

Exploring elementary teacher education students' perception on parental involvement

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ABSTRACT

This study concerned with elementary teacher education students not prepared to have competency in parental involvement in education. The research aimed to explore their perceptions of the importance of parental involvement in elementary education. A 30-item online survey questionnaire, which employed a series of Likert-style statements in five types of parent involvement, was utilized to measure their perceptions. The study involved 1,459 undergraduate students majoring in elementary teacher education as participants, representing 72 study programs of universities and college schools in Indonesia. Descriptive and mean score comparison analyses were employed to make the obtained data meaningful. The finding revealed that the students rated parental involvement as an urgent aspect of elementary school education. The study discovered no significant difference between male and female students, significant differences among sophomore, junior, and senior students, and significant differences among students of public and private higher education institutions. The findings indicated that all respondents agreed on the importance of involvement and revealed implications for the elementary education study program.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Parents are well known as the first and the ultimate educators of children. Being the foremost educators, they teach children at home by providing a safe, nurturing, fostering, growing, and healthy environment. In such a home environment, their children feel secure and learn attitudes, values, and behaviors appropriate for family members and the neighborhood [1]. However, today's parents' responsibility to education is more challenging. For instance, they introduce the basic skills earlier to children to meet a favorite school requirement. They also introduce gadgets for children to learn, communicate, and gaming. In addition, parents of children with disabilities have to find suitable inclusive elementary schools providing better services [2], [3]. Despite daily school and school-related activities starting to dominate their children at their elementary school age [4], [5], parents' roles do not lessen but transform into other means. By doing this, parents expect their children are more likely to experience academic success.

Parental involvement is a prudential school effort to make children's education successful. However, to make it works, some challenges need attention. For instance, concerning their nature, what kinds and how to arrange home and school-based activities effectively are still in question [6]. Furthermore, under its impact, most researches on parental involvement prefer addressing children's academic performance [7]–[12] and attitudes, behaviors, and self-efficacy of children [13]–[15]. Other impacts, such as school effectiveness,

seemed has little consideration [16]. Relating to the obstacles, involving parents in education was a complex effort [17]. The difficulties seemed to associate with parents, children, and school [18], [19]. For example, increasing number of mothers in the workforce limits their social engagement with children [20], [21]. Minority parents were considerably uninvolved in their children's schooling [22]. Another study also found similar finding in parents of children with disabilities [23]. Socioeconomic status took a position as a potential challenge for parental involvement in schools [24]. The study has given some insights into aspects that need exploring for more understanding. For example, in 2013, Ministry of Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia published new curriculum which clearly proposed parent to be more involved in their children education [25].

Theoretically, elementary teacher education students should learn about parental involvement as part of their competencies. Since how well they practice parental involvement depends on their insight, attitudes, and behaviors, providing a related course will allow them to explore its theories and practices in several areas of elementary education, such as supporting positive student outcomes, communicating positively, demonstrating respect, and collaborating to solve their problems in learning [26]–[28]. Several universities offer parental involvement courses at the introduction level under different titles, such as introduction to family engagement in education [29], parent engagement [30], and family engagement in education [31]. Unfortunately, the Elementary Teacher Education Educator Association of Indonesia [32] does not include parental involvement in a list of learning outcomes. Since it has been a guideline for developing a study program curriculum, it seems most of its members might not include it in their curriculum, as proven by the study program curriculum of leading higher institutions [33]–[35]. Consequently, although students may be familiar with its practice, they probably have unstructured knowledge and will feel less qualified to deal with parents on various educational issues. The study programs ideally have to identify this limitation and renew their curriculum based on the field needs.

In conjunction with the limitation, the students might have different perspectives on parental involvement compared to teachers and parents [36], [37]. They probably have previous significant experiences of their parents accompanying them in learning at home, communicating with teachers, being school volunteers, or attending parent-teacher meetings that impress them. On the contrary, others may have unpleasant experiences that shape negative perspectives on the involvement. These various experiences may have an impact on shaping the ideal teacher profession. In this example, having no course of parental involvement does not imply they do not have a positive perspective, as proven in previous research [38]. Since there is less attention to the involvement [39] and scarce discussions in the professional literature concerning how study programs prepare their students on this matter [40], it is necessary to explore further their perspectives on the importance of parental involvement in elementary education.

