

# Indonesian Parents' Involvement in Their Children's Education: A Study in Elementary Schools in Urban and Rural Java, Indonesia

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## Abstract

Despite a growing body of research on parental involvement and its effects on students' academic achievement, our knowledge about the mechanism of parental involvement in non-Western contexts remains scarce. Our study addresses this gap by exploring the factors that motivate parents from different socioeconomic status and educational levels to be involved in their children's education in Java, Indonesia. We further explored how parents were involved and what challenges they faced in their involvement. The analysis is embedded in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's parental involvement motivation model. Sixteen parents in eight elementary schools in urban and rural areas in Java participated in this interview study. We found differences in parents' expectations and aspirations for their children's education and in their perceptions of their obligations and responsibilities regarding their children's education. These differences were related to parents' socioeconomic background and also to the urban and rural community contexts. Although all parents felt welcome at school, some highly educated parents reported lack of power and lack of opportunity for active parental involvement at the school. As is typical for a collectivist culture such as the Indonesian society, this study points to the shared responsibility of some Indonesian parents for the education of children other than their own in the local community.

Key Words: parental involvement, Indonesia, elementary school, motivations

## Introduction

Positive effects of parental involvement on student academic success have been recognized by teachers, school administrators, and policymakers across educational settings (Graves & Wright, 2011; LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Nguon, 2012; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010; Wilder, 2014). Indonesia is not an exception to this effort. There are Indonesian government regulations and national education laws that aim to regulate family and community participation in the school system<sup>1</sup>. According to the laws, community participation includes the participation of individuals, groups, families, professional organizations, entrepreneurs, and community organizations in the implementation and quality control of education services. The community has the right to participate in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of education programs. There is some research on parental involvement in Indonesia in specific contexts. For example, Fitriah, Sumintono, Subekti, and Hassan (2013) studied participation of parents in school committees in two public schools in Depok, West Java, and Karsidi, Humona, Budiati, and Wardoyo (2013) studied parental involvement in five senior high schools in urban and rural areas in Karanganyar, Central Java. These studies indicated that there was a lack of parental involvement in children's education in those specific contexts and that the role of parents in school committees is limited. A study by Werf, Creemers, and Guldemon (2001) showed that an intervention program to increase parental involvement at primary schools as part of a school improvement project in Indonesia was quite effective in improving students' achievement. In the present study, we were interested in studying parental involvement in a larger regional geographical area, that is, in the contexts of urban and rural areas in Jakarta, West Java, and East Java. The study is a small-scale, qualitative follow-up interview study of a large-scale, quantitative survey study in urban and rural school settings in Java (Yulianti, Denessen, & Droop, 2018). With the present study, we wanted to exemplify parents' views and experiences regarding their involvement in their children's education.

In the previous large-scale survey study on the effects of parental involvement on children's education in Indonesia, we have shown that Indonesian parents' educational attainment and parental involvement at home have positive effects (although relatively small) on elementary school students' academic achievement (Yulianti et al., 2018). The study also revealed that Indonesian parents were more strongly involved in their children's learning at home than at school, that parents in urban schools showed higher involvement than parents in rural schools, and that parents with middle and high levels of education showed higher levels of involvement than parents with low levels of education. Interestingly,

parents with low levels of education in rural schools reported slightly higher school-based involvement (volunteering, decision-making, and collaborating with community) than parents with higher levels of education. This quantitative study answered some questions regarding differences in the involvement of Indonesian parents with various socioeconomic backgrounds in different geographical contexts. However, these findings raised new questions, such as: Why do these differences exist? What are relevant parental and school factors that can explain these findings? We do not know the answers, because research on these issues in the Indonesian context is scarce. Therefore, we designed an interview study with parents with various backgrounds in different parts of Java to further examine the observed differences in parental involvement. We used the parental involvement model of Hoover-Dempsey and her colleagues (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) to help us understand parental involvement differences between socioeconomic groups in Indonesia, specifically in urban and rural areas in the Java context.

### **Research Context: Urban and Rural Areas on the Island of Java**

Indonesia is a large country which is ranked fourth in population in the world; the estimated total population is over 256 million people. This country (17th largest of the world geographically) consists of thousands of islands, including the five biggest islands. In this study, we focus on Java, the most densely populated large island in Indonesia. To be more specific, this study was conducted in urban and rural elementary schools in three provinces in Java, respectively, Jakarta (the capital of Indonesia), West Java, and East Java. Urban and rural settings have their own characteristics that may influence parents' motivation to be involved and how they are involved in their children's education. For example, the pace of life in urban areas is fast while in rural areas this is more relaxed. There are also differences in parents' socioeconomic and sociocultural conditions between urban and rural areas in Indonesia. Parents in urban areas, for instance, usually have higher educational levels than parents in rural areas. With respect to occupations, parents in urban areas tend to be predominantly engaged in trade, commerce, and services, while parents in rural areas are mostly engaged in agricultural work. In terms of life values, people in rural communities tend to be more traditional and religious. Rural areas, for example, are characterized by strong communities compared to more individualized urban areas. Empirical data on the life contexts in urban and rural contexts in developing countries show that urban culture can be described in terms of "the greater dependence on cash income and the lower reliance on agriculture and natural resources; the higher percentage of women-headed households; the greater involvement of women in income-generating activities

outside the home; the smaller family size and weaker social and family networks; and the resulting limited availability of affordable alternative childcare,” but also “greater availability of food, housing arrangements, health services, and possibility of employment opportunities” (Smith, Ruel, & Ndiaye, 2005, p. 1286). In addition to these findings, Smith et al. (2005) found women in urban areas more likely to have completed formal schooling and to possess more decision-making power relative to their spouses than women in rural areas. These observed urban–rural differences may well influence the parents’ involvement in their children’s education and their motivations underlying their involvement. The parental involvement model by Hoover-Dempsey and her colleagues (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) provides a useful theoretical model to understand the motivational dimensions of parental involvement in education.

