process and at the same time allow the researcher and the interviewees to explore themes as they come up. The emphasis is on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events (Bryman 2001). An interview guide keeps researchers on track so they do not go off onto irrelevant topics. The guide used in this study was divided into two overarching themes, parents' participation and the role of SCs as representatives of the parents. In each school, four parents, four teachers, a principal and an SC chairperson were interviewed. Parents who participated in interviews and FGDs were selected from parents of 5th-grade students in each school, who have had experience with the school for more than 5 years, spanning the period before and after the institution of the FSP program. In addition, several key informants, a Depok Education Office official, a head of the Depok Education Council and an NGO practitioner, were interviewed to clarify and enrich the previous data gathered from the main respondents. Most of the individual interviews were conducted at people's

homes or at the school sites, depending on the respondent's preference. Interviews were voice-recorded with permission from respondents.

The focus group approach was also employed in this study as an opportunity for people to probe each other's reasons for holding a certain view (Bryman 2001; Stewart et al. 2007), which benefited this study significantly. Sometimes, within the dynamics of a focus group, individuals argued with each other with the result that they arrived at a more realistic account of what the participants thought. Hence, the focus group not only produced more data and verified the individual participants' perceptions, but also enriched the quality of the information that was collected (Bryman 2001). The FGD conducted in one school consisted of twelve females and three males, who were parents and SC members. Everyone spoke freely about the issues raised, and the meeting was recorded with the participants' permission.

Other sources of data for this study were questionnaires which were distributed to 27 parents (13 and 14 parents, respectively, from the two schools) and which asked about basic parental participation at their child's school; and document analysis, which included public documents related to SC and the FSP, that were accessible from government offices or the internet. Unofficial documents were also collected from the two schools with their permission, such as SC meeting minutes and school budget reports, and were photocopied by the researchers for later analysis.

The process of data analysis in this study began once the fieldwork had been conducted. All of the data were analyzed using of three concurrent flows of action: data reduction, data display, and conclusion and verification (Berg 2007). Data reduction involves focusing, simplifying and transforming raw data into more a manageable form. At this stage, coding was utilized based on thematic findings. The next step is to classify the main issues that emerge into specific themes for data presentation (display). Conclusion and verification is the final stage of analysis, in which the conclusions drawn from the patterns apparent in the data must be confirmed (verified), ensuring that all of the procedures used have been clearly articulated.

Findings and discussion

School Operational Support (BOS) at Depok's public primary schools

According to the BOS *Handbook 2009*, the purpose of BOS is to free the public primary and junior secondary schools from the responsibility of paying for their operational costs (MoNE 2009). The BOS allocation of funds to the schools is on a student per capita basis, which for elementary schools in a city area like Depok was Rp. 400,000 per student per year (equal to US$ 40) in 2009. As a central government program, the BOS is funded entirely from the national budget and implemented through the deconcentration funding mechanism (Widyanti et al. 2008). Funds are distributed from MoNE's budget to provincial BOS committees and then further distributed to the bank accounts of beneficiary schools.

At the local level, the local government has to cover the operational cost of BOS from their Local Government Income and Expenditures Budget Plan and make up the difference if the BOS funds from the central government are not sufficient to cover all needs. In 2009, the Depok local government supplemented the BOS funds at Rp. 10,000 (US$ 1) per student per month. So, each primary school in Depok (public and private) received a total allocation of Rp 520,000 per student per year for school operation costs (non-salary budget). On average, a primary school in Depok has 240 students enrolled at any time, so the total amount of funds they received from the government in 2009 was fifteen times higher than the amount they received in the pre-2005 policy, before the establishment of BOS (Supriadi 2003; Ghozali 2005).

According to the information gathered from the Depok education office, after 2005, many public primary schools still collected money from parents through the school committee even though it was prohibited and even though they received the increased funds for operational costs, as stated by one principal:

> There was first an unwritten announcement from the district education office, but recently an instruction letter has just arrived to warn school headmasters not to collect any kind of financial contribution from parents (*interview, principal*).

