



# Indigenous Education in Indonesian - Traditional Families Migrant Workers Abroad: From Mothering to Parenting and Schooling for Educational Design

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The purpose of this study is to explore indepth indigenous values from traditional communities in order to improve children's educational design services. Qualitative phenomenology methods are used to explore the experiences of families and relatives of Indonesian workers who work abroad regarding caring for and guiding and facilitating their children's educational needs. Data was collected through indepth interviews and direct observation of 30 families of migrant workers who have children attending primary and secondary schools. Cross-site analysis is used to construct propositions that refer to theoretical designs about traditional indigenous society.

**Keywords:** *indigenous education, traditional society, kinship, Indonesian labor*



## INTRODUCTION

Results of research conducted by researchers within the last ten years show that improvement incentives for education service quality in rural (traditional) areas should be based on a study centered on the potential areas and rural communities themselves. The preferred education service strategy is the empowerment of potential, wisdom and content found naturally from the background of the community and local environment without intervention and manipulation from outside parties (Ulfatin and Mukhadis, 2015). In particular, it was shown a focus on improving the quality of education in rural areas must consider the necessity for: (1) a special school curriculum that is intentionally designed based on local content; (2) special service packages and action programs that pay attention to the potential and opportunities of rural targets; (3) teaching and learning that uses an integrated learning model that combines academic skills in the core curriculum and personal skills and social skills in independent learning at home; (4) a system of partnership and friendship between schools as a driver of progress; and (5) a changed teacher role to that of motivator and role model that highlights personal and social competencies for students and society (Mukhadis and Ulfatin, 2017).

In basic education (elementary school and junior high school), the application of criteria and indicators of progress in education and the system of rural schools require the involvement and empowerment of the community and parents which is much higher or equal to the involvement of staff and teacher personnel in schools. This is very reasonable because the social environment and family play an equally important role in the development of individuals in the period of adolescence (Olsen and Fuller, 2003). In adolescent development, alienation from family triggers negative impingement and influences academic activities. Family is the most influential factor in adolescent academic performance and this why schools (elementary school and junior high school) and teachers must establish good relationships, not only involve parents but also relatives and peers.

In rural and traditional communities, the involvement of family and relatives in education needs to be studied more deeply. This is because they have their own indigenous character and the higher the family's concern for education, the higher the willingness to encourage adolescents to achieve academically (Chen and Gregory, 2017). The family in this context includes not only the parents (father and mother), but also involves other relatives (grandparents, aunts uncles, and extend to community members who live near parents' house) (Collins, 1987). A village teenager who wants to continue their education will find that their choice of school is determined not only by themselves and their parents but also involves their family and relatives, even their neighbors (Ulfatin and Mukhadis, 2015; Collins, 1987; Desforges, 2003).

There are problems which develop among rural communities when a child is left behind by their parents (especially a mother) in the circumstance where the parent works at a distance away from the home or abroad. The departure of parents while on the one hand resulted in increased revenues, housing improvements, motor vehicles, and increase investment (Yuniarto, 2015), on the other has an impact in that the departure of a mother for an extended period can have a negative impact on the



family left behind, especially related to the continuity of children's education and in fact lack of parental love can result in juvenile delinquency (Amalia, 2011).

The involvement of relatives in the lives of children as they develop into adolescents is increasingly important especially in rural socio-economic communities. In these communities the role of parents (father and mother) can be replaced by relatives (grandparents, uncles, aunts, and so on). The involvement of relatives in the care and education of children in traditional rural communities (including remote areas) needs to be studied more deeply to develop a better applied program and education system in accordance with the characteristics and potential of the traditional environment and background (Goenther and Osborne, 2018). Further, the description of the kinship system in traditional rural families needs to be explored more deeply to develop propositions about indigenous rural families that must be considered by school policies in the development of educational partnership programs.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Most of Indonesia's population live in rural areas. They live as traditional communities and many still face the problem of poverty. The national poverty rate indicator has not reached the 2015 MDG's Indonesia target (BAPPEDA, 2015). Poverty is not only viewed from economic aspects but from a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional perspective including particularly education and health (Stamboel, 2012; Suyanto, 2012; Indira, 2017). Poor children are threatened with marginalization, exploitation and have no future (White, 2005). Junior high school children in rural areas all come from poor families and they are prone to dropping out of school because they have to help parents work to support their families (Ulfatin and Mukhadis, 2015).

