
THE COST OF UNIFORMITY: THE CASE OF STATE SCHOOL STUDY TOUR FROM ANTI CORRUPTION PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *Scientific traveling, frequently called a study tour, is a regularly conducted program by school management and must be followed by the school students regardless of their parent's financial condition. This event must be followed in order for the students to be able to do some scientific projects. Even though some school managements do not force all students to participate in this program, most of the school students feel obligated to participate. The study tour has been prominently discussed and reported due to the numerous impacts of this program. It persists due to potentially beneficial factors, such as the possible income reaching hundreds of millions and becoming a financial source for school management and other related parties (bus providers, travel agents, hotel providers). Even though the government fully funds the state school, the need for more cash and funds makes the school management hold the event regularly. Of the government's objective to create a freedom to learn and a free-from-corruption education program, the culture of forcing students to participate in the so-called study tour should be prohibited. Furthermore, the implementation of this program should be tightly supervised so that potential maladministration can be prevented. In sum, such expensive traveling camouflaged with the name scientific activities can also be conducted in much more affordable programs, for instance, by choosing the nearest colleges/universities, reducing the length of programs, and choosing the most relevant institutions to the students' diversified interests and future career prospects.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right protected under the international, regional, and national legal continuum (Juwita, 2017). The importance of education has been proven scientifically through a positive relationship between human capital and economic growth (Mankiw et al., 2018, as cited in Triatmanto & Bawono, 2023). Mankiw et al. (2018, as cited

in Triatmojo & Bawono, 2023) identified that countries that invest in education and training tend to experience higher levels of economic growth. In sum, the prosperity of a nation is measured by the quality of its education.

In the Indonesian context, primary education is mandatory for both citizens and the government. Specifically, free education is warranted by the Indonesian constitution. Constitution 1945 Chapter XIII, Article 31 stipulates the following (Mahkamah Konstitusi, 2015). a) Every citizen has the right to education. b) Every citizen shall undertake primary education, and the government shall provide such funding. Despite being a constitutional mandate, the application of free education remains mythical. Rampant corruption cases are continuously reported (Yusfriadi & Sulfemi, 2012; Sjafrina & Anggraeni, 2021; Wirawan, & Sinaga, 2022). One of the most commonly committed practices in education and significantly burdening the students' parents is imposing illegal levies on students for various pretexts (Al-Yamani, July 8, 2024).

Basically, Indonesian education comprises two kinds: a) privately managed primary education and b) Publicly managed education. Indonesian private institutions charge some money to the students as their educational operation (e.g., paying the teachers' salary, staff, maintaining buildings, or other rooms) will be based on the student's school fees (Sinaga, 2017). Private school fees generally vary depending on the facilities and the students' financial conditions that they admit.

Ironically, public schools, notably organized and funded by the government, are still not immune from corruptive practices. Transparency International (2024) defines *corruption* as abusing entrusted power for private gain. The corruptive act commonly found in schools is imposing additional fees, which is irrelevant to students' learning process. Illegal levy is a legal term for imposing additional fees not per any official rule (Nugraha & Yusa, 2017 cited in Effendi & Windari, 2022, p. 186).

The present study examines the most blatantly and persistently committed by the school management at the end of the academic year, called the 'study tour program.' Study tours alternately called scientific traveling, are both famous and troublesome for some reasons; for instance, traveling is generally costly and burdens students from low-income families. Besides, the so-called scientific program is unclear as most activities are conducted in tourist sites, not in scientific places (e.g., museums, laboratories, or science departments). Lastly, the lengthy period spent on the program has also affected the cost that the students' parents should bear.

Despite the reports of some benefits that the study tour might incur, such as improving the students' motivation to learn, widening the students' horizon, training students to learn more actively, and potentially applying the concepts already learned from school (Saing, & Sinurat, 2023; Wijaya, Mukminah, & Hasanah, 2020), these programs have also caused some fatal incidents (Asrianti, May 13, 2024; CNN Indonesia, May 20, 2024). From the perspective of the corruption concept, the costly scientific traveling program conducted by the school might be an act of corruption if the potential misuse of funds occurs and benefits certain people. The present study delves into more extensive aspects of scientific traveling, such as the applications and the potential drawbacks of this program.