This means that, even after the 2005, BOS policy was implemented, the practice of collecting money from parents through the school committee finally stopped only after instruction letters were sent to each headmaster of the public primary schools in Depok. An officer from Depok Education Office confirmed this:

> It is true that since the government initiated the *Program Sekolah Gratis* (Free School Program) in 2009 as the continuation of *Bantuan Operasional Sekolah/BOS* (school operational fund program), we delivered letters to every headmaster in the public primary schools instructing them to stop collecting parental contributions, which are known as *Sumbangan Operasional Pendidikan* (Education Operational Funds). From then on, parental contributions have ceased, at least for the time being.

Thus, the year 2009 was the turning point for Depok's public primary schools in terms of collecting money from parents. This situation resulted in many unexpected changes that had not been experienced previously in the context of the development of Indonesian education, and which are explained and analyzed in the next sub-section.

The characteristics of parents' participation

Parental participation at the two schools investigated in this study was divided into three categories: financial contributions to the school, involvement in the school's meetings and access to the school's financial information. Each category is discussed in terms of before and after the establishment of FSP in 2009.

To discover the practice of parental participation in school management, a simple survey was conducted of parents in both schools, involving basic descriptions of parental participation. The first question 'How do you participate in school management?' was followed by three answer options, of which parents were allowed to choose more than one. Data from this survey revealed that before 2009, parents participated in schools mainly through financial contributions (24 out of 27), followed by attendance at meetings (17 respondents). No parent chose the third option, which was involvement in school budgeting. As one of the parents explained in the FGD:

> The form of our participation is actually by contributing money to the school. Every time we are invited by the School Committee to have a meeting at school, what we are thinking about is money and money. Honestly, our expectation is that they are going to explain to us the financial condition of the school. (*FGD, parents*)

Actually, this practice (of contributing money) had been the main form of parental participation since the POMG era in the 1950s (Lee 1995), and so the parents in our study considered this the only choice though the regulation regarding SCs opened up other possibilities (Sumintono 2009).

The explanation from the school principal below illustrates how the school used the money from parents:

> So far, parents' participation is good. They have really supported me since I first took on the position as a headmaster. When I arrived in 1999, there was no upper storey on the building. Then we planned everything, the parents and committee had a meeting on this matter, what we were going to build, and how much money every parent had to contribute. Every year there was an improvement in school facilities; we built the fence, the drainage ditch, the playground,

and most importantly, we built more rooms such as the computer room and prayer area. All of these became possible as a result of the parents' participation. (*Interview, principal*)

The above excerpt shows that the parental financial contribution had primarily supported physical infrastructure that needed substantial amounts of funds rather than support for teaching–learning in the classroom. Infrastructure development in the school was the most common reason given by the school for collecting money from parents (Supriadi 2003; Chen 2011), even though, in fact, it was the government's responsibility. It led to confusion about the function of public schools: were they also meant to implement an additional form of taxation (Sumintono 2009)?

In contrast, after 2009, with the introduction of FSP, such practices completely ceased. Parents no longer made any financial contributions at all due to the change imposed by the new government. This had the effect of changing the parents' perception of their participation in the school system; most parents interviewed came to feel that since there was no longer an obligation to contribute financially, they did not need to participate in school management at all, let alone the funding policy. Most of the parents felt that without being able to make a contribution, they had no right to have a say in decision making. One parent's comments during the interview clearly described this perspective:

> Since the school is free, there is no more parents' contribution. As a result, the process in the school seems only one-way, and parental participation is stagnant. Parents cannot participate anymore. We also feel reluctant to complain when we do not agree with something. (*Interview, parents*)

The above excerpts show that financial contribution is the 'only language' parents understand as participation in the public primary schools. It is interesting to note that when the government takes over all financial burdens in schools it puts parents in the position of mere receivers of a public service. A comment from a teacher's interview described the weakening of parent's participation:

> In my opinion, as a consequence of free school, parents act as if they do not have any responsibility anymore since they feel they do not have to pay anything. Or just because they are busier now, I have no idea. When the school still collected money from them, they paid more attention to it. They came sometimes to ask about the teaching and learning process at school, and about their children's progress.

