



Perceptions and Actions of Educational Policy Makers regarding Parental Engagement in Education

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine perceptions and actions of educational policy makers regarding parental engagement in children's education within a district in West Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. The study employed a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach. Data were collected from five participants through a semi-structured interview, involving the head of the district, the education department head, a sub-district head, a village head, and a school principal. The collected data were analyzed by applying Moustakas's (1994) analytical methods consisting of three steps namely bracketing, creating clusters of meaning, and textural description. The results showed that the policy makers within the district had an appropriate perception about the increment of parental involvement in education, not only for students but also for schools, parents, and local governments. However, positive perceptions of educational policy makers within the district were not consistent with their actions, proved by no particular policy intending for parental involvement.

Keywords

Actions, parental engagement, perceptions, policy makers

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Introduction

Student improvement is not only determined by learner-teacher interactions in classroom settings but also significantly affected by the simultaneous and collective presence of all educational actors; the government, students, principals, teachers, parents, communities, and educational stakeholders. However, some people including educational policy makers consider parents as the least important actors who have less stake in education because they do not formally perform educational tasks in schools. Moreover, a negative belief of administrators which tends to feel that parents are not capable of making school decisions because of their lack of training experience becomes a challenge of parental involvement implementation (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). In fact, research has shown that parents' contribution to school programs has a positive impact on efforts to accomplish educational goals such as improving student attendance, fostering a positive attitude towards school, pursuing academic achievement, building networks, maintaining good health, and increasing their sense of well-being. For example, a study conducted by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) found that parental involvement through behavioral and emotional engagement can be explored to predict students' academic achievement and mental health. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) then confirmed that the implementation of specific activities for family and community involvement could enhance students' presence in elementary schools.

In some institutions, policy makers may have a positive point of view about parental engagement, which believes a vital role of parents in children's development. However, they do not interpret this belief in a real policy so that they do not allocate enough budget and exert effort for parental programs. Expectedly, policy makers are not only to have a genuine perception of the importance of parental engagement but also to implement such belief in policy documents. Another factor hindering parental programs is different and contrasting decisions taken by educational policy makers in the same organizational unit. This situation can be seen in the district government structure in Indonesia that consists of five kinds of functionaries ranked from the highest to the lowest position, namely, the regent or the district head, the education department head, sub-district heads, village heads, and school principals.

The regent is the top leader and has the most power to create and implement policies in the entire district. Yet, the success of these policies is strongly affected by how the regent subordinates execute them at the bottom levels. In addition, the district head's programs are determined by how policy makers in the lower units make their own policies that are coherent with the ones created by those in the higher units. If they do not have coherent perceptions and actions regarding an issue, the decisions they produce can be contradicted each other. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate perceptions and actions of educational policy makers within a district in Indonesia concerning parental engagement in education, including the extent of the consistency of policy makers' beliefs with their actions on the issue. The study also intended to examine the conformity of perception and action of one policy with another in employing parental involvement.



Literature Review

Parental involvement

Negative behaviors of learners are viewed as serious problems in learning (Bobbitt & Rohr, 1993; Pipan, 2004; Poulou & Norwich, 2000) because they can prevent teachers from implementing high-quality instructions (Wehby, Lane, & Falk, 2003). Several literatures discuss that parental involvement can solve unacceptable behaviors of students (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Matthews et al., 2011), such as the study of Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, and Holbein (2005) saying that there is a beneficial association between parental involvement and students' school engagement, motivation, perceived competence, perceived control, self-regulation, and mastery goal orientation.

Moreover, school-family partnership can solve pupils' emotion and mentality problems, enhance students' self-esteem and decrease the number of discipline referrals (Burke & Hara, 2008). This is very important because emotions can bolster or impede students' academic engagement, commitment, and ultimate school success (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Meanwhile, negative emotion such as anger, indifference, stress, anxiety, depression, and offence can lead to teachers' negative feelings and thoughts (Poulou & Norwich, 2000). Parental involvement also has a strong and positive influence on learners' academic accomplishment (Fan & Chen, 2001; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Gordon & Cui, 2012; Ing, 2014; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2007; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). Through behavioral and emotional engagement, it can be used to predict adolescent academic achievement and mental health (Davis & Lambie, 2005; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Even partnership between schools and families could help youngsters succeed in their later lives (Epstein, 1995).