Research questions

1. How is the study tour implemented by the school management?

2. How do the participants view the study tour program?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Free education for Indonesian children

Corruptive practices in Indonesian primary education

Every child in Indonesia has the same right to primary education based on the Indonesian constitution. Despite the constitutional mandate, numerous factors are found to prevent Indonesian children from accessing primary education in Indonesia. The most troublesome factor preventing Indonesian children from accessing primary education is the potential economic burden the students should bear (Masing, & Astuti, 2022). One of the potentially significant burdens the students' parents should face when learning in public school is commonly a form of illegal levy.

Free but not totally free school

Indeed, the government vehemently claims that primary education is free and is mandated in the Indonesian Constitution 45. However, some corruptive practices, such as gratification and illegal levies, are continuously reported (Putra, September 17, 2018; Wahyono, July 13, 2023). There are some corruptive practices, which belong to the most common occurrences in primary school context and deemed as lucrative business.

Firstly, when the students enter the school compound, they must prepare the uniforms to commence their learning process. Despite being considered essential to support uniformity in schools, the prices they charge to the students are commonly much higher than the average prices outside the schools. Some of the clothes and other necessary items the students must wear are emblems indicating the same school, socks, hats, and other items related to scout activities.

Even though the students can buy a more affordable uniform outside of the school, the teachers or the school management usually require the students to buy it at school for uniformity. The school claims that the emblems ingrained in the socks or uniform cannot be found elsewhere and should be bought in the school (Al-Yamani, July 8, 2024). After wearing uniform, the students will be further required to collect money for various purposes, such as photocopying, buying some learning sources, and visiting those who are sick (e.g., parents, students, or teachers). The forms of collection will generally vary depending on the student's parents' agreements.

There is no clear report on the average amount of the money as this practice is rarely discussed and reported. Even though the government has firmly imposed strict rules banning teachers from collecting money from the students or students' parents, the practice has continuously happened until now. The most blatant and highlighted news is about the potential corruption committed by the elementary school teacher in Pangandaran, West Java. The teachers allegedly borrowed the students' savings from the school cooperatives and failed to return them in due time. The amount of money allegedly borrowed by the teachers amounted to 7 47 billion rupiah (Rosa, June 22, 2023).

Study tour

Scientific traveling, commonly called study tours, is one of the most popular programs the school management conducts annually. These programs usually involve more parties as they are generally conducted outside of the schools and for quite long days (e.g., schools, bus

providers, travel agents, or hotel managements). Despite incurring both positive and negative impacts, few studies analyse the implementation of these programs more objectively. In fact, most studies tend to analyse the program from positive aspects.

One of the latest studies, for instance, conducted by Saing and Sinurat (2023). They analysed the implementation of a study tour conducted by one of the high school in Jambi city. In relation to learning history, they identified that the application of study tours could improve the students' learning process. Specifically, they found that the study tour program was beneficial in improving the student's comprehension of the sources, improving their motivation to learn history, and providing a more relaxing and exciting learning atmosphere.

RESEARCH METHOD

Design of the study

The approach of the study belonged to a mixed method (Creswell, 2009). The application of a mixed method helps the researchers identify more instruments to support their study (Creswell, 2009; Adu, et al., 2022). In the present study, the researchers elicited written data from reliable sources (e.g., news reports, journals, and parents' notes on social media). Besides, the researchers also used interviews (non-written data) as the other instrument to elicit data from the recruited participants in the study.

The use of interviews allowed the researchers to have a more comprehensive picture of what they might view about study tours in their schools. In scientific paradigm, an in-depth interview allows the participants to explain their own words, how they understand and interpret the world around them (Knott et al., 2022). In other words, verbal responses elicited from the participants can possibly illuminate the issues more naturally. The views conveyed by the participants were deemed essential as they could provide more objective information regarding the benefits and drawbacks of the study tour.

Up to now, studies conducted on study tours tend to highlight the positive aspects while neglecting the possible negative aspects incurred during the implementation of study tours (Wijaya, Mukminah, & Hasanah, 2020; Saing, & Sinurat, 2023). In sum, the present study attempted to elicit more varied sources of data so that they could have more balanced information regarding the study tour program.