As mentioned before, the parents' survey revealed that before 2009 attendance at meetings was another significant

form of parental participation in school management, with 17 out of 27 parents choosing involvement at meetings as one of their forms of participation. The school committee meeting was held annually, usually during the enrollment period, and facilitated by the SCs, for the purpose of gathering parents to discuss parents' financial contributions. The main agenda of the meeting was about contributions and thus appears to have been a mechanism for asking parents for money (Sumintono 2009). According to the principals, the level of parent attendance at the annual meeting was at around 80 % in School 2 and 50 % in School 1. However, the SC members revealed that most of the time, only a half or fewer of the invited parents attended the meeting, and these were always the same people. This fact indicates that only a limited number of parents were actually active enough to attend the annual meeting (Bjork 2009). From this data, it can be said that the level of attendance at the meeting was moderate with mostly only the same parents actively engaged each time.

Parents' responses in this research project's FGD illustrate how for them the meetings before 2009 were always associated with their contributions. For example, in the FGD, parents immediately responded that donations were the main topic of discussion in the annual meeting. The secretary of the SC in the second school also admitted in the FGD that whenever they had a meeting with parents, it was impossible to avoid the impression that the gathering was associated with parental financial contributions. The head of the SC described the quality of meeting this way:

> In every meeting regarding parents' contributions, firstly we tell the parents about the school's needs, and how much money the school needs in support. And then we divide the amount of money with the number of parents so we reach the amount of money parents should pay. Then, parents are welcome to have their voice heard as to whether they agree or disagree with that amount. If we can reach a consensus, then we agree to pay that amount. If not, then we hold a vote. So, the decisions are made by the majority. There are always one or two parents who disagree with the result of the meeting, but we always try to accommodate their interests, and never force them to pay. (*Interview, Head of SC*)

This means that the meeting was mainly the instrument for the school to ask for financial contributions from parents which illustrates how low the parents' participation level was (Chen 2011). Although they could bargain in the meeting to reach a decision, in the end, they still had to pay accordingly (Sumintono 2009).

It is easy to predict that after the government implemented the FSP policy in 2009, the meeting activity would cease. There is no point for the SC to conduct a meeting in which the main agenda is not available to be tabled and the school wanting to avoid trouble. Interviews with parents illustrate the situation:

> When the government launched the FSP, they suddenly stopped us from paying school donations, with no further explanation as to why that is that so. After that, there is no more information on school financing, and no more meetings. All we know is that the donations are stopped, that's all. (*FGD, parent*)

Regarding parents' access to the school's financial information as a measurement of control, the survey response shows that after 2009, many parents were not informed regarding school finances. 17 parents (62 %) answered that they did not get information about school finances, 9 parents (33 %) said yes and one parent (3 %) did not answer the question. According to two parents commenting during the FGD, the pre-2009 practice was that when meetings were still held, parents were in fact informed about school finances to some extent:

> Yes, before the Free School Program, there was a report on the money which was gathered from our contributions. But there is no report on the schools financial resources now that they come from the government fund.

The consequence of the loss of parental involvement in that they no longer made financial contributions and no longer had meetings with the SC was that most parents did not have any information about the school finances after the implementation of the FSP. Parents generally reported that they knew about the FSP, but it is remarkable that none of the parents in either school reported knowing the amount of the money allocated per capita, or the distribution of funds. The parents' comments in the FGDs also confirmed these findings. One parent's interview illustrates the situation:

> What I know is, after the FSP we were freed from financial contributions. But I never know the amount of money the school gets from the government and its allocation, as the school never disseminated this information to us.

This situation reveals a problem of transparency when it comes to the use of monies from the BOS fund. At the same time, schools are required to detail the local allocation of BOS funds and the amounts involved in school expenses on notice boards that should be visible and accessible to school stakeholders. Compliance with this requirement was actually encouraged by the officer of Depok Education office, who stated:

We encourage the principals to report the money they managed on the notice board - how much money was allocated for their schools and the details of the allocation, in order to increase transparency.

Under these conditions, it seems that since the funds are generated from the government's budget and not from parents' contributions, the accountability of the schools has only shifted in an upward direction, toward their superior office, rather than downward toward the parents. Consequently, parents' access to financial information has become quite limited and their control has grown very weak.

The school committees' new roles

Just as with parents' participation, the role of the SCs in Depok's public primary schools has also been impacted considerably by the new FSP policy in. Before the initiation of the FSP, the SC's function of collecting money from the parents was very significant (Sumintono 2009). Every parental contribution was made through the mechanism of the SC, and thus, the SC had a strong effect on school budgeting through their ability to generate money from the local community (Chen 2011). Naturally, because of this, these committees exercised considerable control over financial resources in school budgets.