Not only children, educators, schools and parents themselves also receive the positive impact of parental involvement. Engaging parents will make parents view schools in positive ways so schools will obtain more parents' support (Davies, 1993), that helps teachers' works more manageable (Epstein, 1995). Then, parents will also obtain a greater appreciation of their important roles, strengthened social networks, access to information and material, personal efficacy, encouragement to continue their further education (Davies, 1993), and will enhance skills and leadership (Berlyn, WiSe, & Soriano, 2008; Epstein, 1995).

Educational policy makers' belief and behaviors

Perspective is equivalent to point of view which often determines what is known, thought, said, and intended (Campos & Gutiérrez, 2015). Belief is different with knowledge. Knowing something means assertion that it is incontrovertibly true, whereas believing something means stating that it is true but accepting the possibility that it may not be true (Britton, 1998). In other words, knowledge can be interpreted as fact, while belief may refer to as a view of something. However, our emotional reactions and actions often do not wait for knowledge but are based on belief because we initially see beliefs as facts (Britton, 1998).

Initiation and execution of parental programs are highly determined by belief or perspective of policy makers, who are principals in school level and executive officers in



government level. Policy makers realizing the urgency of parents tend to develop a policy facilitating parent participation in education. If principals simply view children as students, they are likely to see parents separately from the schools, but if they look students as children, there is a tendency they see family as school counterparts (Epstein, 1995).

Educational decision-makers may have positive values and beliefs towards parental involvement but their beliefs are not applied to a policy which can facilitate families to possess more roles in educational practices. According to Gonzalez-Mena (1994), both teachers and teacher educators believe that involving parents is important and results in a positive impact but when they are confronted by a parent seeing things differently, they may not change their actual relations. In addition, the challenge of implementation of parental programs is regarded to how policy makers in district level understand and apply existed standards. According to Spillane and Callahan (2000), for example, implementation failure of the standards occurs when policy makers in district level do not comprehend the spirit of the criteria. Necessarily, each policy maker in education should have not only positive belief but also understanding regarding the significance of parental engagement and intention to implement parental policy.

Methodology

General background of research

This study employed a phenomenological approach to focus on individual perception. Phenomenology attempts to understand the meanings from the participants' experience, perspective or point of view (Baker, Wuest, & Stern, 1992; Brogden & Knopp Bilken, 2007; Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 2009; Lester, 1999; Selvi, 2008). This approach is not intended to give descriptions and logical inferences for situations, but it is only centered in an existent situation that is imaginative or a real-life experience (Selvi, 2008). By applying this theory, policy makers within the district can reveal their primary beliefs regarding parental involvement in education and describe their actions as a response to such beliefs. Perspectives could be feelings, thoughts, ideas, reactions, and responses related to the research questions. The reason why perceptions and actions are the focuses is because they are related each other. Southgate and Verneti (2014) stated that people's behaviors or actions are driven by what they think and believe. Therefore, it is assumed that educational policy makers will have expected actions in creating a policy of parental involvement if they possess affirmative perspective of parental engagement. On the other hand, it is almost impossible for them to cooperate with parents if they do not believe that parents can make a positive alteration in education.

Participants of research

This research was undertaken in a district in West Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. The participants were chosen based on their positions as top leaders in their units within the district's local government. These positions allowed them to initiate and develop an educational policy in the units they lead. Moreover, they had authority to sign policy documents and to allocate funds for education programs. Policy makers who could not



directly make decisions and did not have power on the educational sector, such as the head of other departments (e.g. health department, agriculture department, and tourism department), were excluded in this research. Five people between 28 to 60 years old were purposively chosen as participants, namely the district head, the education department head, a sub-district head, a village head, and a school principal. For ethical reasons, the names of the district and the organization units were not mentioned. This number was somewhat small and determined in advance (Hancock et al., 2009). Participants were taken purposively because the researcher knew the informants who have lived the experience being investigated (Baker et al., 1992).

Data collection and analysis

Interviews were conducted through formal conversation, categorized as a semi-structured interview in which the researcher followed predetermined questions as an interview guide, but he could ask typical or unplanned inquiries which might stray from the guide when he felt this to be appropriate. The form of in-depth semi-structured interviews is a common method of collecting information from respondents in phenomenology (Reeves, Albert, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008; Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007). This method allows an interviewer to probe participants to elaborate on an original response or to ask follow-up question aiming to receive clarification (Hancock et al., 2009).