Parents of poor families still have the resources and opportunities to carry out child care functions to a minimum, but their use is not optimal because of the limited capacity to carry out parental roles (Indira, 2017). Emotional closeness in children tends to be characterised by indulgence and is not yet balanced with consistent discipline with moral education left to religious institutions. Even though school is considered an important element for children, parents are constrained in assisting their children to learn because of their limited academic abilities. What's interesting about this finding is the presence of social support from the extended family (relatives) and neighbors in raising children due to the sense of togetherness.

Indira's (2017) finding is limited to exploring cases in poor but intact families (existing and living with father and mother) in urban areas. Meanwhile, for families that are not intact (separation of parents due to divorce or separation or because one or both of them migrate and work in distant places), the care and education of children that are handed over to relatives and neighbors has not been widely explored. As well as poor people in rural areas, the rights of children who have not been fulfilled by their parents cannot be anticipated because there is no clear picture of their profiles and their potential. Conceptual parental function can be defined as parenting capacity (Indira, 2017).



Parenting capacity according <sup>(14)</sup> is the ability to care for children in a 'good enough' way to empower them for life. The parenting capacity can function effectively if parents have enabling factors in their child's care, namely resources and opportunities to interact with their children. According to the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families (2000) parenting capacity includes six dimensions: basic care, ensuring safety, emotional warmth, stimulation, guidance and boundaries, and stability. Further, the enabling factors are resources (socio-economic situation, home situation), and family time (quantity and quality when parents interact with children).

Children from traditional rural poor families, do not get help when experiencing academic difficulties and education is less appreciated by parents because they are busy working for a living. According to Suryadarma and Suryahadi (2009), poverty also has a significant negative effect on the completion of education up to junior high school level. However, on the other hand poverty actually reinforces the importance of cooperating in fulfilling children's rights to obtain care and education that optimizes their potential so that they have the opportunity to achieve in the future. The results of the study show the importance of the role and involvement of parents in children's academic, namely the development of skills and knowledge (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995).

Other research also shows that the role of parents is very dominant in child academic self-efficacy, learning competencies and behavior and also reduces the negative impact of low socio-economic factors on children's academic achievement (Fantuzzo, et. al. 2004). Based on the results of these studies, schools should establish good cooperation with parents and even in traditional societies, as described by Indira (2017), the school-parents cooperation must be extended to relatives and the neighborhood where the children live. This is so that parents have social support from extended family and neighbors to help when parents require child-related needs.

The expansion of the relationship from and between school and parents into the relationship between school and relatives has been investigated by Fantuzzo, et. al. (2004) and presented in the article "School-family-community partnership: Perspectives and challenges". According to Pang (2005) the community relations stakeholders exchange experiences and from the results of this research, schools became more convinced that they possessed and played their respective roles in various types of partnerships. The contact between school and home communication (parents) is not only limited to formal communication but becomes more informal and two-way. From the phenomena shown by community kinship behavior, the views of teachers changed when looking at the capabilities of parents in helping and contributing to school progress. However, school communication with home does not appear to be merely a focus on children's learning and school relations with parents and relatives should not be hindered by the existence of a strict bureaucratic structure. "*Hongkong parents mainly serve as supporters of their children at home in the past. They have now also become customers, and to some extent learners, volunteers and managers in school education*" (Pang, 2015).

Other dimensions that need to be studied in addition to expanding school relations with parents and relatives to broaden the depiction of the diversity of parents, for example the condition of parents with a variety of status (single parent, broken home, etc.) and the lives of the community. Grant



(1979) gives an example of the form of participation of parents and traditional communities in the United States in education, which in the past, involved a tendency to form face-to-face groups to collaborate with schools. The group consists of parents, neighbors and relatives who informally establish direct relationships with teachers and school personnel to discuss child development problems. In the past, this was achieved by parent and community gatherings – meetings where people drank coffee or ate dinner, then talked to each other and discussed their children's school needs (their children go to the same school). These parent meetings resulted in the formation of parent organizations that contribute greatly to improving the quality of education services in schools due to their shared focus on their children's education.