### **Understanding Differences in Parental Involvement Motivations and Practices**

Hoover-Dempsey and her colleagues have provided a model of parental involvement that identifies three major sources of motivation for involvement: parents’ role constructions; parents’ sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school; and perceptions of general invitations, demands, and opportunities for involvement. First, parents construct their roles generally from their personal experiences and expectations and those of others around them (e.g., their own parents, friends). Parents’ role constructions influence parents’ actions related to their children including their decisions about involvement in their children’s education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Drummond and Stipek (2004), who studied low-income African American, Caucasian, and Latino parents of elementary school students in the U.S., showed that parents’ role construction as involved parents indeed was associated with helping their children in reading and mathematics.

Second, according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), parents’ sense of efficacy for helping their child succeed in school means that “parents believe that they have the skills and knowledge necessary to help their children, that the children can learn what they share and teach, and that they can find alternative sources of skill or knowledge if and when they become necessary” (p. 314). Consistent with the sense of efficacy theory, several studies reported that parents’ confidence in their ability to help with homework was associated with their involvement practices (e.g., Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Yamamoto, Holloway, & Suzuki, 2016).

Third, general invitations, demands, and opportunities may come both from children and their schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), invitations from children may appear as “a function of age, performance, or characteristic patterns of parent–child interaction” (p. 201). The declines in parental involvement associated with age are usually in consequence of changes in the level of academic work, changes in parents’ beliefs about their ability to help their children to learn, or other specific developmental changes in the children (e.g., younger children are prone to be dependent on their parents, while older children want more independence). Children’s academic performance could also influence parents’ decisions about involvement. Several studies showed that parents of students with high levels of academic performance reported more school-based parental involvement and specific involvement actions than parents of students with lower achievements (e.g., Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). On the other hand, parents of at-risk students reported having more frequent contacts with the teachers due to their children’s low academic performance (McNeal, 2012). The patterns of parent–child interactions may also influence involvement decisions: positive parent–child relationships are likely to strengthen involvement, whereas conflicted relationships are likely to depress involvement. Parents’ perceptions of teacher and school invitations are determined by teachers’ practices and schoolwide efforts to create an inviting climate for involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parents’ perceptions of teacher invitations were associated with parental involvement both at home and at school (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Yamamoto et al., 2016).

### **The Present Study**

As we mentioned above, through our previous study we learned that there were differences in parental involvement in children’s education in urban and rural areas in Java, Indonesia. However, we did not know why those differences existed. Hence, we attempted to answer the question through this qualitative study. Following the parental involvement model of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), the present study aims to provide insights into motivations, practices, and barriers to parental involvement of different socioeconomic groups in Indonesia, particularly in urban and rural settings in Java. This study attempts to answer these questions: (1) What are the factors that motivate parental involvement in their children’s education? (2) How are parents involved in their children’s education? (3) Which barriers to parental involvement do parents perceive? The answers to these research questions can provide valuable information and recommendations to teachers, educators, and policymakers in Indonesia about what needs to be done in order to encourage involvement from parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds in urban and rural contexts.

## Method

### Research Context

The study was conducted in three provinces in Java, respectively Jakarta, West Java, and East Java. Java is the most densely populated island in Indonesia and is a melting pot of different people and cultures. An estimated 56.57% of Indonesia's population (or 148.138.800 people) live on this island in 2017 (BPS Jawa Timur, 2017). There are six provinces on this island (Jakarta, West Java, East Java, Yogyakarta, Central Java, and Banten). Jakarta, West Java, and East Java are the most populated provinces.

### Participants

The participants in this study were selected from 8 of 18 participating schools in our previous large-scale questionnaire study (see the sampling procedure in Yulianti et al., 2018). These schools were selected to represent the contextual characteristics that we addressed in the introduction. Besides two urban schools in Jakarta, we sampled urban and rural schools in West and East Java. We invited parents of diverse backgrounds in terms of socioeconomic status and educational levels (as they mentioned in the questionnaire in our previous study). There were 16 parents (12 mothers, 4 fathers) who participated, one parent per student. To prevent the sample from consisting only of mothers, fathers who were involved in school committees were invited to participate in this study. The age of the children of these parents ranged from 7 years to 11 years old. Students in public elementary schools in Indonesia, including the children of these participating parents, do not pay to attend school. Table 1 presents the demography of the participating parents in the present study.

### The Interview Protocol

The semi-structured interview protocol used for this study, in particular the questions about factors that motivate parental involvement, was mainly derived from the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of parental involvement (1997). In addition, we asked parents about their home and school involvement practices and the challenges or barriers to their involvement. Hence, the interview protocol consisted of questions about:

1. Factors that motivate parental involvement;
  - a. Parents' role construction;
  - b. Parents' sense of efficacy for helping their children to succeed in school;
  - c. Parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement;
2. How parents are involved at home and school; and
3. Barriers to involvement.