The Education Department Head, the District Head, the Subdistrict Head, the School Principal and The Village Head were interviewed in once occasion respectively from 30th January to 3th February 2017. The conversations were recorded using phone recorders at participant's discretion with the interview durations less than 30 minutes for each person. To be more detailed, the length of interview arranged as the list of participants above were 18:17, 11:59, 16:56, 24:02, and 23:03. Although the durations of interview were relatively short for some participants, all main questions in the interview guide had been asked to them and they had already explained what the researcher wanted to hear. These are some examples of the main questions in the conversation: (a) what are the current student-related problems that are of concern to you? (b) do you think parents can affect behaviors of their children (such as attendance, discipline, doing homework and participating in extracurricular activities)? (c) have you tried or done developing policy or program(s) ruling parent involvement? If yes, what is that? should such program(s) be compulsory for parents? And (d) what instruction(s) do you give to your subordinates to make parents involved in schools?

The process of data analysis applied analytical methods in phenomenological research which was proposed by a phenomenologist Clark Moustakas (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). The first step is bracketing where transcripts were entirely read over and over, so the researcher might be familiar with the transcript contents and obtain an overall sense of the data. In this step, the researcher temporarily coded with exact words used by the participants to prevent the researcher from interpretations influenced by expectations, preconceptions and early assumptions regarding the issue of parental engagement. After that, initial codes (the significant meanings of the data or data expressions) were noted to the relevant words, phrases, and sentences. The codes could be actions, feelings, concepts, beliefs, perceptions, or opinions regarding parental involvement. Something could be considered relevant when it was mentioned several times, participants explicitly stated that it was important, it was associated with a theory or concept, or it was considered related to the unit of analysis.



The second step was creating clusters of meaning from the significant statements into themes (Creswell, 2012). Themes were consistent expressions and the essence of respondent experiences. The expressions that were unclear, duplicated, and overlapping underwent reduction and elimination. In this study, the researcher categorized four themes; problems related to students, roles of parents in children's education, reasons why parents were not involved in education, and actions to make parents engage in their children's education. The third step was textual description, in which themes were used to write illustrations of participant responses to the phenomenon. This action was taken after validating the themes to ensure they were compatible and explicit with participant experiences. In this stage, the researcher rewrote descriptions of the themes, supported by quotations of participant expressions in the data transcripts, and then discussed them in the discussion part.

Findings

Problems related to students

Participants were asked to explain the issues around students to examine if the policy makers understand current student problems and believe that parental involvement can be employed as a solution to the problems. Lack of repetition was considered a serious issue by the District Head (DH) as he said that children do not relearn and fathom subjects in their homes. Dropout was another main problem mentioned by DH and the Sub-district Head (SH) due to lack of parent control to their children.

Meanwhile, the Education Department Head (EDH), the Village Head (VH) and the School Principal (SP) believed that indiscipline defined as not following school instructions such as absence and truancy is an alarming subject in education system. EDH claimed that the main reason for this situation was the influence of a negative social environment, whereas VH blamed the teachers as a scapegoat of student absence. Differently, SP accused parents behind this situation since many students help their parents work in their farms. Again, EDH, VH, and SP have the same point of view that drug consumption among students has been a dangerous situation in education. The negative influence of social environment is strongly linked to this circumstance. EDH added that student misbehaviors are also influenced by the technological devices accessed by the students:

“The very rapid advancement of technology makes them difficult to differentiate what is right and wrong, ethical and unethical.”

Another educational problem which makes parents and the educational policy makers in a dilemmatic situation is child labors. SP and SH claimed that they should accept it because by working, children can help their families to fulfil financial needs. SP understood parents' economic difficulty, so he gave students' permission not to attend the school.

The last problem identified from VH and SP answers is lack of student motivation, defined as not interesting in attending classes, staying at schools, and enjoying learning. VH argued that teachers are the key to overcome this problem. Meanwhile, SP claimed that parents do not have many options to increase their children's motivation, as he said:



“Some parents want to send their children to schools. They want their kids adequately to study at schools, and they are ready to support their children. However, their children do not interest in and do not want to go to the schools. I am sad looking at those parents. ... Those parents said in a sad expression and crying, that I had asked my children to attend the school, but they did not want. Sometimes, they go to the school today, but tomorrow they don't.”

In brief, this section indicates that all participants could identify student problems faced by schools and families in their area of authority. The problems were related to misbehavior of students such as indiscipline and lack of effort to learn. Interestingly, the participants seemed well understood this issue because they were able to explain the reasons why the problems appeared.