Reflecting on such research, currently, there is no clear evidence-based information on how elementary teacher education study programs in Indonesia prepare their students to understand theories and practices of parental involvement in education. The scarcity of this information is unfortunate because this is one piece of evidence showing that the study programs have equipped with one of the competencies required by elementary education. Obtaining their perspectives on the importance might provide new insight that nowadays seems overlooked, strengthen them, and gain many ideas that may be shared and implemented in elementary schools. This study, specifically, aims to explore students' perceptions of the importance of parental involvement in elementary education and discuss its implication for the elementary teacher education curriculum. This study will contribute meaningfully to the field by giving additional information on this matter to those who care about elementary education.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

A survey method of quantitative approach [41], [42] was employed to achieve the research aim. This online survey sample comprised 1,459 students majoring in elementary teacher education from 72 higher education institutions (30 public and 42 private universities or college schools) in Indonesia. A non-proportional sampling technique was applied to recruit the students as respondents since the student cohorts among the study programs vary significantly. The researchers contacted and offered respondent candidates the opportunity to participate in the study via study program networking availability on the social media of WhatsApp Messenger and Telegram. Their participation voluntarily was proved by filling out informed consent. Students who completed the informed consent and questionnaire were considered qualified as respondents. There was an additional requirement that a study program held less than 15 of 20-25 students participating dismissed. By this requirement, the study removed two study programs from the list. Table 1 informed the demographical profile of the participants determined for data analysis related to possible different values.

Table 1. Information of participants

Variable	Categories	N	%
Types of higher institution	Public	616	42.2
	Private	843	57.8
Number of study programs based on location (Islands)	Sumatera (21 study programs)	422	28.9
	Java (41 study programs)	834	57.2
	Kalimantan (3 study programs)	68	4.7
	Sulawesi (5 study programs)	97	6.6
	Bali/Nusa Tenggara (2 study programs)	38	2.6
Students' gender	Male	260	17.82
	Female	1,199	82.18
Year of entry	Sophomores	449	30.8
	Juniors	696	47.7
	Seniors	314	21.5

The questionnaire of student perception on parental involvement in education (QSPPI), a Google Form-based instrument, was administered to respondents. It was written based on Epstein *et al.* [43] proposal of parental involvement types. Comprising two parts, the first part of the questionnaire consisted of five items about students' demographic data: student's name, gender, years of entry, and name and type of institution. Part two contained 30 questions on the importance of six types of parental involvement. They were parenting (4 items), communicating (5 items), learning at home (6 items), volunteering (5 items), decision-making (5 items), and collaborating (5 items). The following were item samples of each type: i) parents need to participate in a parent education program on how to rear children effectively (parenting); ii) parents have to attend conferences with a teacher at least once a year and follow up its results (communicating); iii) parents need information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home (learning at home); iv) parents have to participate in a volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, children, and other parents (volunteering); v) parents have to contribute to school committees for parental and community involvement (decision making); and vi) parents should know how to encourage the Alumni to participate in school programs for children (collaborating). These six types represent their perception of how important teachers have to involve the parent in their child's education. They rated each item on a 5-point scale of Likert (1=not important at all, 2=not important, 3=undecided, 4=important, and 5=very important). The validity of QSPPI yielded between .61-.80. Meanwhile, its reliability reached .81, a value that surpassed the acceptable coefficient [44]. The researchers sent the QSPPI's link to respondents via WhatsApp Messenger and had the students complete it within two weeks of the workday. The researchers sent the QSPPI's link to respondents via WhatsApp Messenger and had the students complete it within two weeks of the workday.

Data were saved in a computerized database and analyzed with the SPSS version 25. Students' responses to the Likert scale transformed into ordinal data were tallied and displayed by a graphic. Next, the researchers converted the ordinal data into interval data by utilizing the method of successive intervals and calculating the central tendency and all types of involvement for all student scores. Finally, the researchers applied an independent sample t-test to count mean score differences between male and female groups and public and private higher institutions, as well as utilized a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) technique for comparing the mean scores by student entry years and by islands.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 displays the percentage of students' ordinal score distribution in QSPPI orderly. Scores of 1 to 5 represent the importance levels of parental involvement. The data firstly points to parenting, followed by learning at home, communicating, and decision-making. Students' score distribution in each type is dominantly on a score of 4 (an important). Its trend tends to be linear, from parenting to collaborating. Only in parenting does it reach an important level. Meanwhile, undecided, not important, and very not important take a small portion of the distribution. More detailed data on students' perceptions of parental involvement are in Table 2. It displays the mean, standard deviation, and results of the independent sample t-test of each type of involvement for males and females.