At present, informal associations organized by parents are still relevant and need to be not only maintained but continually improved to achieve the intentions of: (1) improved welfare of children and youth in homes, schools, houses of worship, and the community; (2) raised the standard of living of children at home; (3) security and legal protection for child and youth justice; (4) creating home and school relationships, where parents and teachers work together to improve children's education; and (5) developing educator the general public relationships as an effort to advance children's physical, mental and spiritual education. The nature of the involvement of parents (and families) should be directed and focused on improving educational programs.

Some of the reasons underlying the involvement of parents and families depend on the nature of involvement. Findings that involvement is useful are as follows: (1) through involvement, parents will be able to better understand school activities, and in the end they will have better understanding about what their children are learning, understand what problems their children are facing in the school and be more supportive in efforts to help education programs in schools; (2) through involvement with teachers and administrators, parents are better at giving children learning opportunities at home to develop social and personal skills and other basic skills; (3) through the involvement of parents and the community, schools can accept ideas, hopes, and other information in order to improve education programs in schools; and (4) through the involvement of parents and the community, many things can be evaluated effectively and openly.

Schools that involve parents indirectly also teach and provide education to parents. This education for parents aims to: (1) help parents understand and be skilled in teaching at home (for example teaching reading preparation for low-class children); (2) helping parents to manage (management) children's education at home (e.g. controlling homework) and (3) helping parents become more effective in their role as parent educators of their children (e.g. teaching how to learn effectively).

It is time for parent education programs to be directed to increase the role of those who are no longer just supporters of their children's education in school but become managers for a number of educational programs in schools (Olsen and Fuller, 2003). Some activities in the education program for parents are being developed and implemented to bridge the progress of school and child relationships and meet the needs of advancing science and technology. Educational activities for parents can be exemplified including parents workshops, mini workshops series, personalized reading



and mathematical books, public awareness and data lines (LEEDOOHYOO, 2008; “Member Activities,” 1982; Sosa, 1997). This parent education is delivered through workshops or other activities that offer themes related to parental assignments such as how to become tutors for their children, make learning tools for children at home or put them in contact with child specialists (eg doctors, psychologists and counselors) to deal with their child difficulties.

## **METHODS**

This research was conducted in traditional rural communities in the southern part of Malang district, Indonesia. In this area all of the people are indigenous people with low income (poor) and work as laborers. Some of them are families with one (husband or wife) or both parents working as migrant workers abroad (Indonesian labor) namely Hong Kong, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, etc (Romdiati, 2016). The families of migrant workers abroad on average have children who are attending elementary and junior high schools. Every school in their village (elementary and junior high school) has an average of 10-15% of students whose parents are migrant workers abroad. In 2017, there are 3,168 overseas migrant workers from the South Malang area (Malang District Manpower Office, 2017).

This study used a qualitative approach to describe indigenous kinship relationships in families of migrant workers abroad in a series of child education and design contexts. Thirty-five people were involved as participants and informants in this study. They were students whose parents work as migrant workers abroad, teachers, relatives, community leaders, village, and concerned parents who are working abroad. Interviews were guided by questions designed by the research team. The first interview started with questions about the background and the reasons parents choose to work as laborers abroad, followed by questions about how communication and relations between parents abroad and children and relatives in the country. All questions were directed to gain an understanding of the practices of parenting and planning for children's education, including the practice of education involving teachers in schools.