Table 1. Participants

School	Region	# of Participants	Role	Educational Attainment	Occupation
1	Jakarta	2	Father	PhD	University professor
			Mother	Master's degree	Employee at a private bank
2	Jakarta	2	Father	Junior high school	Unemployed
			Mother	Unfinished elementary school	Food street vendor
3	West Java Urban	2	Father	Master's degree	Consultant
			Mother	Vocational high school	Housewife
4	West Java Urban	2	Mother	Bachelor's degree	Housewife
			Mother	Junior high school	Factory worker
5	West Java Rural	2	Mother	Never attended school	Farm worker
			Mother	Unfinished elementary school	Food street vendor
6	East Java Urban	2	Mother	Bachelor's degree	Kindergarten teacher
			Mother	Senior high school	Housewife
7	East Java Rural	2	Mother	Senior high school	Informal teacher
			Mother	Never attended school	Housewife
8	East Java Rural	2	Mother	Junior high school	Housewife
			Father	Senior high school	Factory worker

**Procedure of Data Collection**

After parents were selected, they were invited for the interviews in the schools. All invitations were accepted by the parents. There were 16 interviews conducted individually. The interviews were conducted between October and December 2016. The interviews were conducted in the Indonesian language and lasted between 20 to 45 minutes. All interviews were audiorecorded with the permission of participants.

## Data Analysis

During the interviews and data analysis, the first author positioned herself as both insider and outsider, or as Dwyer and Buckle (2009) call it, a “space-in-between.” As an insider, she positioned herself as someone who shared the same identity with participants, particularly in West and East Java, as a person with Javanese and Sundanese (West Java) origins. To make parents feel comfortable during the interviews, although she did not speak Sundanese and Javanese well, she spoke with a little bit of Sundanese accent, while with parents in East Java, she used some polite Javanese words. According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009), an “insider role status frequently allows researchers more rapid and more complete acceptance by their participants. Therefore, participants are typically more open with researchers so that there may be a greater depth to the data gathered” (p. 58). In line with Syahril (2016), the first author benefited greatly from being an insider because the participants seemed to be very comfortable and open with her during the interviews. Simultaneously, the first author positioned herself as an outsider. She explained to parents who participated in this study that she was not a representative of the schools or the government, but she was a researcher conducting the interviews for her doctoral study. She asked the participants to be as honest as they could be, told them there were no right or wrong answers, that their responses and anonymity were guaranteed, and that their answers were valuable for their children’s education and for the improvement of home–school partnerships in Indonesia.

Once the data were collected, the next step was transcribing the materials. For accuracy purposes, the researcher chose to follow a simple transcription approach which means simply transforming the spoken word that has been recorded into the written word verbatim (word for word) without any attempt to correct what was said (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). Then, all verbatim data were translated into English. The verbatim data were coded with axial coding based on the dimensions and subdimensions of the parental involvement motivations model (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), parental involvement practices, and barriers to involvement as mentioned in the interview protocol. After the data were coded, we summarized the responses to the questions per research question. We compared parents’ responses in the context of their geographical area and their educational background and looked at commonalities and typical differences among them.

## Results

Below, we present the results of our analyses in response to each of our research questions in this study. In the first section, we present the factors that

motivated parents to be involved in their children's education. Then in the second section we discuss parents' involvement in their children's education. In the last section, the barriers to parental involvement that parents experienced are presented.

## **Factors That Motivated Parental Involvement**

### *Parents' Role Construction*

With regard to parents' role construction, we distinguished parents' aspirations regarding the school career of their children, their hopes for their children's future, parents' beliefs about what they should do in relation to their children's education, and parents' beliefs about how their children should develop. Parents' aspirations and hopes for their children's education are essential precursors for being involved in their children's education. When parents have high aspirations and hopes for their children's education, parents might see their role as important so that they become involved. Below we will exemplify these factors.

*Educational aspirations.* In response to the question about the educational attainment of their children that they aspired for, most parents—regardless of their educational attainment, socioeconomic status, and geographical area—had high aspirations for their children's educational attainment and allowed their children the freedom to choose. A highly educated father in Jakarta expressed this quite keenly:

We hope all of our children will finish college. However, we never force our children to follow or pursue what we want them to be. We just need to support them. For example, my eldest daughter is passionate in interior design, so that she studied in a school of interior design. Now, she has become an interior designer.

However, the educational aspirations parents have for their children are shaped by their contexts. Two mothers with low levels of education in urban and rural areas pointed out a lower aspiration for their children's educational attainment due to their financial situation. A mother in Jakarta who did not finish elementary school stated:

Her brother dropped out of high school because I was ill. He became a bus conductor to support us financially. Once a month he sends me some money. I hope this will not happen to my daughter. I hope she can finish high school. Going to college seems impossible since we don't have enough money.

*Parents' hopes for their children's futures.* In the interviews, parents were asked about their hopes for their children's futures with their education. This

question engendered a range of responses. For the working-class parents or parents with low levels of education, the dominant emerging theme was hope that their children would have a better life than their own. Meanwhile, to be financially independent was an important theme which arose across some parents with low and middle educational levels. The same mother in Jakarta who did not finish elementary school pointed out:

Maybe, graduating from high school can help her to get a job. I don't dream she will be a doctor or engineer. As long as she can get a job and earn money so that she is financially independent, I will be very grateful.

