

Assessing the Impact of Information Campaigns on Raising Parental Awareness of the BOS Program¹

Policy Brief

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Photo: World Bank

BOS lightens the load – A campaign commercial explaining the purpose of BOS

I. School Operational Assistance Program – *Bantuan Operasional Sekolah (BOS)*

Indonesia has shown an increasing commitment to education over the last decade. Since 2001, spending has doubled in real terms largely as a result of a constitutional requirement obligating the government to spend a fifth of its budget on education. A cornerstone of this increased investment has been a school grants program aimed at providing financial support to all public, private and religious primary and junior secondary schools.

The School Operational Assistance program (BOS), initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2005, provides basic education schools with block grants. The program currently provides grants to 228,000 schools benefiting an estimated 43 million students. In 2012, 8.1 percent or Rp 23.5 trillion of the total government education budget was spent on BOS.

The aim of the school grants program, allocated on a per-student basis, is three-fold: to improve access to and raise the quality of basic education, to reduce the financial burden for students and to support school based management reforms. Grants have

supported the purchase of goods and services meant to enhance the quality of education (e.g. texts and library books, teaching-learning materials, teacher professional development activities, and remedial learning) and have reduced the need for schools to seek funds from parents to cover these expenditures.

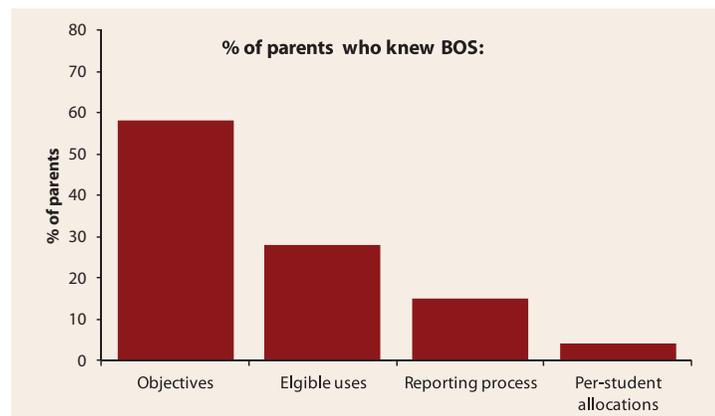
The BOS program provides schools with greater autonomy and flexibility in managing their resources. Schools in turn are expected to use these resources in a transparent and accountable way. The program has strengthened school planning and budgeting processes and has begun to open these up to parental and community oversight. Given the traditionally passive role which parents play in school activities and management, compounded by a lack of information about school affairs, this clearly represents a fundamental reform of education in Indonesia.

II. The BOS Information Campaign: Why and What

While parental knowledge is crucial for the success of BOS, concerns were raised at the Ministry of Education and Culture about the level of parental awareness of the program. These concerns were confirmed by a nationally representative survey conducted in 2009. Parents were generally aware of the overall objectives of the program but were less knowledgeable about the detailed workings of BOS – knowledge necessary to actively participate in school affairs and hold schools accountable for the use of BOS funds (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Many parents knew about BOS objectives, but far fewer had any detailed knowledge of the program

Percentage of parents who gave correct answers to questions about the BOS program, 2009



Note: Parents were randomly selected from a nationally representative sample of 702 primary and junior secondary schools.

¹ This policy brief is based on a more detailed forthcoming report - World Bank, 2012. 'Assessing the impact of information campaigns on raising parental awareness of the Indonesian school grants program'

In light of this limited awareness, the Ministry of Education and Culture, with the support of the World Bank, developed a social marketing and information campaign to raise awareness of the program. The campaign had two main components:

- **A national television and print media campaign** targeting the general public across the whole of Indonesia. The aim of the campaign was to provide basic BOS information and advocate for greater transparency using public service announcements on television and print advertorials. The national campaign was complemented by a range of activities designed to support journalists covering the BOS program.
- **A trial of alternative campaigns in four districts and selected schools.** The main aim of these trials was to identify the most effective way of reaching parents with information about the program. Methods used to reach parents with information on BOS included the organising of school meetings, sending letters and SMS to parents and providing information either through new and more colorful school notice boards or giving small pocket books, containing information on BOS, to parents.

Each element of the campaign had to explain what BOS was and how it could be used, in clear and simple messages, and outline the responsibilities of each level of the system to make BOS succeed. A private firm was engaged to design and implement each component of the campaign.

