

Participatory Communication in Children Empowerment Program in Yogyakarta: The Case of *Sekolah Gunung Merapi* and *Komunitas Jendela Jogja*

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Abstract

Using qualitative approach, this study aims to analyse the participatory communication in the children empowerment programs held by Sekolah Gunung Merapi and Komunitas Jendela Jogja, as well as its supporting and undermining factors. The data of this study were collected through in-depth interviews, semi-participant observations, and document collections. Six informants were involved in this study, which were purposively selected as they are activists of the two research communities. As a result, the study shows that participation in children empowerment programs in Yogyakarta appears at four processes: decision-making, activities implementation, monitoring and evaluation and outcome utility. In each process, they mostly use the concept of dialogue and carnival participation. In terms of participation level, the children empowerment programs held by Sekolah Gunung Merapi and Komunitas Jendela Jogja are both in partnership level with roles as accelerator, mediator, educator, expert and social planner. The supporting factors in the children empowerment programs include supports and facilities while the undermining factors are the lacks of number and teaching skill from volunteer's side and troubles from student's side.

Keywords: *Children empowerment program; participation; participatory communication; Sekolah Gunung Merapi; Komunitas Jendela Jogja.*

1. Introduction

As a developing country, Indonesia has some problems in its education system. In 2017 for example, UNICEF revealed that there were 2.5 million Indonesian children who could not afford high school. The data showed that 600 thousands primary school students and 1.9 million junior high school students could not continue their education. Similar problem happens in Yogyakarta. Despite its trademark as a city of education, the number of children who drops out of school in this city is quite high. Besides, education is not evenly distributed.

Luckily, there are some communities and institutions that voluntarily run children empowerment programs in Yogyakarta. Two of them are Sekolah Gunung Merapi (SGM) and Komunitas Jendela Jogja (KJJ). Empowerment itself means an attempt to raise a skill of an individual to reach particular goal. An empowerment program surely involves participatory communication. According to Bessette (2004) participatory communication is the use of media and interpersonal communication in the form of participatory dialogue among those who are involved in a development and empowerment program. This study aims to explore how participative communication is practiced in the children empowerment program at SGM and KJJ. It also aims to know the supporting and undermine factors in the children empowerment program at those two communities.

2. Literature Review

This study fulfil the gap of the rare existing studies on the issue of children empowerment, especially focusing on its participatory communication. In the context of children empowerment, Rahmaveda (2017) explored the phenomenon of children who live on the street in Surabaya. She looks at further on the empowerment program held by Surabaya City Social Service (*Dinas Sosial Kota Surabaya*) in cooperation with *Rumah Singgah Alang Alang* and *Rumah Singgah Kharisma*. The result shows that there are three dimensions of the empowerment programs such as the dimension of street children's self reliance, the dimension of synergy among stakeholders in the empowerment program, and the dimension of street children empowerment. The street children who join the

empowerment program come from different background so they have different characteristics. The research reveals that the children were not involved in the planning and decision making process of the empowerment program. However, the outcome shows that the empowerment program had been successfully raising the social self-reliance of street children. However, their intellectual and learning self-reliance were still low.

Sulaiman, Sugito and Sabiq (2016) in their research entitled "*Komunikasi Pembangunan Partisipatif untuk Pemberdayaan Buruh Migran – Participative Developmental Communication for Migrant Workers Empowerment*" explained that participatory development opens the opportunity for local community to dialogue, to aspire, and to confabulate with the government. They argue that the process of planning and implementing empowerment program really depends on the participatory communication as indicated in the involvement of society in village development, welfare, having a job and not leaving the village to be migrant workers.

Meanwhile, Mandafi, Supratomo and Sultan (2015) applied three dimensions of indicator to understand the importance of communication and community participation in Development Planning Meeting – *Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan* (MUSREMBANG) program. These dimensions include synchronisation, integration and coordination. The research shows that the relationship between community and government had been intensively built during MUSREMBANG activities. The research also indicates that there had been a better communication among community members, however women involvement was still less than expected. In addition to that, the involvement from community was in the forms of joining activities and giving recommendation.