When SCs were no longer allowed to generate money from parents, their power weakened, as clarified by the SC Chairman in School 2, who commented:

The SC is now in the phase of apparent death, as it no longer has a role to play since parents' financial contributions have been banned.

Even worse, one of the principals remarked that perhaps SCs will no longer be needed since the BOS handbook has already fixed every allocation and SC input into budgeting is no longer necessary (*interview*). The change in the SCs' involvement in the school budget meeting can be detected from school committee member's statements concerning this matter:

Unfortunately, after FSP was initiated, the portion of the SC's role in school budgeting declined because every allocation was already set up by the government (i.e., the Ministry of National Education). This is a matter for the SC, as we are not able to be more involved. While we previously had authority to administer or make some changes regarding the budget allocation, now every allocation is already fixed and we are not allowed to do anything. Our involvement is very limited now (*Interview, SC's secretary*).

Thus, it seems that since the implementation of the FSP, the SCs have been relegated to the rubber-stamping role of a legitimizing entity. This development was also recognized by the head of the Depok Education Council, a body that acts as an umbrella for all SCs within Depok city, who described the role of SCs in Depok city as deteriorating significantly as a consequence of the FSP. He asserted that the SCs only play a role in terms of controlling the movement of funds and are no longer involved in planning and implementation. Furthermore, the control exercised by the SCs is very weak, as most of the time their function is merely to sign the budgeting plan. Although the schools' expenditures should have been reported to the government as well as to the SC—an opportunity for the SCs to once again play a significant role—the SCs' control has become, in fact, very limited. Generally, the SCs' situation in Depok city after FSP was described by the Head of EC as follows:

As a consequence of FSP, the roles of SCs in Depok city are generally weakened. Actually, before that their roles were extraordinarily important in improving the quality of education in each unit of an educational institution. They were quite powerful, as they managed the money from parents' contributions. However, their roles deteriorated as the program ran. In fact, the school budget process required an active role by the SCs as stated in the head of the Education Office's decree. As the FSP was implemented, the SCs' roles became limited to merely controlling the flow of finances and sometimes only to signing documents. Ideally, they should be engaged in planning, not only in signing the plan. FSP should not become a justification for SCs to reduce their role at school.

Conclusion

This paper examined the implementation of the BOS policy for Indonesian public primary schools and its implications for parental participation in school. The BOS policy is the first policy since modern schooling was introduced in Indonesia that does not differentiate between public and private schools at the basic education level (years 1–9) in terms of receiving enough funds for operational costs from the government. Parental participation and school committees as vehicles to accommodate participation activities in two public primary schools in Depok, Indonesia, were examined to provide a better understanding of the issue. It is suggested that findings in this study are limited to the sampling chosen but are generalizable to other similar schools.

Prior to FSP, parents viewed their participation in school management mainly as contributing financially through the

school committee to the school. However, this changed dramatically as a consequence of BOS in terms of FSP, as revealed from the findings of this study. It appears, the FSP has switched the status of parental financial contributions from 'active' to 'none.' Consequently, parents felt that since they had no financial responsibilities to the school, their participation was now weaker. They felt reluctant to have a say in matters related to the management of the school, as they did not pay anything for their children's education. This perspective was also supported by the headmasters and teachers; they felt that, somehow, the FSP lessened parental involvement in school life. It appears likely that parents have become disempowered and have lost the motivation to involve themselves in school management as a result of FSP.

Additionally, the school committee's role as the parents' representative as mandated by the regulation seems to be problematic. Since school was made free, the parents' involvement in school budgeting has become very limited. The school committee meetings have been held merely to inform parents and report the use of the money. For some reason, some school stakeholders have reacted that there is no longer any need to conduct school committee meetings. Therefore, parents are no longer engaged in the planning of allocations, and neither they nor the SCs are able to have input into planning. This has limited the function of the SCs to merely legitimizing the school budget proposed by the school. The findings of this study are also relevant to SC policy, in that they show that the SC regulation imposed prior to the BOS policy is no longer appropriate for the new realities, and parental participation should be given a different role.

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