An interesting response came from a father with middle educational level in a rural area in Pasuruan, East Java who reflected on a social problem of girls marrying at a young age in rural areas. He hoped that education could be the solution to this problem and that it would help to empower girls in the village:

In this village, people are married really young, about 17 years old. Many parents still think that their daughters will lessen their burdens by getting married at a young age. I think this is wrong because those girls are not mentally ready, and because they are not ready, they cannot be a good parent for their children. This creates another problem in the society. I do not want my daughter to be like them. I will do my best so that she can pursue an education as high as possible.

Broader educational goals (related to citizenship and personal development) beyond obtaining a high level of education were stressed by some parents, mainly highly educated parents. A mother in Jakarta who has a master's degree, for example, stated:

I want them to be good humans with strong characters, for example, kind, honest, having integrity, becoming a leader, at least to them. Their success is not my concern. Moreover, life is not about being successful and happy all the time. I also want them to be resilient.

*Parents' beliefs.* Differences in parents' beliefs were apparently influenced by their own parents' educational levels and socioeconomic backgrounds. In particular, the parents of highly educated parents in this study became their role models and greatly influenced how they valued education. A highly educated father in Bandung shared this with us:

My father had a great influence in my life. I was raised in a military way. His upbringing prepared me to be ready for my future. My father was more involved in teaching me science and in how to be networking. My father spoke six languages and emphasized the importance of mastering foreign languages to his children. My mother's role was in character building and religion education.

On the other hand, life adversity played a role in shaping the beliefs of parents with low and middle levels of education. A mother who graduated from junior high school in Bandung, urban West Java stated:

Yeah...our life adversity taught me that my son should be better than us, his education should be higher than us so that his future life will also be better. That is why the first thing I do at home after work is checking my son, whether he has done his homework and asking him what he studied today at school.

Especially parents with middle and high levels of education expressed beliefs about how their children should develop. These parents had well-developed ideas about the main values and personal qualities that their children should have for their future. A working mother in Jakarta with a master's degree pointed this out in the interview:

We want our children to build strong character....The character that our society is missing nowadays. With regard to success, it is relative. In addition, in life we can't always get what we want. I also want my children to be resilient and persevere. I'm grateful that my husband and I are on the same boat, we share the same visions.

All parents, regardless of their educational levels and area, believed that they had an important role in their children's education. However, in the families where both mothers and fathers were highly educated and had full-time jobs, parents seemed to share equal responsibilities in raising the children. A working mother in Jakarta with a high level of education shared this:

We believe that we both must be involved in our children's education. During family dinner we talk about our children's school activities. Then after dinner we check with our children whether they have done their homework and accompany them studying for tomorrow's class. We also do enjoy our quality family time in the weekends by just staying at home or watching movies at the cinema.

Meanwhile in families where only the fathers worked and the mothers had at least middle educational levels, mothers spent more time with the children and were more involved in their children's learning. A full-time mother with a high level of education in Bandung, the capital of West Java, told this to us:

We know that we both must be involved; however, since I am a full-time mother and my husband has a full-time job, I am the one who is mostly involved. For example, I accompany my daughter studying or doing homework every day. When I have difficulty helping her, then I ask my husband to help her.

Parents with low levels of education also believed that they had an important role; however, due to their perceived educational incapability and economic condition, they reported that they could only provide motivational support to their children. A mother in rural Pasuruan, East Java, who never attended school told us, "I often remind my son to study hard so that he can be smart, that is all that I can do."

*Parents' Self-Efficacy for Involvement*

Although all parents agreed that they were responsible to provide good education and that good education was important to shape their children's futures, parents from different educational levels varied in their self-efficacy for involvement in their children's education. Parents who were at least senior high school graduates reported confidence in their ability to be involved. A mother in Bandung, urban West Java who was a vocational high school graduate described this:

Thank God, although I only graduated from a vocational high school, I can still help my daughter with homework. Since I am a full-time mother, most of the time I have time to accompany her studying at home.

Contrary to these parents, parents with low levels of education reported a lack of confidence to be involved both at home and at school. The mother in Jakarta who did not finish elementary school said this:

I ask her elder sister who is now studying at junior high school to help her with homework. I am not involved in school either. Even if I come to the school activities, I cannot do anything. I did not even complete elementary school, only finished Grade 2.

*Parents' Perceptions of Invitations to Involvement*

All parents felt that they were welcome at school. However, parents in urban areas, especially in the predominantly middle to high socioeconomic status schools, reported more involvement in school than parents in rural areas. Besides parent-teacher conferences, annual meetings, and holy day celebrations, schools invited parents to school events such as seminars for parents, student exhibitions, and the end-of-year school assembly. Parents in these schools also received teachers' invitations to organize class field trips. A highly educated father who was a school committee member in Jakarta described parental involvement in his child's school:

In general, the school regularly invites parents to attend parent-teacher conferences twice in every semester, an annual meeting before the new academic year starts, religious celebrations such as Idul Fitri and Idul

Adha [Sacrifice Feast in Islam when Muslims sacrifice animals—in Indonesia most common are male goats—and give away the meat to the poor and needy], and assisting teachers in organizing class field trips. School also held seminars for parents, for example, a seminar about handling preteen kids. This seminar was intended for parents of Grade 6. The speaker was a psychologist who was a colleague of my wife.

