

SIDE VIEWS

Private schools need more government appreciation – Markus Budiraharjo

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Private schools have been influential in the political, economic, social and cultural history of Indonesia. Much literature suggests that long before independence in 1945, religion-based schools had prepared the literate and

*highly patriotic
groups that made up
this country.*

This article sheds light on one particular finding drawn from a collaborative study by Sanata Dharma University and Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta this year.

The data was obtained from a sample of 92 schools out of 1,081 Muhammadiyah and Catholic schools in Yogyakarta and Central Java provinces. As an excerpt of the more comprehensive report, this article addresses three areas of concern: first, the real amount of money collected by the private schools for each student; second, the gaps between the actual funds from the government and the real expenditure by each school; and finally, the particular strategies of the private schools to meet the gaps of infrastructure construction.

A green advertisement for Jongla. The top left features the Jongla logo with a paper airplane icon and the text 'New way of messaging'. The top right shows a circular inset image of three young people (two men and one woman) smiling and looking at a smartphone. The main text in the center reads 'FREE MESSAGING' in large, bold, white letters. At the bottom, there is a rounded rectangular button with the text 'DOWNLOAD NOW!' in white on a green background.

The data shows that the

distribution of school operational assistance funds (BOS) for private schools is intended to finance school activities, honorariums for instructors, learning aids, electricity, water, telecommunication bills, infrastructure maintenance, transportation, taxes and food for students.

However, the BOS is not used to pay private school teachers' salaries.

According to the existing regulation the BOS amount is determined by the number of students in each school. The BOS was initially intended to alleviate the burdens of

parents for sending their children to enjoy a nine-year compulsory education program.

In addition, the fund is also expected to meet the minimum standards of service by the school. As shown in the following table, the amount of money obtained for each elementary school student is Rp580,000 (RM165) per year and for a junior high student Rp710,000 per year.

The data shows that the financial contribution of the government to private, religion-based schools is far from sufficient. First, the government funds to these schools on average contributed up to 47% of all expenditures. It was also obvious that Catholic schools spent more money to run the schools.

For Muhammadiyah schools, the funds obtained from the government

contributed 51% of their whole expenditures, while for the Catholic schools the contribution was 42.5%. The biggest gap was in government funding compared to the expenditure of Catholic junior high schools, which reached almost Rp2 million per student.

The study also reveals that religion-based schools encounter huge problems in infrastructure and facilities.

In contrast with state-owned schools, which rely solely on annual state budgets and local government budgets to build facilities, these religion-based schools are forced to find their own sources apart from the 21% obtained from the government.

The rest was obtained from other sources, such as networking (20%), parents (16%), and external parties (18%). Given the huge

disparities among schools, in terms of school leadership skills, networking, alumni relations, and other socio-economic considerations, only a few schools thrived in such a tough and dire atmosphere.

In conclusion, each private school faces a losing war, in which their public school counterparts enjoy much privilege over resources that leads to attracting brighter students, enticing more parents with free education services and better facilities or infrastructure.

Verbal accounts gathered in the study show that while some officials in local education offices show appreciation of the contribution of private schools, the top leaders such as the former education minister, Muhammad Nuh, frequently raised negative remarks with regards to civil society's participation through education.

Once he said it was unlawful for the private schools to obtain the BOS while charging tuition fees. Such an attitude demonstrated a lack of understanding about the actual amount of money needed to operate these private schools and ignorance of or insensitivity to the historical contributions of private schools.

Private schools have done their part for decades and now need some appreciation. We are waiting for real, meaningful actions from the administration of President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo. – Jakarta Post, December 13, 2014.

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