Roles of parents in children's education

All policy makers have the same opinion that parents are in a vital position for child development. DH said that the first role of parents is fulfilling educational needs of their children such as books, modules, and uniform. He also thought that lack of parental involvement contributed to many dropout cases:

“If children do not want to go to schools, parents have the responsibility to encourage them, so they intend to go to the schools. If children come late to the schools, parents also have the responsibility to urge them to arrive on time.”

DH argued that parents are role models for their children, so they can profoundly influence actions committed by their children. Similarly, EDH explained this function in more detail in her comment below:

“They highly affect their kids' behaviors. If parents educate and guide their children, their children will have positive behaviors. For example, if parents control their children very well, their children will be more disciplined. They may be influenced by social environment when they leave homes, but as long as parents conduct controlling duty, the negative influence towards their children can be prevented or overcome.”

In addition to behaviors, EDH believed that parents could affect students' emotion and health. She said that this function is crucial because health and emotion can affect student achievement. Parents helping children's academic achievement are also argued by SH:

“Parents determine student achievement. Parents are assistants of their children especially for those who are not smart. They can do this in many ways, especially in supporting fees for education. The principle of the assistance is encouraging children to be better and more developed in education.”

Moving to VH, he argued that parents must contribute to educating their children and preventing them from the negative influence of communities by acting as motivators, such as



prompting their children to attend schools. More importantly, parents should not give all fostering tasks to teachers because teachers just have about six hours a day to interact with pupils in schools. Moreover, VH thought that parents should show a strong confidence to their children that only education can make someone succeed in life. SP commented that parents have more chance to influence child behaviors or habits. This is because parents own authority over their children, so they possess rights to instruct their children to do something, and generally, children want to follow the instructions. In addition, parents also contribute to mental development of their children. However, SP admitted that this role is not optimally reached because parents do not give their children opportunity to learn how to solve their own problems and to accept their mistakes.

Reasons why parents are not involved in education

Although parents' contributions in education were needed, the participants admitted that majority of parents were still not optimally involved in education. According to DH, economic, cultural, educational, and social reasons cause parents to disconnect from schools:

“..... because of the economic conditions, parents should give children responsibility to collect money. Thus, children are working and leaving schools. The second one is the cultural factor. For example, if parents never study at formal education, their children may not attend the classes as well. Parents feel this situation is natural and not wrong. The level of education affects their participation, but this also depends on their social environment. Although they have low educational attainment, such as just passing primary school, they can be well engaged in school if they live with many educated people.”

EDH realized that limited education of parents could hinder their involvement, yet she considered awareness regarding the significance of education was more influencing than that. She illustrated that parents could still motivate and encourage their children to attend schools when they had awareness regarding the importance of education although they had low educational attainment and had no much knowledge about parenting.

Financial situation was also believed by EDH as the main reason why parents do not fully involve in schools because this situation made them very busy to work in their farms. This statement was supported by SH and VH saying that education level, financial problems and lack of awareness were the reasons why parents were not participating in children's education. It was problematic because not working much meant parents could not support their children's needs. SP also agreed with this explanation. He said that parents were farmers that must go to farms every day so they were difficult to present at school forums.

Meanwhile, in VH's expression, less engagement of parents was caused by their incorrect paradigm believing that education was not important and it could not make a meaningful change in their lives. This was quite intriguing because parents think everyone had already been in each position. They believed that they had already had the regent, governor, headmasters, teachers, and etc., so they did not need to spend children's time at schools to be like them. Again, this negative mindset was much affected by parents' limited education. To conclude, all participants thought that parent factors were the cause why parents were not involved in education. These factors consisted of economic, cultural, educational and social



situation. Meanwhile, factors other than parents such as no policy ruling parental involvement were not mentioned by the policy makers.

Actions to engage parents

When asked about actions, DH confirmed that there was no specific action to build trust and communication. He just instructed the policy makers in lower units to exploit parent association:

“I optimize the function of parent association which is called school committee. We encourage the committee to establish a productive relationship between parents and schools because effective communication and trust between parents and schools can be well established if the committee optimally runs their functions.”