To explore the impact of different campaign approaches, a nationally representative survey of parents of primary and junior secondary school students was carried out before (2009) and after (2011) the campaign. For the national television and print campaign, this allowed for a simple comparison of levels of knowledge on BOS between parents who saw different aspects of the campaign and those who did not. In the four participating districts, different campaign methods (e.g. SMS, school meetings, pocket books, etc.) were randomly assigned to different parents and schools. This allowed for a rigorous evaluation of the change in parental knowledge associated with each adopted approach.

III. The Results of the National Television and Press Campaign

At the national level, the campaign focused on television announcements and advertorials placed in the national print media. Over the last five years, opinions in the Ministry of Education and Culture have differed on the best approach and this has resulted in a number of different campaigns. Prior to 2010, two television advertisements featuring famous personalities were aired (Cut Mini and Dik Doank). One of these advertisements was wrongly interpreted by the public as suggesting that BOS would provide



As part of their media workshop, journalists discuss the benefits of BOS with a poor household in Tulungagung, East Java

free schooling to all. After 2010, a number of new advertisements were designed with support from the World Bank. They included:

- A second advert featuring the famous personality, Cut Mini, which corrected the earlier misconception that BOS would cover all individual student costs (e.g., transport, workbooks).
- An advert featuring MoEC officials highlighting the important role districts needed to play in supporting the BOS program.
- An advert featuring colourful balloons lifting children off the ground. This was intended to show that BOS would “lighten” the cost of education, with the balloon becoming a striking and memorable icon for the campaign.
- A set of animated adverts explaining the purpose of BOS and the need for parents’ participation in discussing, planning, and monitoring the use of BOS funds. Print advertorials with similar messages were placed in several national newspapers.

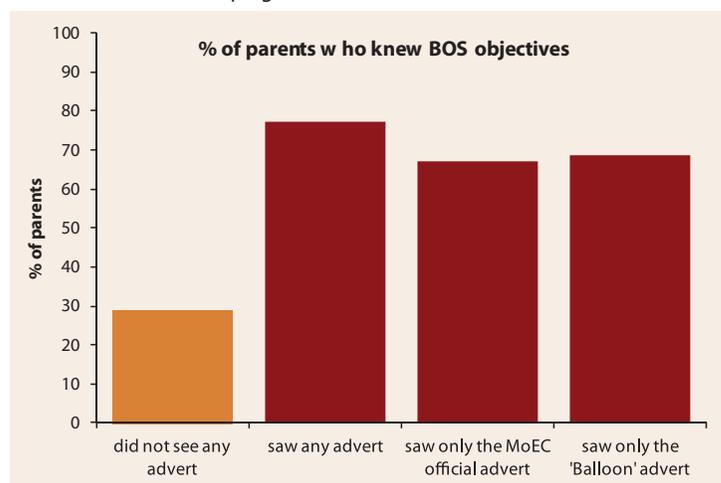
The BOS television campaign was successful at reaching a large number of parents - 60 percent of parents surveyed had seen at least one of the BOS commercials. The national press adverts were frequently complemented with advertorials in the local media sponsored by district education offices. However, only 7 percent of parents remembered seeing an advertorial in either the local or national press. There was also a significant difference in recall among the various television approaches. The “balloon” ads and the 2009 ads featuring famous personalities (Dik Doank and Cut Mini) were remembered by approximately a third of parents. Far fewer parents recalled the advert with MoEC officials (13 percent), and the recent animated adverts were remembered by less than 10 percent of respondents.

Parents who remembered seeing the national television campaign were more aware of BOS objectives but no more likely to have detailed knowledge of the program. A simple comparison showed that the proportion of parents who had seen a BOS advert were 48 percentage points more likely to know about BOS objectives than parents who had not (Figure 2). However, there was no marked difference in parents' grasp of detailed BOS knowledge (e.g. awareness of eligible uses of BOS funds) between the two groups.

These results are only suggestive as it was not possible to control for differences between parents who had seen the BOS adverts and those who had not. It is possible that the better knowledge of BOS amongst parents who had seen the campaign was the result not of messages contained in the television commercial but rather of other factors. For example, parents seeing the adverts may be wealthier than parents who did not see the advert. Wealthier parents may have a better understanding of BOS, regardless of whether they saw the BOS campaign, because they have greater access to information on BOS from other sources. It is possible that parental wealth may be driving the higher levels of BOS knowledge amongst the group who saw the BOS campaign rather than the campaign itself.