Given the sensitivity of the issue and the potential impact of the interview on the participants, the researcher ensured the participants' right to remain anonymous. Due to the sensitivity of the issues, the researchers could only elicit verbal responses from a few participants (two high school students, two parents, and one high school administrator). All of them had no relationship, which means that each participant represented his or her own state high school.

Sources of data and research data

Data can be categorized as the kinds of information that the researchers acquire on the subjects of their research (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The sources of data taken in the present study were both written and non-written objects. The written objects taken in the present study were the articles, opinions, journals, and other relevant news pertaining to the study. On the other hand, the non-written objects belong to participants' verbal responses elicited during the interviews.

Participants of the study

Participants or sometimes called as research participants are individuals who take part in the research study. They provide the data or information that the researchers collect and analyse. The participants are important to the research process because what they experience, opine, and perceive belong to the core of the data (Stewart, 2024). There were only few participants of the study who were willing to participate in the study due to the sensitivity of the case. The participants comprised of two students, two parents (both of them have no relationship and studying in different schools) and an administrator of a state high school.

The followings are the table of the participants recruited in the present study

Participants	Employment status	Age	Sex	Participating in study tour
A	High school student	18	Male	No
B	High school student	18	Female	Yes
C	Factory worker	40	Male	Yes
D	Company worker	43	Male	Yes
E	Administrator of a high school	47	Male	No

Data collection procedures

In order to collect the data more effectively, the steps of collecting the data were formulated. The data collections were made carefully to allow the researchers to accomplish the expected findings. a) The researchers contacted the people who were willing to participate in the present study. b) The researcher briefed the participants on the importance and the purposes of the study. c) The researchers elaborated on the importance of accessing the data from the participants and granted the participants anonymity. d) After the participants had been recruited, the researchers interviewed them. e) The results of the interviews were written, and not recorded due to the request of the participants. f) The researchers identified the important themes and specifically noted the themes. f) The researchers triangulated the most relevant themes with the other relevant sources articles to identify the potential gaps and to improve more valid data.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Findings

How the study tour is implemented by the school management

Participants	Relevant verbal responses collected during the interview
A	I remembered the teacher told me about the program long before the study tour, but my parents could not afford to pay. So, I had no other choice but to tell the teacher that I did not want to join. Luckily, the teacher could understand about this matter. However, I also had to do the project on my own. If I travelled with my classmates, I could have done it much easier as I could share the projects with my classmates.
B	The teacher usually tells my parents long before the program. My school regularly holds a study tour annually. Once I travel, I have to spend about 2

	million. I heard other schools charge even higher as they take different locations and longer trips. Every study tour program usually takes 2 – 3 days.
C	Usually, the teacher gives me as the parents some information long before the study tour. So, we can save the money. In fact, the head master tells openly to the students’ parents in the meeting occasionally so we have no other choice but to follow that. I spend almost 2 million every time my child participates in the program.
D	I remembered when I got the school report the class master told us that we were having a study tour by the end of the year. So, we were advised to save gradually so that we could have enough money during the picnic.
E	We usually provide sufficient information regarding the benefits of the program so the students and the students’ parents usually agree with this program and they do not reject the program. We also allow those who cannot join the program due to some reasonable factors, such as economic or health conditions. As far as I know there are very few students who do not join in this program, and I believe this is because we manage the program very carefully and wisely.

The participants’ views on the study tour program

Participants	Relevant verbal responses collected during the interview
A	I wish, I could join the study tour, but my parents did not have the money to go, so I had no other choice but to say and to see my friends went out together. Actually, if it were not very expensive, I could possibly go. Honestly, I don’t think it is important for my future or for my future education but I just loved to go. The reason to go to this program is because we can go together after the examination and we just do it once in our high school period. So, I think the moment to travel and visit some interesting places will be an unforgettable event for me and my friends.
B	I participated in the study tour, it was okay, but it was really tiring. It took four days and only one day on sites. In fact, there were so many sites to go. So most of the time we spent on the buses. I thought it could be much more exciting and more relaxing if we could go to the nearer places like in Jakarta or Bandung so we did not spend too much time on the bus and we could have more time to study if we were really meant to study at the site.
C	As a father, I had no other choice but to follow this program. I knew it was hard enough as I am the only bread winner in the family and I have some children to finance. But, I saved the money long before the traveling and the school had given the notice long before we conducted the picnic. I thought it was only a picnic but it was covered as if it were a study tour or scientific travelling. I knew that the long distance made my child tired and sick, so how could she study or observe something there if her condition was not good and tired? Why doesn’t the school find the nearer sites, I think it is a