Parents who were more self-confident perceived schools' invitations as rather limited. In the interviews, parents who were university graduates expressed that they wanted to be involved in their children's education in an important way. Despite their active involvement in their children's schools, parents reported concerns that invitations from their children's schools and teachers were limited to requests for parents' assistance in school activities. Teachers had never invited these parents to be a volunteer in classroom activities such as reading to the class or planning class learning activities. A highly educated father in Bandung, urban West Java complained:

I have a plan to develop a parent-as-teacher volunteer program. The principal is actually quite open to my idea, but teachers, especially senior teachers, are resistant. They make excuses that this program will decrease their teaching hours which is one of the teacher certification requirements. I've tried to convince them that this program has nothing to do with their teaching hours, and in fact it will help them, and yet they still refuse it.

On the other hand, parents with low levels of education in urban schools and parents in rural schools reported limited invitations to involvement. Schools only invited them for parent-teacher conferences, holy day celebrations, and celebrations of national days such as students' carnival on Indonesia's Independence Day.

Parents also reported that teachers in their children's schools really cared about their children. A mother in a rural area in West Java who did not finish elementary school shared with us the following story:

Once my son did not want to go to school. Then, his teacher came to visit us and persuaded him to go back to school. The next day she came to pick up my son. She also asked me to take my son to school every day until he wanted to go to school on his own.

No parents of any educational level across geographical areas reported any teacher invitation for home reading activities. Yet, parents in some urban and rural schools stated that their children's Islamic religion teachers assigned their Muslim students to make a weekly report of Al Quran reading at home.

## How Parents Are Involved in Their Children's Education

Regarding how parents are involved in their children's education, we distinguished home-based parental involvement and school-based involvement. We present them below.

### *Home-Based Parental Involvement*

There were differences in home-based parental involvement reported by parents with different educational levels. Parents who had middle and high levels of education were more involved in their children's education at home.

*Helping with schoolwork.* As mentioned earlier, all parents who at least graduated from high school reported helping their children with schoolwork or sending their child to a private tutor when they do not have the time to do it themselves. A mother in urban Pasuruan, East Java, who was a high school graduate, told us the following:

My daughter is a bit shy, introvert, but she is a self-regulated learner. I don't have to remind her to study hard. I always accompany her studying and help her with homework, if necessary. But now we have a baby, and she is in a higher grade where mathematics and science subjects are getting more difficult. It's a bit difficult for me to focus on her. Luckily, we have a neighbor who gives private tutorials, so that I can send my daughter to study with her.

Parents with low levels of education seemed to seek more help from others, for example the elder siblings of the child, their uncles or aunts, and neighbors. A mother in a rural area of Pasuruan, East Java, who never attended a school, shared with us the following:

I never attended school, while my husband only attended elementary school. I often ask my neighbor to help my son with his homework.

In community-centered contexts, such as the rural areas in Java, parents not only feel responsible for their own child, but also for those of other parents. A mother in a village in Pasuruan, East Java, who was a high school graduate, reported that she had been an informal teacher in her neighborhood:

I am involved in my son's learning at home for sure. In fact, I give private tutorials at home for our neighbors' children. They study with me almost every day after Maghrib prayer. My intention is only to help them since in this village, many parents have low levels of education, and thus they are not able to help their children study. However, some mothers are eager to learn. They sometimes come to study mathematics with me so that they can help their children afterwards. I just want to help; [I] don't

mean to get money. Yet, parents sometimes give me money, some kilograms of sugar and rice, it's all up to them, I never ask.

*Reading and watching movies.* Besides doing homework, reading and watching movies together were the most frequently reported activities at home by parents who were university graduates, while other parents did not mention such activities at home. The highly educated parents said that they had family reading time and watched movies together at home on the weekends or once in a while at the cinema. A highly educated father in Jakarta stated:

We both love reading, and we transfer it to our children. However, sometimes I can't be with them during our family reading time since I have to teach an evening class. We also have movie time on Sunday followed up with family time where we can discuss anything.

*Children's afterschool activities.* Children's afterschool activities were strongly related to parents' religions, socioeconomic backgrounds, and parents' role construction (parents' beliefs, hopes, and aspirations for their children). For instance, regardless of parents' socioeconomic status and educational levels, Muslim parents reported reading Al Quran as one of their children's afterschool activities. Other afterschool activities were related to parents' socioeconomic background and parents' role construction. Students whose parents had middle and high levels of education in urban areas were engaged in various and structured afterschool activities, for example joining an English course, piano lessons, or a cooking class during school holiday, learning to read Al Quran (since they were Muslims), swimming, and martial arts lessons. These children's afterschool activities showed that parents had considered how their current efforts would help their children in the future. A mother in urban West Java who graduated from college stated this:

My daughter has an English course twice a week. She also learns to read Al Quran at the mosque once a week. I think these activities are important for her.

Parents with middle and low levels of education reported limited choices of afterschool activities such as learning to read Al Quran, playing games at the PlayStation centers, playing soccer, and watching TV. A mother in Bandung, the capital of West Java, who graduated from junior high school and worked as a factory worker stated:

I can't monitor my son while I'm working at the factory. Moreover, we live with our extended family and his grandmother spoils him. He likes wasting money on PlayStation. I don't know how to stop his addiction to PlayStation.