DH claimed that he had just launched Let’s Back to School Movement, commanding parents who had dropout children to register them back to school. This program was compulsory for parents, and there had been 3,376 children brought back to schools. This program also provided free school uniform for new students from low-income families in primary and junior high schools. The program was regarded as an effort to promote parent-school collaboration which was monitored and evaluated every month. EDH who was directly responsible to DH for educational matters initiated a program called *Siola*, which literally means together. In this program, education, health, and economy are integrated. However, EDH admitted that *Siola* was not a program specifically aimed to engage parents in education because she thought that the specific program for parental engagement was currently not necessary:

“There is no formal program in the education department which specify rules in parental engagement in education because each school has a school regulation for this purpose. Besides, there has been a regulation created by the national government about involving parents in education. Therefore, I don’t think a new regulation should be made because too much regulation is not okay. What I do is just execute current regulations. Probably, it may be a good idea to develop a policy about this issue, but recently, we have not created any policy to involve parents in schools. In the future, we may create it.”

For engaging parents, EDH relied on the program Movement of Back to Schools, which had been explained by her boss. In this movement, the government brought back 3,376 children to schools, consisting of children who were dropouts, children who did not continue their education, and children who never registered in schools at all.

Although EDH did not have any program for parental involvement, she used to speak to school staff to pose as examples for parents and students. Becoming an exemplar was the key to build trust and gain parent commitment. She said that if schools want to build positive characters of their students, they must start by showing the same traits. That’s why she asked headmasters that they must motivate parents to involve in schools:



“I only tell my expectation to principals, and it will be explained in a forum attended by headmasters and parents. In this forum, an example of instruction I give to headmasters is that they must ask students’ parents to accompany their children to schools at the first-day of school.”

In the subdistrict level, a program requiring parents to involve in schools was not found. SH said that to build trust and communication between parents and schools, he just depended on instruction to village heads and believe that God will help his good intentions. For example, he asked village heads to inform parents that parents should look for solutions regarding students working at school time. Similar to SH, VH also did not have a specific program to engage parents in schools. To promote collaboration, VH relied on verbal explanation in some forums by asking parents to act as educators and motivators for their children. He also posed as a mediator that facilitated and mediated the relationship between parents and schools by creating a forum for parents, schools, village government, and public figures in his village. The absence of a formal program to involve parents also happened in the school headed by SP. So far, he and teachers just depended on verbal communication with parents in schools and homes as an approach to engage parents. The optimum effort having been taken by SP to engage parents was mediating teachers and parents when a conflict occurred through a forum in the school.

Discussion

Parental involvement in solving the student problems

Students’ lack of repetition is the first issue thought as a serious problem by the participants. They are right about this because repetition is a basic principle in learning, in which it can improve human retention (Karpicke & Roediger, 2008). In addition, repetition is very vital due to our limited capacity to know and understand a subject in one trial of association (Rock, 1957). In fact, limited time of teaching in schools makes teachers can just transfer lessons in one instruction, which can result in only several students receiving the contents so many pupils may not understand teachers’ explanation, or they may forget what they have learned. Re-learning lessons at homes could help children recall and comprehend lessons achieved from their teachers and parents are expected to drive this activity. Leichtman et al. (2017) claimed that student retention on academic lessons obtained at schools could be increased through discussion between students and their parents at homes although parents did not own specific knowledge about what their children experience at schools.

Another problem in this study is that students are unmotivated to be involved in schooling activities. The problem was identified when students were not interested in attending classes, disliked staying at schools, and did not enjoy learning processes. Pupil motivation, in common terms, indicates willingness, needs, and desire to engage to be successful in learning processes (Said & Al-Homoud, 2004). Absolutely, pupils who do not have willingness to engage in academic and extracurricular activities cannot be blamed as they may not obtain inspiration to do so. Someone will not act if he has no aspiration to do that, but he will commit it when he is energized by motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Here, parents are supposed to be an external factor that extrinsically motivates their children to commit



right things. For example, parents are expected to convince their children that formal education is very useful for their future lives, so they must attend school and enjoy learning activities, and not being active in school may affect dismal lives in the future.

Student misbehaviors such as nonattendance in school, indiscipline, truancy, non-involvement in teaching instruction, drug consumption, and fighting each other are other enormous problems in the district. The policy makers believe that these are the result of a negative influence of social environment. A student can behave unethically, for instance, because of unethical attitudes showed by his friends, neighbors, television and social media. Parents are in the best position to tackle this situation, at least preventing their children from the negative atmosphere of communities. For example, children will not be exposed to inappropriate television programs if parents control the use of the device for their children. Unfortunately, sometimes parents play the role that makes the situation worse. As an illustration, some parents always blame their children's friends and teachers when a fighting involving their children happens, even though they do not really understand the causes. They do not care if their children are guilty or not.