Furthermore, Satriai, Muljono and Lumintang (2011) explored community involvement from the perspective of reducing the cost of social development. As a consequence, human is merely perceived as hard labour so their role is limited in the context of program application and implementation. This restrains the development of creative potencies from every individual as they are forced to accept the decisions from 'outsider'. This research also finds out that the stakeholders, in

this case are Situgede village administration, P2SDM LPPMIPB and public figure, play their own roles in *Posyandu Kenanga* activities. The impact of participatory communication can be seen in the exchange of information and knowledge, the effort to solve the problem together and the good cooperation among cadres.

Another research about empowerment in Central Java and Yogyakarta was conducted by Masrukin et al. (2013). This research finds similar model of empowerment in four different locations in the area of research. These models are: (1) Community needs comprehensive empowerment program, which consist of training, counselling, and mentoring; (2) Community needs to establish a cooperative to guarantee the supply of raw materials, investment or capital, and access to distribution network. The cooperative can also be a business for the community; (3) Community needs regular training and reinforcement of disaster awareness group in community level.

3. Method

This research applies qualitative method. The data were collected through in-depth interview, observation, and document during September – December 2018. The interviews were conducted with the interview guide and with the model of semi-structured interviews. While the observations were done through semi-participant observations in which the researcher participated as the teacher or facilitator in the two research locations. In the data analysis step, this study has applied qualitative approach analysis which consisting of data reduction, categorization, and conclusion.

There were six informants involved in this study, purposively selected as they supposedly understand the research issue. All of the informants were the activists of the two research communities, i.e. Yasmin Winnett (the founder and teacher at SGM), Arie Brianita (teacher assistant at SGM), Annisa Nuraini (librarian and teacher assistant at SGM), Ahmad Khoirul Anam (coordinator of KJJ), Dinyatul Ladiya (cooperation division of KJJ), and Firdausi Nur Afifah (program coordinator of KJJ).

4. Participatory Communication in the Children Empowerment Program at Sekolah Gunung Merapi

An empowerment program will not run successfully without participatory communication. This is because in the implementation of empowerment program there is always interaction between everyone involved. Participatory communication is essential in empowerment program because there should be an involvement between facilitator and the targeted community to guarantee that the planned program run successfully and give expected benefit. According to Adi (2003) there are four concepts of participatory communication in an empowerment and development program, i.e. heteroglossia, dialogue, polyphony and carnival.

This research analyses participatory communication in Sekolah Gunung Merapi to reach their empowerment program goals. The participation is then seen in four different processes, i.e. decision-making, activities implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and outcome utility. This study finds that SGM uses the concept of participatory communication in the whole process of their empowerment program, starting from decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, to outcome utility.

In the process of deciding every matter related to children empowerment program, SGM applies the dialogue concept. Indeed, this concept appears when they discuss about the activities of children empowerment program. One example of participation in decision-making level can be seen when they decided to open English class for children. In this process, they agreed mutually on the curriculum, the learning material, the learning method, the supporting facilities and all the things needed to run the English class program. The decision making in the class also involved students as they discuss and decide the class name, the class arrangement, and the favourable learning method.

Sekolah Gunung Merapi believes that dialogue concept is fit and effective for decision making because it can eliminate the escalated obstacles and problems. In the dialogue process, everyone involved tries to appreciate each other to agree on a decision. This concept also

provokes responsibility in every individual so the communication process goes effectively.

In the activities implementation, every party such as organizers or teachers, students and parents, were involved in their respective capacities. The organizers, for example, teach in the class, mentor activities in library, help with homework and play together. There was also a special training for the teacher to improve their English skill. Meanwhile, parents' participation include to sign their children up and be charged if their children are not showing up for no reason, to drop off and pick up their children and to attend the end of semester celebration where their children perform. The children also play a role in the implementation of program by actively joining the activities, and following the given rules.

Thus, we may say that when implementing the empowerment program for children, SGM applies the carnival concept of participatory communication by using interactive media, i.e. games, videos, songs, and stories, to deliver the lesson to the children. This concept was considered as the easiest way to deliver material and was more understandable for children. Also, this concept was good to avoid boredom during lesson. Furthermore, there are many outside parties who want to join in the programs by using their skill such as storytelling, pantomime, painting, and other fun activities for children.