Every interview was recorded and then transcribed. The interpretive approach was used to interpret the facts and actions of the subjects studied. To streamline data collection, researchers collaborated with Postgraduate and Native program students, namely students from community areas who were studied to understand the language and regional culture used in daily life (Mack, et al, 2012). In addition, the research involved multiple interviewers for triangulation that checked the validity of information. The results of interviews were transcribed and then discussed by the research committee. The committee consists of native graduate students and lecturers who understand the research context. The committee discussed themes identified in the interview data and used these findings to draw conclusions through a process of consensus.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **The role of Mothering and Parenting was Replaced by Relatives**

The results of this study indicate that more than 80% of family members who work abroad as migrant workers are women. They are wives who leave their husband, child and other family for a long period of time, not returning home for between 4 and 12 years. These women, who are mothers, found work abroad through employment agency services and they left home to go abroad due to economic needs. It was found that husbands do not participate in going abroad as migrant workers because work opportunities are more available to women. As a migrant worker abroad, they receive 7-fold salary (around 7 million rupiah or equivalent to 500 USD) in comparison to the salary generally received domestically for the same job (around 1 million rupiah or 70 USD). Further, this salary amount, as domestic workers, is much higher than the salary of their husbands (around 2.5 million rupiah or 165 USD) and a calculation of the salary amount leads to the assumption that they can live a decent life and fulfill their family's daily needs.

On average, mothers leave one to two children under the age of five and will meet to regroup when their child enters their teen. In the field research it was even found that one mother who had to leave a three months old newborn child. She was forced to leave her child because the schedule of departing abroad as a migrant worker was arranged by an employment agent. Thus the mothering role was only enacted until giving birth and after that child care is replaced by grandmothers and other relatives. There are two models of child care for children whose mother works abroad. First, parenting was carried out by the father alone and second, by relatives. This paper examines the parenting in the second model, namely where the child is cared for by their relatives.

This field research found that the group of children left by their mothers and then cared for by their family / relatives, were far more numerous. In this context, even though there is a husband at home, childcare is often left to family / relatives. The dominant relatives involved are grandmother and grandfather and after that a sister (big or little). These relatives cared for and educated the children whose mother left them behind to seek work. Meanwhile, the father only plays a role to fulfill activities related to formal affairs, such as citizenship, guardianship to school, and so on. Subsequently interaction with children is mainly by grandmothers and sisters as compared to fathers.

As a consequence, although the child has reached adolescence (teenager and junior high school), education and planning is still carried out by their grandmother and aunt and very little is done by the father. In these circumstances, the role of the mother in childcare is completely replaced by a grandmother and aunt. Meanwhile, the role of a father is concerned with the formal affairs of citizenship. In other words, if a mother is absent, the biggest role model that shapes the child's life is their grandmother and indeed it is believed by some that "grandmother's love for grandchildren exceeds her love for her husband and her grown children".

The presence of a grandmother's figure is as important as the presence of a mother, because the family live in one house. The warmth given by grandmother to grandson is exemplified in the form of sleeping



together or co-sleeping which in Javanese terms is called "*dikeloni*". A grandma's detailed attention is usually more maximal compared to a father's attention, for example in terms of patience in preparing food, school uniforms and equipments, accompanying or dropping off to the daily class, doing homework and giving affection. However, the form of love given by a grandmother often exceeded the limit, so that it became a negative association. In other words, excessive affection from grandmothers includes allowing children to play at will and take over tasks that should be completed by the child on their own and which will have an impact on children who complain about not being allowed independence.

The findings above indicate that there is a shift in the role of mothering and parenting in child care for traditional families of migrant workers abroad, from provision by mothers and fathers, to relatives, principally grandmothers and aunts. This shows that traditional sociological theories still exist and that the family structure of traditional indigenous communities has not changed much in developing countries, including in rural Indonesia. It also strengthens that women are not the only ones who do the *mothering*. However *mothering* isn't the same thing as childbearing or breast feeding; it involves taking care of a child, physically and emotionally. *Mothering* is a social, not a biological role and because of that, the *mothering* role is learned and not only played by a mother but all relatives <sup>(5)</sup>.

It can be interpreted from the research that it is time for *mothering* activity to shift to *parenting* activities. In other words, a mother (despite being replaced by a grandmother), in parenting not only performs mothering activities but also performs parenting activities. The terms mothering and parenting need no longer be rigidly dichotomised. It has been proven from the results of observations and in-depth interviews in the field, that the activities of mothering and parenting seem to be united in daily activities by relatives who live in one house.