Finally, child laboring is thought as one of the worried issues that can hinder educational programs although this situation can be accepted when it happens among disadvantaged families. The policy makers find it very dilemmatic as children need to help their parents to work in farms. Furthermore, children working with their parents are not strange because this circumstance is culturally accepted in the district. On the other hand, they realized that children have right to play and learn in formal institutions as preparation for their better lives.

The explanation above illustrates that parents play an important role to deal with student problems. Ironically, instead of becoming solution, parents are regarded by the policy makers as part of problem causes. Misbehaviors, lack of motivation, and lack of repetition can be caused by parents not being able to be the inspiration for their children. The contribution of parents to student problems clearly appears in the issue of child labors. Children will not leave schools for working in farms if parents do not permit them to work. Therefore, to overcome student problems, the policy makers, especially in school level, must consider parents as the main target of their policy.

Perceptions about Why Parents Disengage

From the educational policy makers' perspective, some parents realize that education is an escalator from misfortune to better life. Reaching an elevated level of formal education is believed to make children in the future experience a different life with their parents who currently work as farmers. Farmer is a job regarded as underpaid in the district because those who work as a farmer cannot raise sufficient money to fulfil their needs. Hopefully, if children graduated from a university, they can easily work as employees in the government, public or private companies, and get well salary.

This ambition is good to motivate parents to send their children to schools and actively collaborate with teachers. Unfortunately, economic difficulties are picked as a convincing justification for parents to disengage from education. The term 'economic' here is not 'human capital' point-of-view set out by Stafford, Lundstedt, and Lynn Jr (1984) saying that education consists of various costs, including money paid for tuition and fees, books, and



additional outlays going to schools. The policy makers are confident that such costs are not a big deal because the government has provided much assistance for parents to cater those needs.

The economic factor hindering education programs mentioned by the policy makers is defined as a situation in which parents struggle to overcome their families' difficult financial burdens, not specifically children's educational cost. This statement is consistent with the study conducted by Berry (2008) stating that low classes of society contribute less in the community compared with the social capital elites who participate in almost all kinds of activities. In one hand, parents want to allocate their time and effort to help their children. On the other hand, they must fulfil their families' needs by working from morning to afternoon and sometimes spending nights at their farms, which are quite far from schools.

The busy parents, due to working too much at farms, make school programs not going smoothly. For example, when parents are invited to come in a discussion forum, they cannot attend because they are in their farms. Consequently, schools are likely left alone to handle student problems. Ironically, schools seemingly have no idea how to deal with this situation because they cannot force parents to come to the schools. Teachers and principals are aware of and can justify the reason why parents cannot attend the school invitation.

The busy parents are also considered the root of student problems because they have insufficient time to watch and control their kids. This is pertinent to the study conducted by Berry (2008) that busy working parents made them time-pressured and less engaged in a community participation. Busy working results in lack of parent communication to their children, so they cannot ensure if their children attend the schools or just hang around with their friends, who they mingle with, and what they do after school time.

The worse thing is that some parents ask their children to work with them in the farms. This practice is very common in the district in which children assist their fathers in preparing lands, planting, growing, harvesting, and selling agricultural products. This means that parents are not only causing uninvolved children in schooling, but also they cause child labors that make children lose their right to study at schools, either temporarily or permanently. Some child workers struggle to keep attending classes despite not every day, but this is not effective because without an intensive attendance, they cannot follow all lessons conveyed by teachers.

Moreover, low-level education of many parents in the district is one of the obstacles in parental engagement since there is a tendency that uneducated families do not have self-awareness of how important education is. Indeed, attitude, behavior, and communication set are influenced by self-awareness (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). If parents have consciousness towards the virtue of education and they realize their position to reach it, they will endeavor to make their children more educated, yet they cannot possess such positive mindset unless they have experienced formal education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Social-cultural is another factor that makes parents possess unawareness or negative feeling towards education. A person surrounded by people having a negative mindset can also possess the negative feeling although he has sufficient education. This is because social and cultural relationship produce motivational properties, in which the positive or negative behavior of a person was affected by whether direction outside himself is positive or negative (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). More sadly, if something bad is culturally and socially expected, it can be seen as a normal thing, so people do not view it as a problem.



Unawareness goes hand in hand with the ability to educate children. Uneducated parents usually do not have enough parental knowledge and skills. It is admitted that experiencing education in high schools or universities is not a guarantee that people automatically possess parenting ability, but at least, when people have studied in formal education, they can be easy to process feedback given through school and government programs, or learn independently from books or self-reflection regarding their role as parent teachers. This attempt might be more difficult for uneducated parents because of some challenges, such as language barrier, deviant mindset towards education, and inexperience in interactions of formal educational.