	<p>matter of money. The farther the more expensive the cost we have to burden.</p>
D	<p>As a good father, I tried hard to participate. Although I also questioned why they should have gone to such far state universities. Isn't there a campus, which is as good as that university? Is it safe to travel far? As we know we spent more time on board than studying. We also spent more hours to visit tourist sites such as Bromo, and other interesting areas and I believe these activities are not scientific. Although the students should write a paper after the traveling but I think it is only relevant to Indonesian language and that is all.</p>
E	<p>Off course, the school needs money annually. So, the activities are not only beneficial to the school but also to teachers, and also bus providers or travel agents. So, it is a big business, I think as long as we do it safely and we don't take much from the trip, I think it is still reasonable.</p> <p>I admit that there are some cases where some schools might commit some serious mistakes such as taking the bad buses, which are not safe. In fact, they also take enough money to find a better one. Some of the reasons for doing this because they need to support the teachers and those who accompany the students when traveling. I think this program is a serious program, you cannot play or you will have a problem. In sum, we always ensure that many things are discussed and supervised. Even though, we get the profit but it is not much as the teachers who accompany the students must also be given pocket money. We also dismiss the other classes so that we could focus on serving the students who participate in study tour more effectively.</p>

Analysis

Potential interest among those involved

The data from both participants' verbal responses and the other relevant sources indicate that scientific traveling programs emphasize recreational and scientific aspects. The lengthy days spent traveling compared with the scientific activities required to the students indicate that the program is not purely scientific; it can also be termed a school traveling program. Long-distance traveling is also identified to impact the higher payment charged to the students. Some traveling participants reported that, despite going to some high-quality universities, which might be the student's future goal, no further analysis allows them to measure the potential acceptance in studying on these campuses. These campuses tend to show off their programs without providing more information on the possibility of attending the universities, which are quite difficult for most students to enter.

All of the traveling activities are identified to involve many parties (e.g., bus providers, travel agents, hotel managements, and schools) that are difficult to stop. Even though some local government decrees have been issued to stop this program due to the possible negative

impact of this program (e.g., accidents), the schools continuously conduct this program. With the large number of students (approximately 100 per program) paying as much as 2 million rupiah, it can be predicted that the schools and the other relevant stakeholders can reap quite a lot of money from this business. As there is no data and studies dealing with the above fact, further study might be needed to justify this analysis.

Students' refreshment after examination

Despite being stated as a voluntary and not a compulsory activity, most of the students tend to participate in this program. The students think this program will help them release stress or boredom after the examination. It is identified that most of the programs are generally conducted after school examinations, thus making the program more attractive to the students. Besides, the possible assignment given to those not participating in the travelling program might also burden the students as they should do the assignment in person. When they participate in the program, the other classmates or the teachers who are available as their supervisors might contribute some help to those participating in the travelling program.

The analysis of some activities and reports indicates that most of the sites chosen by the organizers or schools are popular tourist sites, such as Bogor Parks, Bandung, Bromo, and even Bali islands. It is, therefore, difficult to defend the pretext of conducting scientific activities if most of the sites visited by the students belong to tourism sites and not learning or educational sites. Suppose the organizers plan to hold the scientific programs. In that case, the organizers should choose the institutions or sites primarily located in the city centres (Jakarta, Bandung) instead of the recreational parks. Besides, the relevance of the student's department (e.g., social or natural science) should also be considered. It means that the plan of choice, the relevance, and the expected result of the program should be the most important aspects to be done, not only the cost spent for the program and the popularity of the destination.

Most scholars believe that students will always have different interests and capacities. For instance, Gardner (as cited in Morgan, 2021) has long postulated that humans have different intelligences, commonly termed multiple intelligences. Concerning this concept, most educators believe that the most advanced concept in education is the one which appreciates the differences among the students, commonly called the student-centred concept (Kaput, 2018).