Dialogue concept was also used in monitoring and evaluation. SGM evaluates their programs on regular basis, i.e. after one activity is completed, weekly and monthly. Monitoring and evaluation are conducted by the organizers. During evaluation, every organizer expresses their opinions regarding things that need to be evaluated. Evaluation was done to judge the effectiveness of program, material, and learning method. Furthermore, evaluation was also used to see children development in class. Every teacher also shares the information based on their opinion and observation regarding the matters that need to be evaluated as well as any problem that appeared during program implementation. They also gave recommendations for future improvements. In such discussion, they try to find the best solution that is agreed by everyone.

As for the outcome utility, the program gives a positive impact to the children. This was shown in their increasing interest to read or

literacy, increasing English skill, increasing creativity and cooperation with other parties. In this step, SGM applies the dialogue concept of participatory communication. After the teachers express their opinion about students' progress in one semester, they further discuss the continuity of the program by deciding what next to sustain and later improve the achieved learning outcome such as self-reliance, responsibility, teamwork, and environment care and awareness. This is done by running activities and strengthening understanding through group task, group discussion and so on. To maintain the improvement on reading interest among the students of SGM, the teachers keep motivating and even promising a present for those who read the most. In addition to that, a level system was made to motivate the students to raise their English skill level. Meanwhile, to improve children creativity, SGM provides *Pentas Akhir Semester – Semester Final Performance*, an end of semester performance when the children can perform their creativities and are given freedom to discuss anything related to the performance. They are free to discuss what to perform, distribute the jobs during performance, arranging schedule for practice, and preparing equipment needed. In terms of relation with external parties, SGM is open for cooperation with potential partner.

5. Participatory Communication in the Children Empowerment Program at Komunitas Jendela Jogja

Participation is also an inevitable part of children empowerment program held by Komunitas Jendela Jogja. Similar to SGM, the form of participation in KJJ can be seen in the level of decision-making, activities implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and outcome utility.

In the decision making process, KJJ applies the concept of dialogue participation as they involve all organizers, volunteers, parents, and students. Dialog appears when they decide on matters related to activities implementation and when they do the weekly briefing to prepare everything they need from material to person in charge. It is the role of organizer to decide what program to run, idea and theme for the monthly activities, job distribution, and equipment needed for the activities. When deciding idea, students' aspiration is taken into account. Their

parents also get involved by giving approval to the activities that will be held by KJJ. For example, in the process of deciding what activities to do, there would be exchange of ideas, by having dialog with students, to make sure that the intended activities are not boring for them. Students' opinions are indeed taken into account by the volunteer for the successful of next activities.

In implementing the activities, KJJ runs socialisation related to the intended children empowerment program. During the weekly briefing, the organizers discuss the topic and the theme, person in charge, things they need to do, and other practical matters. In addition to that, organizers and volunteers play the role in their respective divisions. The students are also actively involved in the activities implementation by giving suggestions for the next activities, joining all the activities and willing to increase their knowledge by reading books in KJJ library.

Komunitas Jendela Jogja applies the concept of carnival participatory communication when implementing their activities. This concept is the most obvious in this level as KJJ uses interactive media such as storytelling, film, drama, etc., in their activities. It is believed that these methods make the material delivery to students easier. Different theme is offered every week and each covers various topics such as environment, heroes, parents, diversity, youth pledge, etc. Every week, there is different method using interactive media. Collaboration with outside parties also use interactive media based on the skill they have. This attracts students to join the activities enthusiastically.

In doing monitoring and evaluation, KJJ applies the concept of polyphonic participatory communication. It is done during the regular evaluation (post activities) as well as during the three-monthly major evaluation. In the evaluation, the volunteers have chances to present their observation result related to completed activities. They can criticize the missteps in previous programs and give recommendations for the following activities. Not only volunteer, students are also allowed to contribute in the evaluation process as they are given a chance to give suggestion and recommendation both written or directly to the volunteers.. In every session after an activity is completed, the volunteer hands out paper and pen for the students to write their testimonials about the activities and their suggestions for the

next ones. The volunteers then discuss these testimonials and suggestions. In such discussion, counterargument is inevitable due to different point of view. Therefore they need to be open to each other to reach mutual agreement.