Perceptions about the importance of parental engagement

All policy makers in the district clearly believed that involving parents in education notably affects the successfulness of educational programs. This is because parents can pose as educators, facilitators, and motivators for their children. They take over teacher roles when children are outside schools. **Catsambis** argued that students as the ultimate outcome of education will obtain optimum advantages from parental involvement, not only for their academic culture but also for their lives after completing schooling (as cited in Mo & Singh, 2008). Besides, the policy makers agree that student problems occur due to the lack of parent contribution in education. Negative behaviors of students such as indiscipline, absence, truancy, and drug consumption emerge since parents are unsuccessful in guiding and controlling their children. If they look after their children very well, the negative influence of social surrounding can be tackled. Moreover, parents are also thought as the reason why many children work and leave their studies since without permission of parents, children cannot work in farms.

There are three elements of parental involvement asked to the policy makers in the present study, namely, trust, communication, and collaboration. All of them believed that the elements are very crucial and are the key to solve student problems. At the same time, they admitted that those components had not been occurred effectively. Home-school collaboration may be the best solution to handle student absence and truancy and to improve student learning. Moreover, collaboration should be the best option for families from social and economic disadvantages as the government and schools can strive to understand and assist their difficulties, especially for financial matters so that parents and schools can reduce the number of child labors in the district. Not only that, can collaboration help parents improve their parental skills although they do not have background as educators because one of the principles of collaboration is empowerment, reached through a meaningful two-way communication on mutual respect and trust (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999).

In the other way, the policy makers also gain a tremendous advantage from parent contribution because in an effective collaboration, parents will also endeavor to assist school and student difficulties (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). Thus, collaboration between parents and schools as a component of involvement are very crucial, in which it will help both sides to take many advantages relating to their roles as educators. For example, schools can assist parents to increase their parental knowledge and skills, whereas parents can help schools ensure students participation in schools.



Communication is another element determining if school and home can collaborate each other. Information about student problems and student progress achieved from school will help parents track academic and social activities and then take appropriate actions over their children. For example, parents can increase their control and intervention when they identify their children behave inappropriately. Meanwhile, reports from parents regarding their children can also assist schools to make evaluation and design policies to enhance student competences. Information from parents can be utilized by teachers to tailor teaching approach and philosophy to their pupils in classrooms. Failing to establish an effective communication may result in mistake approaches taken by teachers and parents, and after all, students are the most aggrieved in this situation.

Trust is the key to building an effective relationship between home and school. According to Moran, Ghate, Van Der Merwe, and bureau (2004), parents are likely more engaged with parental programs when they are given trust and respect. However, the principal seems to underestimate parent ability because majority of them are uneducated. He thinks that insufficient knowledge and skills possessed by parents are obstacles in educating their children even in homes. In contrast, principals and teachers expect parents trust them 100 percent. This is understandable as Lasky (2000) stated that schools feel more comfortable with parents who fill a related set of expectations and share their value system. However, the principal's perception about trust may need to be corrected because trust cannot be built just on one side, but both parents and school at the same time must respect each other.

Actions to engage parents

It is obvious in the explanation above that the policy makers have a right perception regarding the importance of parental involvement in children's education. They understand very well the problems of home-school relationship, and they have high expectations of realizing effective collaboration between both sides. However, it is confusing that the policy makers have not established any formal programs or policies that particularly rule parental involvement. Indeed, people recognize policy makers as the only one who has the power to undertake public decisions (Cornélis & Brunet, 2002). Logically, when someone believes something is very important, he will strive to achieve it, as Albion and Ertmer (2002) noted that belief can be the best indicator to predict decision-making in human lives.

In fact, the policy makers only attempt to involve parents through an informal action, which is conversation with parents in discussion forums and other occasions that are not designed as parental programs. This method can be a clever idea in encouraging parents to contribute to school programs if it is well established. However, inviting parents to engage obtains a limited success if schools are not able to address parental role construction and parental sense of efficacy for assisting children progress in education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

The policy makers also mandate their subordinates or staff to inform parents that they are supposed to engage in children's education. This action is not considered as a policy because it has no outcome indicators, strategy of development, and evaluation process. Thus, the policy makers cannot depend only on communication methods. They must create a policy or program that can measure the involvement of parents. This result indicates that positive



beliefs or opinions and attitudes (George, 1969) are not adequate for policy makers to create an educational program. This saying seems to be contradictive with Sakui and Gaies (1999) and Rifkin (2000) revealing that beliefs are a stable predictor of human behavior. The result more reflects a finding from the case study conducted by Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd (1991) that beliefs did not influence people's actions. Billings and Hermann (1998) argued that decision-making can be taken if policy makers comprehend how and why problems happen. This step is required in a policy development. Yet, the result shows that although the policy makers can explain in detail parental problems and the reasons why parents do not engage in education, the policy of parental involvement is still not created. Thus, it can be said that understanding the root of problems very well is not a guarantee for policy makers to create a program to handle the problems.