As displayed in the tables, the student rating average of the five parental involvement is 4.05 (SD=0.90). Among them, parenting, learning at home, and communicating orderly have higher mean scores than the other types (volunteering, decision-making, and collaborating). Meanwhile, volunteering is rated the lowest and has a higher standard deviation. Both indicate that student scores of this type spread out more than other types. Students rate decision-making, collaborating, and volunteering slightly lower than the first three are acceptable since these types require parents to engage in school-based activities that may face various barriers, such as time, expertise, or personal matter.

Further, the data show that the male and female students' mean scores and standard deviation are relatively similar. The lowest mean scores of both groups fell in volunteering. Meanwhile, the highest is in parenting types. Results of the analysis of variance revealed that there were no significant differences between both groups in all involvement. The data analysis indicates that both groups of students are homogeneous and have relatively similar perceptions of all types of involvement.

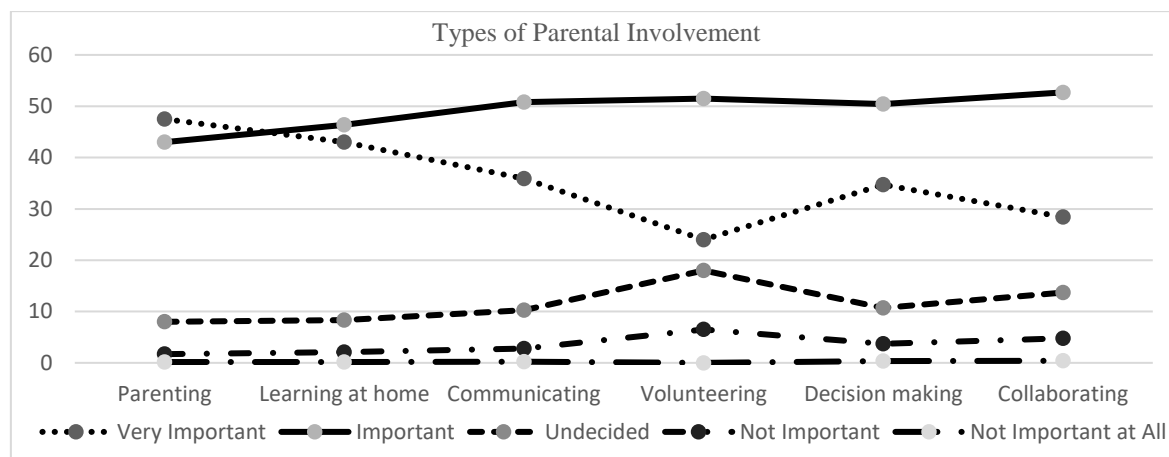


Figure 1. Descriptive data of the importance of parental involvement (%)

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of parental involvement importance by students' gender

Types of involvement	Overall (n=1,459)		Male students (n=260)		Female students (n=1,199)		t_{test}	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Parenting	4.280	.568	4.236	.623	4.292	.555	-1.140	.150
Learning at home	4.212	.601	4.170	.654	4.221	.589	-1.234	.217
Communicating	4.080	.598	4.079	.662	4.083	.584	-.105	.916
Volunteering	3.781	.668	3.821	.741	3.772	.651	1.079	.583
Decision making	4.005	.613	4.070	.657	4.047	.604	.549	.545
Collaborating	3.906	.684	3.945	.046	3.897	.019	1.025	.305
Overall	4.040	.537	4.048	.597	4.040	.523	.089	.929

Note: $p < .05$

A more analysis takes a turn to identify differences among students by year of entry. Table 3 displays mean scores and standard deviation based on the year of entry, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The result of One-way ANOVA shows all types of significant differences exist ($Sig. < .05$). Furthermore, the Tukey honest significant difference (HSD) analysis indicates the mean of seniors is different from those of sophomores and juniors ($F = .32801$ and $F = .26854$, $Sig. = 0.000$). In addition, at all involvement types, the mean score differences between the sophomores and juniors are not significant ($F = .05947$, $Sig. = .310$).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of parental involvement importance by year of entry