In the context of outcome utility, the empowerment program had been successfully increasing reading interest and literacy, increasing creativity, and cooperation with other parties. KJJ applies dialogue participatory communication in the context of outcome utility. Such concept appears when the volunteers discuss about how to make the most of the outcome with students. Each volunteer has an opportunity to convey his/her idea regarding the impacts of outcome for students and how to improve them. For example, to improve the reading interest among students, the volunteers create another activity as an award when the students reach reading target, such as movie screening or museum visit. In addition to that, to improve creativity, the students are encouraged to perform in the community anniversary night. They even are allowed to decide for themselves what to perform, who will perform, job and role distribution, practice schedule, and everything up until the performance time. After receiving an award they also discuss further improvement. Dialogue participatory communication also happened when outside parties express their interest to cooperate with KJJ. Komunitas Jendela Jogja is indeed open to collaboration, as long as it is relevant with their values and purposes.

6. Supporting and undermine factors

Arnstein (1969) believes that there are eight levels of public participation. Looking at the empowerment program by both SGM and KJJ, the level of participation they do is at the partnership level. This level is characterised by targeted community involvement in discussing and deciding to achieve mutual agreement and to share responsibility in planning, controlling decision, and solving problem which is clearly done by both SGM and KJJ in their children empowerment programs.

In terms of role, the organizers of SGM and KJJ develop the concept of role and skill for community worker (Adi, 2003). These roles are: 1). Changes accelerator, helping community to define their needs and to identify and solve

problems; 2). Mediator, connecting community to the needed services or helps; 3). Educator, giving correct, clear and understandable information to targeted community; 4). Expert, supporting the result of empowerment program with their skills; 5). Social planner, analysing social problem and giving alternative solution to handle it.

This study concludes that supporting factors in the implementation of empowerment program at SGM include adequate facilities, available funding, and support from parents and community. On the other hand, the undermine factors are limited number of permanent volunteer, limited skill of teachers, and distractions from students. In the case of KJJ, the supporting factors are support from parents and community. Meanwhile, the undermine factors include limited number of active volunteer, lack of preparation before program implementation, low budget, minimum facilities and distractions from students.

7. Conclusion

This research aims to look at the participatory communication in the children empowerment programs in Yogyakarta as exemplified by Sekolah Gunung Merapi and Komunitas Jendela Jogja. This study concludes that the organizers of empowerment program both in SGM and KJJ are able to describe the active roles of respective communities to the development of children education. The improvements in English skill, reading interest, creativity, self-reliance, social awareness and collaboration offer from outside parties are further evidence of the program impacts from SGM. Meanwhile, KJJ also successfully increases reading interest and creativity among

students, as well as attracts interest from outside party to cooperate with them. KJJ even received an award for their program. These outputs are a result of participatory communication in four different levels, i.e. decision making, activities implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and outcome utility. The success of empowerment programs in SGM and KJJ are not possible without the full support from parents, families of the students and surrounding community.

Both SGM and KJJ have applied the concepts of participatory communication. In SGM, they apply dialogue and carnival, while in KJJ, they use dialogue, polyphonic and carnival. They have also practiced two ways communication between facilitator and targeted community, both students and parents. SGM and KJJ share same vision and mission to empower children in education so they can succeed in the future. In doing so, they use participatory in partnership level and play the roles as changes accelerator, mediator, educator, expert and social planner.

In a children empowerment program, supporting and undermining factors are common. The supporting factors for children empowerment program held by SGM are adequate facilities and infrastructure, secure budgeting, and supports from parents and community. On the other hand, the undermine factors include the lack of permanent volunteer, limited teaching skill, and troubles from students. For KJJ, the supporting factors are supports from parents and surrounding community, and satisfactory book collection; while the undermines factors are lack of active volunteer, lack of preparation, lack of funding, lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure and troubles from students.

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