Positive beliefs over parental involvement and deep understanding regarding parental problems are potency for the policy makers in taking appropriate decisions to develop an educational policy. However, policy cannot be created with just these potencies. said that policy makers' actions rely on three factors—issue, context, and data. The issue defined as problems of needs or objectives had by the policy makers. Yet, the context relating to the knowledge and experience may not be possessed by them so they have no decisional strategies to involve parents. The last factor is the data, which refers to information for decisional analysis.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It can be concluded that policy makers in the district from the highest to the lowest position had positive perceptions regarding the increment of parental involvement in education, not only for students but also for schools, local government, and parents. The policy makers believed that by involving parents, students could gain enormous advantages for their academic enhancement, mental and health development, the fulfilment of school needs, and reaching a higher level of education. This finding is similar to parents' opinion in a study conducted by Zarate (2007) that engaging in monitoring of their children's lives and providing moral guidance had a positive impact on children's classroom behaviors, which in turn allowed for higher academic learning opportunities.

Moreover, the policy makers believed that parents have a vital role in solving problems related to students such as misbehaviors, lack of repetition, indiscipline, absence and truancy, lack of motivation, drug consumption, and child labors. Parent disengagement would make these problems unlikely to be tackled. Meanwhile, involving in education would help parents improve their parenting knowledge and skills, and low-income families could receive financial assistance that was used to meet their children's school cost.

This belief was supported with a good comprehension of the policy makers about how parents must help their children to be successful in education through parental engagement. They knew that effective communication, trust, and collaboration were the key elements to the school-home relationship, and they are supposed to initiate to build this connection. However, they admitted that these elements had not been reached because of the limitedness of parent contribution as a result of financial difficulty, education barrier, and fallacious mindset of parents.



Having a proper point of view regarding parental engagement and comprehending very well the problems of parents did not ensure policy makers creating a program or policy specifically organizing position of parents in education. The only effort committed by them was a conversation through visits of school staff to parents' houses and discussion forums in which many parents were not able to attend them due to time limitation. Lack of knowledge and experience might be the cause of the policy makers not to put a parental policy on the list of priority agendas. Meanwhile, the head of the education department thought that the policy has not needed yet at the district level because there had been a national regulation regarding the function of parents, so school were just supposed to refer to this regulation.

Therefore, positive beliefs of the policy makers regarding parental engagement were not coherent with their actions. Although admitting that parents were pivotal for children's academic advancement and for solving student problems, each policy maker within the district has not created any parenting program or policy in his or her unit. Consequently, effective communication and collaboration between home and schools could not be established and student problems, which were necessarily overcome through school-home relationship, still existed and even became worse.

It can also be said that beliefs and actions among the educational policy makers were linear each other, but in unsatisfactory condition. All of them have similarity in terms of having not created any expected action to make parents intensively involve in education. However, positive perspective about the benefits of parental engagement is linear from one policy maker to the others. A good coordination among the policy makers can cause this coherency, in which starting at the regent; they instruct their subordinate to ask parents to contribute to education.

Based on the conclusions above, creating a policy that is especially intended to organize parental engagement is strongly recommended for educational policy makers in district level in Indonesia. National and international standards can be taken as guidance in formulating an explicit policy in local context. To actualize this kind of policy development, the educational policy makers are required not only to have positive beliefs regarding the importance of parental engagement but also to have accurate data and problem understanding about the issue.

For other scholars, they can find out the implementation and comparison of parental involvement policy in other times, places, institutions, and government levels. They can increase the number of participants to collect more data so that there is a possibility to interview more heads of sub-districts, heads of villages and principals because a district consists of several sub-districts, villages, and many schools. Lastly, next research can study parents' perspective regarding parental engagement to answer the question: what do parents believe regarding their roles and supposed actions in relation to their children's educational growth and solution for student difficulties?

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