Based on this argument, any means to support the student's learning process should wisely identify the potential differences which the students have and the future application of their capacities. Accommodating the students' varied interests through specifically tailored programs (e.g., based on their departments, interests, or future studies or employment) will be more effective rather than creating a similar program, which should be followed by all students regardless of their academic backgrounds and potentials.

Potential accidents

The traveling programs conducted and organized by the schools are only sometimes good to hear. Some news reports have reported fatal accidents involving teachers, students, and drivers. Some potential factors might contribute to this calamity, such as the lack of quality of the buses, the ignorance of the organizers toward the bus condition, the length of the distance, which could contribute to the fatigue of the drivers, and many more. Based on

some credible news, it can be interpreted that there are some problem leading to the potentially fatal accident during the tours. Given the scarcity of the research analysing the impact of the study leading to the traffic accident, the researcher could only identify some of the related news on the accidents during the study tour. Based on the police investigation on the fatal accident on one of the study tour program conducted by one of the private vocational high school in Subang, Merdeka.com (May 29, 2024) reported that the sources of the fatal accidents were actually the condition of the improper buses, which were used to transport the students. Further study should also be conducted whether or not there is a potential corruptive action committed by those who prepared the bus for the study tour program. In sum, it is important for those who are involved in the preparation of the facilities to transport the students to be more open to public scrutiny so that the potential of making dirty money in this traveling program can be prevented.

CONCLUSION

Even though the government has touted the freedom of learning, this slogan still needs to be proven. There are still factors prohibiting children from accessing primary education, and most are economic factors. Given the slump in the Indonesian economic condition, the government should fairly and firmly apply the concept of learning freedom so that all students can access their fundamental rights through education. Particularly for those from lower-income families, accessing primary education at state schools will be a massive relief as they usually have more complete facilities compared to private universities as well as more affordable educational fees. However, with the persistence of corruption practices at schools under the pretext of uniformity, the lower income family will probably face more burdens in accessing their primary education.

Therefore it is important that the school's rampant yet unscrupulous traveling activities be monitored and evaluated. For instance, the school should conduct its program and report its activities to relevant bodies for potential improvement and identifying potential drawbacks that might occur during the implementation. The program's relevance should also be reported earlier to the supervising bodies so that the potential misuse of the program can be identified and prevented. For instance, the scientific program conducted by the school should be entirely relevant to the students' backgrounds or departments. Therefore, visiting some factories or small businesses might be more relevant for those learning social sciences to provoke their interest in learning entrepreneurship.

On the other hand, the need to identify more natural or other relevant STEM sources is more relevant to students with natural science backgrounds. Combining the students in a large group in the same traveling program will not impact their backgrounds and capacities. The reason for visiting distant yet prestigious campuses, which helps motivate the students to learn in the future, is also irrelevant, as not all students might be well accepted in these prestigious universities due to their diverse aptitudes.

In sum, this program might do more good than harm if it can inclusively accommodate anyone regardless of their financial background and their academic capacities while at the same time providing them with a more realistic picture of what to do in their future lives. Given the newly elected government program to eradicate corruption and to provide free food for students who learn in the primary programs, supervising and controlling the study

program, which is commonly conducted in primary contexts, will enable all students to benefit from this refreshment while improving the school services to cater to diversity.

SUGGESTION

Despite adopting a mixed method, the nature of the topic has prohibited the researchers from accessing more realistic data and sufficient participants. Given the tricky and complicated rules applied to the school compound, accessing the data fairly and objectively regarding this matter is utterly impossible. The government should be aware of the possibility of corrupt practices regarding this program. This program is commonly conducted and constitutes a lucrative business to the school management and bus providers but a considerable burden to those economically vulnerable. If the study is replicated, further study should involve more participants and more valid data. Besides, the right of the participants to remain anonymous should be well guaranteed, without which they will never voice any word due to the potentially harmful backlash that might affect them in the future. Further studies should also incorporate private schools as the study tour is also conducted by private schools with relatively the same schemes and procedures in its commencement.

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