Specific to the rural areas of Pasuruan, East Java, in this study, children's outside of school activities did not really vary, because they were obliged to attend *Madrasah* (Islamic-based school) in the afternoon after attending the regular school in the morning. The majority of the population of Pasuruan region is Muslim. In fact, Pasuruan is well-known as a "santri" area (*santri* is a student at *pesantren*, a traditional Islamic boarding school), because it contains a lot of *pesantrens*. A mother in a rural area of Pasuruan described how children in her village did not have much time for activities other than attending two schools from Monday to Saturday:

Since attending Madrasah after school is compulsory, children here don't have much time to do anything else. It's even difficult for us to visit our family or relatives who live in other places. Doing two schools a day has already consumed their time and energy....My son's only time to play with his peers is on Sundays. He can also play games on my tablet on Sundays.

*Provision of supplementary materials.* Parents with middle and high levels of education across school settings reported that they provided supplementary materials, such as an encyclopedia and games on tablets, to support their children's learning. The mother who was a high school graduate and had been an informal teacher in her neighborhood in rural Pasuruan, East Java, explained:

I have a tablet and internet connection to support my child and other children in the neighborhood to study. I often browse Google to help them with homework.

*Motivational support.* Regardless of their educational levels and socioeconomic status, parents reported that they provided motivational support to their children to succeed at school. A mother in urban West Java who graduated from a vocational school pointed out:

Usually when we have dinner or during the breakfast before she goes to school my husband and I give her our advice to motivate her to study well at school. If she does well in tests, we give praise; if she doesn't, we encourage and convince her that she can do better next time. Yet, we never push her to be the best student in class, instead we advise her to do her best.

### *School-Based Involvement*

The interviews revealed that there were some differences in school-based involvement between parents in urban and rural areas. Parents in urban schools reported more school-based involvement than parents in rural schools. However, parents' school-based involvement in both settings was limited to attending

parent–teacher conferences and school events and assisting teachers in out-of-school activities such as coordinating field trips. No voluntary classroom activities as stipulated by the laws related to community participation in education were reported by the parents.

*Attending parent–teacher conferences.* With respect to school-based involvement, attending parent–teacher conferences was the most common activity that parents in this study reported, regardless of the school setting or parents' educational levels. Most of the schools invited parents to attend the parent–teacher conferences four times a year or twice in every semester.

*Attending school events.* Most parents in this study reported that besides attending parent–teacher conferences, they were also involved in school events such as helping their children to participate at school carnivals, Indonesia's Independence Day, and holy day celebrations. A father who was the head of a school committee in Jakarta told us this:

Once a year, we celebrate Idul Adha. We give away the meat to the poor students in this school.

Parents in other urban schools reported that they attended various other school events. In addition to school carnivals and holy day celebrations, these parents also attended seminars for parents that were initiated by the school committee, student exhibitions, and year-end school assemblies.

*Coordinating field trips.* Parents in urban areas reported their involvement in coordinating field trips, for example, trips to museums and botanical gardens. A father who held a doctoral degree and was an active member of the school committee in Jakarta shared this with us:

Teachers involve parents to organize class field trips. Parents are in charge of providing meals, transport, and accommodation. Teachers focus on preparing the field trip activities for the students. My wife is usually involved in coordinating field trips. I'm more involved in the school committee, particularly in monitoring the implementation of the school academic programs.

However, this father also reported that parents put too much pressure on teachers in order to get their children into a top public high school in Jakarta:

There are a lot of parents, especially parents of sixth graders, who force teachers to give students more study hours. They want their children to be accepted at the perceived best school in Jakarta. I am against them and try to make them realize that going to the so-called best school is not the most important thing to their children.

## Barriers to Parental Involvement

Regarding the barriers to parental involvement, highly educated parents and parents with low levels of education perceived different barriers. Some parents with low levels of education reported barriers to both home-based and school-based involvement, which seemed partly to be caused by their low self-efficacy to help their children to learn. These parents' barriers were their perceived educational incapability and low self-efficacy, inflexibility of work hours, and financial barriers. On the other hand, highly educated parents only reported lack of power and lack of opportunity for active involvement at school as barriers to their school-based involvement.

### *Barriers to Parental Involvement as Reported by Parents With Low Levels of Education*

*Barriers to home-based involvement: Educational incapability and self-efficacy.* In the interviews, parents with low levels of education expressed doubts about their educational capability. These parents indicated that they depended on others (their elder child, the uncle and aunt of the child, or their neighbor) to help their child learn. As one mother in a rural area of West Java stated:

I never attended school and am illiterate, so that I can't help with her study. I ask her elder sister to help her with homework.

Parents with low levels of education also showed their self-doubts to educate their child. For example, as mentioned earlier, a mother in urban West Java who was a junior high school graduate said that she did not know how to handle her son's addiction to PlayStation.

*Barriers to school-based involvement (1): (Perceived) educational incapability and low self-efficacy.* Doubts about educational incapability and self-efficacy were also reported by a parent with a low level of education as a barrier to her school-based involvement. As this mother in Jakarta stated:

I did not finish elementary school, so even if I attended my child's school activities, I would not do anything. I don't know anything.