Types of involvement	Sophomore (n=449)		Junior (n=697)		Senior (n=313)		F	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Parenting	4.000	.557	4.019	.529	4.167	.512	10.615	.000
Learning at home	4.252	.577	4.263	.572	4.167	.512	3.358	.035
Communicating	4.183	.628	4.166	.599	4.367	.539	13.167	.000
Volunteering	4.036	.621	4.059	.583	4.354	.543	33.169	.000
Decision making	3.714	.693	3.759	.647	4.20	.583	62.234	.000
Collaborating	4.038	.599	4.008	.621	3.924	.658	3.202	.041
Overall	3.837	.705	3.897	.680	4.165	.605	24.182	.000

Note: $p < .05$

The additional analysis addresses mean score differences among student groups by the institution of public and private universities shown in Table 4. The result of an independent sample t-test shows that overall, there are significant differences among the former and the latter student groups ($t = -3.070$; sig. two-tailed = .002, $p < .05$). However, further analysis revealed indifference between two groups in decision-making types ($Sig. \text{ two-tailed } .092 > .05$).

The last analysis addresses mean score differences among students by the institution location displayed in Table 5. The result of one-way ANOVA shows that overall, there are no significant difference among student mean scores ($F=6.982$, $Sig.=.000$). However, further analysis using Tukey HSD revealed significant differences students of Java and Sumatera ($Sig.=.000$) and Sulawesi and Sumatera ($Sig.=.012$).

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of parental involvement importance by institution

Types of involvement	Public universities (n=616)		Private universities (n=843)		t_{test}	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Parenting	4.237	.287	4.316	.552	-2.627	.009
Learning at home	4.034	.620	4.120	.579	-2.860	.004
Communicating	4.164	.623	4.247	.583	-2.623	.009
Volunteering	3.720	.681	3.825	.654	-2.953	.003
Decision making	4.019	.621	4.074	.603	-1.688	.092
Collaborating	3.851	.704	3.946	.666	-3.565	.009
Overall	3.994	.555	4.081	.522	-3.070	.002

Note: $p<.05$

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of parental involvement importance by region

Types of involvement	Bali/NTB (n=38)		Java (n=834)		Kalimantan (n=68)		Sulawesi (n=97)		Sumatera (n=422)		F	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Parenting	4.032	.555	3.996	.557	4.075	.470	3.964	.473	4.156	.506	6.982	.000
Learning at home	4.118	.613	4.032	.613	4.142	.518	4.021	.529	4.183	.581	5.024	.001
Communicating	4.129	.611	4.156	.621	4.272	.561	4.090	.544	4.349	.556	8.837	.000
Volunteering	3.791	.746	3.722	.680	3.790	.603	3.717	.604	3.908	.644	5.713	.000
Decision making	4.126	.556	4.000	.629	4.051	.562	4.014	.572	4.153	.593	4.624	.001
Collaborating	3.921	.646	3.860	.711	3.900	.657	3.797	.627	4.021	.635	4.609	.001
Overall	4.032	.555	3.996	.557	4.075	.470	3.964	.473	4.156	.506	6.982	.000

Note: $p<.05$ (2-5; 4-5)

The present study reveals several findings to discuss. First, most students have a good perception of the urgency of parental involvement in elementary school, where the dominant level spreads out from importance to very important. Among five types, at-home-based involvements are valued higher than out-home involvement. In detail, parenting takes the top, followed by learning at home and communicating. Because the first three types take place in home settings, it is understandable if students rate them higher than the other types of involvement. Regarding preference for parenting in the first position, this may justify some previous studies suggesting parents' roles as the first teacher of their children [45], [46].

Learning at home is part of schooling and there are many ways parents help children learn at home. Teachers usually assign children various homework for several purposes, such as building up knowledge, helping students to develop independence and confidence, enhancing learning, tracking homework performance, and as a form of punishment [47]. Many studies place it as an accessible tool for student learning since it has several valuable for achievement [48]. However, parents helping children with homework does not guarantee academic success. There are different perspectives on homework among children, parents, and teachers. Particularly for parents, they are in a pros and cons position regarding their involvement in homework [49] and who should help children doing homework [50]. Concerning the respondents' rating learning at home as the second important aspect, it reveals an optimistic clue that their perception supports the previous finding. However, they may also consider the different perspectives of parents on this issue so that the involvement will be meaningful.