Parenting tasks carried out by a grandmother, imply that the existence of grandmother replaces all tasks that should be performed by parents. The task is not just to fulfill children's basic and material needs until they trained with life skills but also fulfill emotional and psychological needs, and provide the best education for their future. There are several parenting styles that create interaction with children, namely authoritarian, authoritative, neglectful and indulgent (Baumrind, 1993). Each parenting style has their own characteristics and a subsequent different effect on child behavior. From the data in the field, there is no tendency for a consistent style of parenting to be carried out by relatives (grandmothers) who replace the parenting role of parents (mothers) to their children. There is limited research that tests the statistical significance of data in the form of parenting activities. However, this finding reveals an interesting phenomenon because it can be interpreted as a "rebuttal" to the perceptions adopted by some traditional (Javanese-Indonesian) societies in that a grandmother tends to give her grandchildren the freedom of love when involved in a parenting task system.

### **Collaboration of Teachers, Parents and Relatives in Child Education Planning**

The results of this study indicate that the care and life of children (up to teenage years) cannot be separated from the role of three parties: parents, teachers and relatives. Parents (specifically mothers)



who biologically give birth deliver the initial care and this is continued by relatives when the mother can no longer be present. The presence of parents and relatives is still essential even when the child has entered school level education and the role of the teacher is added to the relationships. This process continues until the child moves into adolescence and adulthood. From the data collected in the field observations, it was determined that all junior high school teenagers netted in the study, even though they were left by their mothers who worked as migrant workers, still maintained communication with their mother in addition to communication with teachers and relatives who educated and cared for them. In other words, there are three parties that have the same strong influence in the care and education of children: parents, relatives (grandmother or aunt) and teachers in the school. Research indicates that communication that occurs in children's daily lives cannot be separated from the effect of three parties.

What's interesting about this research is the involvement of relatives as an integral part of parents and teachers in education planning. Each child was interviewed using the question "who is influential or decisive in the choice of study?", their answers always involved all three parties. This shows that when a child cannot be independent and make their own decisions, the three parties must work together. For this reason, all three must work collaboratively and create networks to design child education. This finding reinforces that the higher the family invests in resources for children's education, the higher the parenting style and learning quality for their children (Puspitasari, 2010). This good parenting was indicated by the involvement of parents and / or family in assisting and supervising their children's learning.

According to the perceptions of the child, their mother who went abroad for a long time advised them to be a diligent student so that later they would have a better job than their parents (Puspitasari, 2010). This message embeds in their subconscious that school is important and therefore, it is time for school programs to not only be designed unilaterally by the teachers but to also involve parents and even involve the relatives of the respective student. The involvement of relatives (grandmothers) in educational design as found in this study shows the strength in the kinship system theory as the basis for intervention in helping the education profession. This is not only true for children with disabilities who need special education (McClean and Shaeffer, 2003) and also not only for models in early childhood education (Lim, 2003) but also for models in elementary education (Glessner, 2003) and even models in middle schools (Johnston and Fogelman, 2003). This finding also reinforces the assumption that middle schools are based on a student-centered concept, a team approach where parent involvement is a logical extension of the team concept.

## CONCLUSION

Every community is indigenous and unique with a distinctive culture, history and body of traditional knowledge. Indigenous education emerged from traditional Indonesian families who became migrant workers abroad and the kinship system built in independent education places the role of relatives (grandmothers) in an equally important position with the role of parents (mothers) in childcare. The role of parents is also not only interpreted as the role of mothering, which merely describes the



function of the mother biologically, but the role of parenting which involves fulfilling needs in the development of physical and emotional aspects. The proposition that is built is that if the role of relatives can be maximized to the importance of the role of parents, then an absence in the process of childcare and education is not a significant problem. As a rule of thumb in the school system, every education service program design should involve teachers, parents and relatives in designing each unit of the education cycle for students.



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