*Barriers to school-based involvement (2): Inflexibility of parents' work hours.* Parents with low levels of education not only stated that they were unable to be involved in their children's education because they lacked capability, but also because of the inflexibility of their work hours that prevented them from being actively involved in their children's school activities. The mother who never attended school and worked as a farm hand in rural West Java stated:

I cannot leave the paddy field. If I work less than the work hours, I will not receive full wages.

*Barriers to school-based involvement (3): Financial barriers.* Another related barrier to involvement for parents with low levels of education and socioeconomic status is their economic struggle that also prevented them from being present in their children's school activities and, at a time of crisis, even prevented the child from going to school. The mother who was an elementary school dropout living in Jakarta shared with us the following:

I'm a single mother. My husband left me. I raise my children on my own. I earn money by selling street food. Sometimes, I have money, but more often I don't. When I was sick, my daughter could not go to school because I did not have money. She had to take public transport to go to her school. Her teacher and other parents came to visit us. They gave me and my daughter money so that she could go to school by public transport and to buy food.

*Barriers to School-Based Involvement as Reported by Highly Educated Parents*

*Lack of power.* Some highly educated parents were critical and wanted to be more involved in school, in particular, in the school committee. A father who held a master's degree and was the head of the school committee in urban West Java shared his concern with us:

Ideally, based on the regulation and laws about family and community participation, the school committee is a school partner. Their position should not be below the principal and teachers. But in reality, our role is limited only to assisting school and giving inputs. Committee should also function in controlling/monitoring, maintaining communication between teachers and parents, and supporting the school.

*Lack of opportunity for active involvement at school.* As mentioned earlier, highly educated parents also reported that they wanted to be more actively involved at school, for example, to voluntarily teach in their children's class. However, they found teachers were resistant to this idea and did not allow parents to demonstrate this type of involvement.

## Discussion

In the present study we investigated: (1) the factors that motivated parents to be involved in their children's education, (2) how parents were involved in their children's education, and (3) parents' perceived barriers to their involvement in their children's education. We conducted this study through interviews with parents to get a better understanding of the mechanisms of parental involvement in elementary schools in urban and rural areas in Java, Indonesia.

Parents' aspirations for their children's education, as an indicator of their motivation to become involved in their children's education, showed some commonalities among the parents. Most parents, regardless of their educational background or the geographical context, had high aspirations for their children's education; they aspired that their children would go to college. With regard to parents' beliefs about the importance of education, all parents shared the same beliefs that good education was important to their children's futures. However, interesting differences were found in parents' hopes for their children's futures. Parents with low and middle educational levels viewed education as a means to improve their children's future life, while highly educated parents had a broader view of education as a means to contribute to society. Differences were also found in parents' beliefs about what they should do in relation to their children's education and their beliefs about how their children should develop. The beliefs of highly educated parents were shaped by their own parents, while life adversity greatly influenced parents with low and middle educational levels. Parents with middle and high levels of education showed higher expectations for their children. In terms of parents' sense of self-efficacy to support their children's learning, parents who were at least senior high school graduates reported higher self-confidence in their ability to be involved in their children's education, both at home and at school. With respect to parents' perceptions of school and teachers' invitations, all parents felt welcome and invited to be involved. However, highly educated parents felt that there was teacher resistance that caused a feeling of powerlessness that hindered their involvement.

Parents' educational levels also affected the way they promoted their children's educational success. The findings indicated that parents with middle and high levels of education were more involved in their children's education. They helped their children with homework, had reading time with their children, were actively involved at school, and provided learning resources for their children. On the other hand, parents with low levels of education reported less involvement due to educational incapability and low self-efficacy, inflexible working hours, and limited resources. An interesting finding indicated community involvement in a rural area. A parent who was a high school graduate reported that she was voluntarily involved in the children's learning in her neighborhood. With respect to the barriers to parental involvement, parents with low levels of education saw themselves as less capable and less self-efficacious, and they reported inflexible work hours and their financial condition as barriers to their involvement. Highly educated parents, for their part, found lack of power as one barrier to involvement in their children's education.

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of parental involvement (1995, 1997) was helpful in explaining differences between parents with different levels

of education in urban and rural contexts regarding their involvement both at home and at school. With respect to parental role construction, all parents in this study perceived themselves as being responsible for their children's education. However, only highly educated parents saw themselves as school partners. These parents wanted to be more involved as school partners, including involvement in voluntary classroom activities, monitoring, and decision-making on the school committee as stipulated by the law and regulations about the role of the school committee. This finding is in line with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) who argued that upper-middle-class parents were classified as "having an interconnected view of home and school" (p. 15); parents of this group viewed themselves as "responsible for intervening in school decisions as necessary" (p. 15). This finding also supports Denessen, Slegers, Driessen, and Smit (2001) who argued that the home-school partnership view is applicable particularly for "middle-class parents who often see teachers as partners in education" (p. 63).

Parents' educational level is also associated with parents' efficacy beliefs regarding helping their children to succeed in school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In this study, parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds reported more confidence to be involved in their children's education, whereas parents with low levels of education showed low efficacy beliefs through statements about their perceived inability to be actively involved in their children's education. However, unlike the working-class parents in many Western studies (see, e.g., Lareau, 1987; Lee & Bowen, 2006), parents with low levels of education in Java, Indonesia were not merely dependent on the teachers to educate their children. Instead, they also sought assistance from their closest family members and neighbors or community. This is an important finding that might be typical for the Indonesian context, in which the community support seems stronger than in individualistic Western countries. The collectivist nature of the Indonesian culture and society (see Hofstede, 1986) might explain the stronger community support reported by parent participants.