In recent study, students' rating of communication as valuable in parental involvement meets previous research findings. Studies prove that good communication between schools and parents lets them be more supportive and even welcome suggestions from the teacher to improve their child's situation and attitude [51]. A study by Bruine *et al.* [52] suggested communication had been the attention of pre-service teacher preparation in parental involvement, although it was not placed a separated course but integrated into the others. Essentially, communication enables parents and teachers to send messages to each other for the sake of children learning. Parents may regularly contact the teachers even though nothing is wrong with their children, ask how children enjoy learning at school, or inform them about what is going on with their learning at home. The theories put forward have been supported and reaffirmed in several studies that a good bond between schools and homes leads to academic achievement [53].

Next, although in the present study, the school-based involvement takes a rating in the last three, they are still considered meaningful by the students. The importance of decision-making is rated higher than

collaborating and volunteering since it relates to what parents can do in parent-teacher associations, school committees, or school governance to determine several policies about their children's schooling programs and the school finances [54]–[56]. Despite this positivity, they ought to be aware that practical decision-making is not an easy task for teachers and parents. Several studies give attention to its nature and consider enhancing students' perceptions. Generally, parents who join school committees are limited in number. They represented other parents to determine school policies. A cross-national analysis of parental involvement in German, France, and Turkey [57], suggests positive impacts of parental involvement in decision-making even though attention arises, such as low awareness level of parents, the busy working life of parents, or negative attitude of teachers. A similar study in Indonesia shows the lowness of parent participation and passivity in decision-making practices letting the schools assert professional control of the school [58].

In the recent study, collaboration is still judged important by the students, although the scores are slightly below the decision-making. They may see this kind of parental involvement as promising in supporting the school. As one of the parental involvement frameworks and school-based activities [59], collaborating parents mobilize their skills, influences, and resources to strengthen school programs, family practices, and children's learning and development. Moreover, since parents join various community networks, being members makes them assume the liaison between the resources and the school. They bridge these resources to schools so that they may contribute to and participate in improving school programs [60], and finally, they become part of a community member of schools where the school will have more access to them [61].

Schools need to have parental support to do their work since children belong to families influenced by family on their learning in school, even at the college level [62]. Volunteering is a direct avenue for parents to prove their commitment to school effort in educating their children. The current study suggests that students perceive volunteering as important among other involvement. Considering it needs parents' expertise, time, engagement, attendance at school, or kind of activities, it is understandable that most students address it to such a position. Research by Menon [63] has justified some barriers on the parents' side. They are not having knowledge of the school system, have a bad experience in the past, have language problems, and are busy with office work, which limits them from engaging in school-based involvement activities. Other studies relate to this finding give additional insight. Burstein and Court [64] found that volunteering is a difficult aspect of all types of parental involvement. For this finding, they proposed a new classification of parent volunteering into five levels (the *uber* volunteer leader, the recruitment volunteer, the peer task volunteer, the will-not volunteer, and the frustrated volunteer). The classification can be a beneficial tool for schools to map parents' profiles in which who can be or cannot be involved in various school activities voluntarily. For such difficulties, volunteering still has a chance to be increased as found by Malluhi and Alomran [65] of improving volunteering in primary school effectively in which the school leaders employ multiple collaborative, shared, and transformational leadership practices.

Second, comparing students' perception of parental involvement based on statistical differences between the means of male and female groups is necessary since both groups have different preferences in various areas [66]. It will give an impression of how this course affects the school practice. As displayed in Table 2, among the five types, data analysis indicates that the mean difference between both groups is insignificant, meaning they almost have a similar perception of the importance of all the types. Research by García-Mendoza *et al.* [67] added more perspective to the difference between both groups on parental involvement in which the perceived parental involvement scores of the female are more spread out than males. Meanwhile, the current finding suggested commonality of perception between male and female students differs from previous studies. Research by Varol and Yilmaz [68] give another perspective on the similarity between males and females instead of their difference which generalizes them rigidly. An alternative perspective on gender roles in conjunction with teachers' and parents' relations should be concerned with elementary teacher preparation. Both father and mother are not crucial issues but education level [69]. Parents with a low education level show a high frequency of uncooperative and uninvolved behaviors compared to parents with a high level of education. However, research by Kim and Weseley [70] suggest a preference for hiring females over males for elementary school teachers resulting in further questions about which of both groups can establish parental involvement effectively. Elementary teacher education students should prepare to deal with the issues.

