

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.

Keywords Indonesian education development · Educational decentralization · School committee · Public primary school · Parental participation

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

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