All parents in this study said they felt welcome at school. Yet, highly educated parents found some restrictions to their involvement at school, in line with the findings of Fitriah et al. (2013). Unlike in Western contexts (Bakker & Denessen, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Xu, Benson, Camino, & Steiner, 2010), schools in Indonesia seem to involve parents merely in terms of assisting with school events or class field trips; parents did not report being involved in voluntary classroom activities or in decision making, which are aspects of school-based parental involvement in Epstein's (1995) framework of parental involvement. This barrier to parental involvement may be due to cultural differences. According to Hofstede (1986), while most developed or industrialized

Western countries show a small power distance, Indonesia can be characterized with a relatively large power distance. In this country with a relatively large power distance culture, parents may have fewer opportunities to be involved in school matters due to the division of responsibilities and the hierarchical relation between teachers and parents (Denessen et al., 2001).

The educational background-related differences between the levels of involvement with children's afterschool activities can be explained by Lareau's (2003) concept of "concerted cultivation" (see also Bodovski & Farkas, 2008; Redford, Johnson, & Honnold, 2009). Lareau distinguished the strategy of "concerted cultivation" that was prevalent in middle and upper-middle class families from the "accomplishment of natural growth" strategy that was more common in working-class families. All parents want the best for their children. However, due to their economic struggles, working-class parents may see their primary life task as fulfilling the physical needs of their children such as providing food, clothes, and housing. Children of these parents may spend their leisure times by playing with their neighbor kids, watching TV, or playing games at the commercial PlayStation center. On the other hand, children of middle- and upper-middle-class families tend to participate in leisure activities arranged by the adults (their parents), for example, private tutorials, English and cooking classes, sports, and so on. Dunn, Kinney, and Hofferth (2003) pointed out that children's afterschool activities were seen by parents as useful tools to help their children develop the necessary skills that are needed in order to become competent adults.

To help parents with low levels of education and working-class parents overcome barriers to their involvement, schools could start establishing home-school relationships by building mutual understanding with parents, recognizing parents' life contexts, and rewarding their efforts to be involved in their children's educational lives (Denessen et al., 2001; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2016). Instead of school-centric and teacher-driven models of parental involvement, schools can take parents and families as the point of departure to establish parental involvement and home-school partnership policies (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2016). In line with this, Sukhbaatar (2018) argued that teachers can plan activities and make parental involvement efforts more meaningful "by understanding different patterns of families, parents' needs, and parental workload" (p. 316). Further, Posey-Maddox and Haley-Lock (2016) posit that schools and parents should engage in bidirectional and collaborative dialogues about what each party needs, hopes, and expects in relation to family-school relationships and their lived realities. However, schools and parents also need support from other parties. This approach requires both institutional and structural changes. For example, to help the

schools to be more inclusive in improving parental involvement practices, there should be adequate funding systems for public education and employment and other economic supports for the families.

Generally, the findings that showed the differences of parental involvement in this study are in line with those of Lareau's study (1987) which demonstrated the link between the level of parental involvement, socioeconomic status, and social and cultural capital of the parents. The findings are also consistent with Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (1986) positing that the educational level of the parents, as a form of cultural capital, influences parents' participation in their children's learning. However, although in general the study findings showed similarities with existing studies on parental involvement in Western contexts, this study also adds to the literature specifically with regards to a sense of community involvement in rural areas in the Indonesian context. While in Western contexts parents in urban and rural settings are more prone to be involved in their own children's education, this study showed that in a rural area in Indonesia, community members were also involved in the education of children other than their own. This finding is rather similar with a study of parental involvement in Mongolia (Sukhbaatar, 2018) that showed the role of caretakers or relatives who acted in place of herder parents and migrant worker parents by taking care of the children. The finding also indicates that the connectedness among the residents in the community in rural areas may offer advantages and opportunities for school–community partnerships not present in urban schools. Bauch (2001), in support of Coleman's social capital theory (1987), argued that poor, rural schools without the existence of economic and human capital can still succeed through their close relationships and strong bonds within the community. In addition, since the majority of the Indonesian population are Muslims, mosque ties can also provide opportunities for school–community partnerships, particularly in rural areas.

Although we are aware of the limited range of this qualitative study and the possibility of the participant selection bias, we can still draw some conclusions. The results of this study provide an enriched picture of the ways that parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds in urban and rural Java, Indonesia envisage the importance of education and define their roles in supporting their children's learning. The study finding that showed how parents with different educational levels valued the purpose of education provides some opportunities for further research. For example, research on school improvement could focus on the role of the school leaders to promote parental involvement from different socioeconomic backgrounds in any type of schools in urban and rural settings. The typical study findings related to the collectivist culture in Java, Indonesia, that showed the involvement of other family and

community members and how parents, particularly in rural Java, felt responsible for the education of children other than their own are also interesting to be further explored in other areas of Indonesia or in different contexts. Comparative research including collectivist cultures and individualistic Western contexts might also be interesting to study the effects of these aspects of parental involvement on children's education.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup>For example, the Indonesian government regulation number 17 of 2010, the Law of the Republic of Indonesia on the National Education System Number 20 of 2003 Chapter IV Article 8 and Article 56.

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