Third, comparing sophomores, juniors, and seniors' perceptions of parental involvement may give some critical insights into the influence of learning experiences during college that shape their perceptions. Senior students will probably have more academic insights and experiences than juniors and sophomores because of more completed courses than sophomores and juniors' do. A similar assumption goes for junior to sophomores. However, the analysis data reveals a vice versa, with no difference in mean scores among the last two groups. In confirming this finding, several previous studies will become a reference for the explanation. Research by Dakeev *et al.* [71] for instance, in studying motivation influence on learning strategies, found no difference among freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Contrary, anoted study

addressed emotional intelligence portrays different results [72], suggesting a difference between juniors and seniors, in which the juniors have higher scores than seniors. A possible explanation of the similarity is their previous experience that shapes the perception and not college experience. This difference implies elementary teacher education, particularly in designing curricula that place the involvement course in the second academic year so they will have positive insight into the involvement.

Fourth, the study finds that students of private universities have a better perception of the importance of parental involvement than public universities. Meanwhile, their perceptions of parental involvement across islands are similar. The more detailed analysis finds that students who belong to study programs of Java and Sumatera Island their perception are different significantly. Students of Sumatera and Sulawesi Island come next. Comparing students' perceptions on behalf of attending public and private institutions and their geographical location in terms of cause-and-effect discourses needs caution. Several challenges arise when comparing them [73]. In certain aspects, some studies mention that public universities are better than those private universities or vice versa [74], [75]. In Indonesia, the most prestigious study programs on Java island have better accreditation grades than those outside Java [76]. Usually, the students of these universities may come from all over Indonesia. Because it is not related directly to learning achievement and the course may be absent in the study program curriculum, the difference among them may associate with other variables, such as the ability to select the quality source for perceiving an object [77], previous knowledge, and vicarious experience [78].

In general, the positivity of students' perception of the importance of parental involvement in elementary education indicated in the present research implies some beneficial suggestions. An elementary education study program or department has to include the parental involvement program in its curricula. The promising foundation of bringing parental involvement in the curricula to the students is to make critical links between its theory and practices in elementary school so that they may understand how to see the possibility of its best practices, such as accommodating parents' aspiration for participation [79]. The efforts to support a study program incorporating parental involvement into their curriculum may take a long road since this field in many kinds of research does not give direct and instant results to academic performance.

Although a positive perception of parental involvement does not guarantee students to act accordingly in their future teaching careers, on many occasions it may help shape their attitudes and behaviors [80]. Consequently, to some extent, knowing their perception can predict future behaviors in the involvement. If their perception is limited, the study program may change it along with academic and practical experience through an offered course. Programs and materials, such as the incredible years teacher classroom management (IY TCM) [81], teacher involving parents (TIP) [82], and a training manual for engaging parents in education Texas Education Agency [83] can be a content of parental involvement curricula which facilitate the students to understand theory and practice of parental involvement.

The study contributes to the parental involvement field, particularly for the study programs of elementary teacher education and elementary schools. It allows more fine-grained exploration how to make the involvement meaningful for the college school students, and elementary school teachers and parents. The study has limitations concerning the research scope, which only covers students' perceptions in questionnaire items. Another is the representativeness of the respondents recruited non-proportionally, resulting in warrant consideration. In addition, the number of male and female students is unbalanced due to the high preference of females for a career as elementary school teachers compared to males, concluding their differences should be case by case. Future research plans, therefore, should involve more representative respondents from all over Indonesia, explore the perspective gap between elementary school teachers and elementary teacher education students, and the real practices of parental involvement in elementary education.

4. CONCLUSION

The current study explores the perceptions of elementary teacher education students on the importance of parental involvement in education and identifies whether their perceptions are homogeneous in terms of demographic data. In summary, this study finds that the students held a good perception of the importance of parental involvement regardless of some demographic variances. There is no doubt that the students, pursuing education in public and private universities and in different islands as male and female, freshmen, juniors, and seniors, have a similar perception of the importance of involvement, leading to more effort to expand it in the same ways. Findings inferred that most students perceive parental involvement in education as a significant part of their future profession. Study programs of elementary teacher education are responsible for preparing the students capable of pursuing competencies in parental involvement enterprise. They can support their students in these pursuits by facilitating them to attain related theories and practices. To equip the students with them, the study programs have to incorporate them into their curriculum. Instead of integrating it into a particular course, it is preferable if the study program adds it as a new course.

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