Figure 2: Parents seeing BOS television commercials were more likely to know BOS objectives

Percentage of parents who knew the objectives of BOS by exposure to the national television campaign



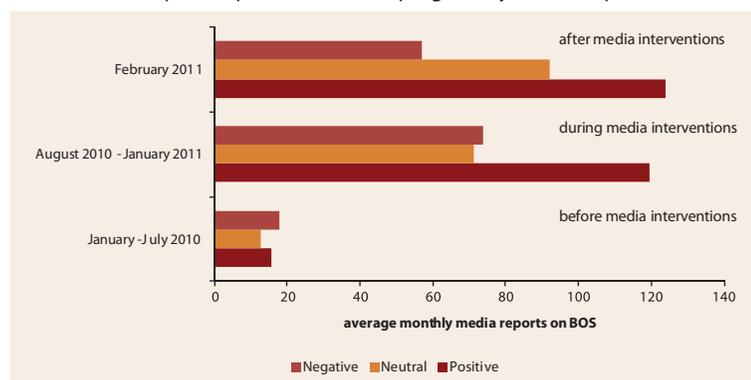
To complement the national television campaign, several activities were designed to support journalists covering BOS. These included press conferences at national and district levels to launch the BOS program, workshops to provide a broader perspective on BOS and its emphasis on transparency and accountability, media visits to districts and schools demonstrating good practice and writing competitions. The purpose of these activities was to attempt to make BOS reporting more accurate as well as more balanced.

Prior to the campaign the majority of reporting on BOS focused on disbursement delays and local corruption cases. Relatively little reporting examined the benefit of BOS to schools and children.

Although there is less information on the effect of activities directed towards journalists, there was a considerable change in the tone of national media reporting. Before the interventions, only 34 percent of national media reports were positive (Figure 3). After the interventions, the percentage of positive reports had increased to 45 percent, and the overall number of reports on BOS had increased four-fold (Figure 3). While it is difficult to attribute all these changes to campaign activities, they do appear to have been related to better coverage of the BOS program in the national media.

Figure 3: Activities directed at journalists were associated with an increase in the number of articles on BOS and an improvement in their tone

Total number of press reports on the BOS program by tone and period



Notes: 30 national and 10 local media (e.g. newspapers and websites) were covered in the monitoring exercise. Positive stories included stories that highlighted the importance of BOS for learning while negative stories frequently covered cases of misappropriation of BOS funds. Approximately 80 journalists were involved in local media workshops on BOS.

IV. Experimenting with Approaches at the School Level

A number of different approaches to reaching parents were trialled in four districts (Ambon, Malang, Sumbawa and Tulungagung). In Malang, half of the parents included in the evaluation were randomly selected to receive a set of SMS messages providing information on BOS. In Sumbawa, half of the schools included in the evaluation were randomly selected, and, with the help of facilitators, school meetings were organized to convey BOS information. In Tulungagung, one approach sent letters on the BOS program home with children while another gave parents free BOS pocket books. Schools included in the evaluation were randomly selected into one of three groups depending on whether parents in the school received a letter, a pocket book or neither (the control group). Randomly selecting schools into different groups allows the true impact of the different

campaign approaches on parental knowledge and participation to be identified.

School meetings convened by the principal or a community leader improved parental knowledge and participation significantly. The proportion of parents with knowledge of BOS objectives increased by 16 percentage points solely as a result of schools holding meetings of this kind (Figure 4). The meetings were also successful at increasing the more detailed knowledge necessary to actively participate in school affairs. The number of parents who knew the eligible uses for BOS grants more than doubled in schools that held meetings compared to those that did not (comparison schools). A key component of the success of this approach can be attributed to the high attendance of parents in school meetings. In Sumbawa, approximately three-quarters of parents attended the school meeting.

The impact of **text messages** sent to parents was smaller than the impact associated with school meetings. The proportion of parents who knew the per-student amount of BOS increased by seven percentage points for those who were meant to receive the text message (Figure 5). However, these messages did not appear to improve parental knowledge of the objectives of BOS.

The more limited effect of text messaging was associated with problems in sending text messages to the correct parent. Only a



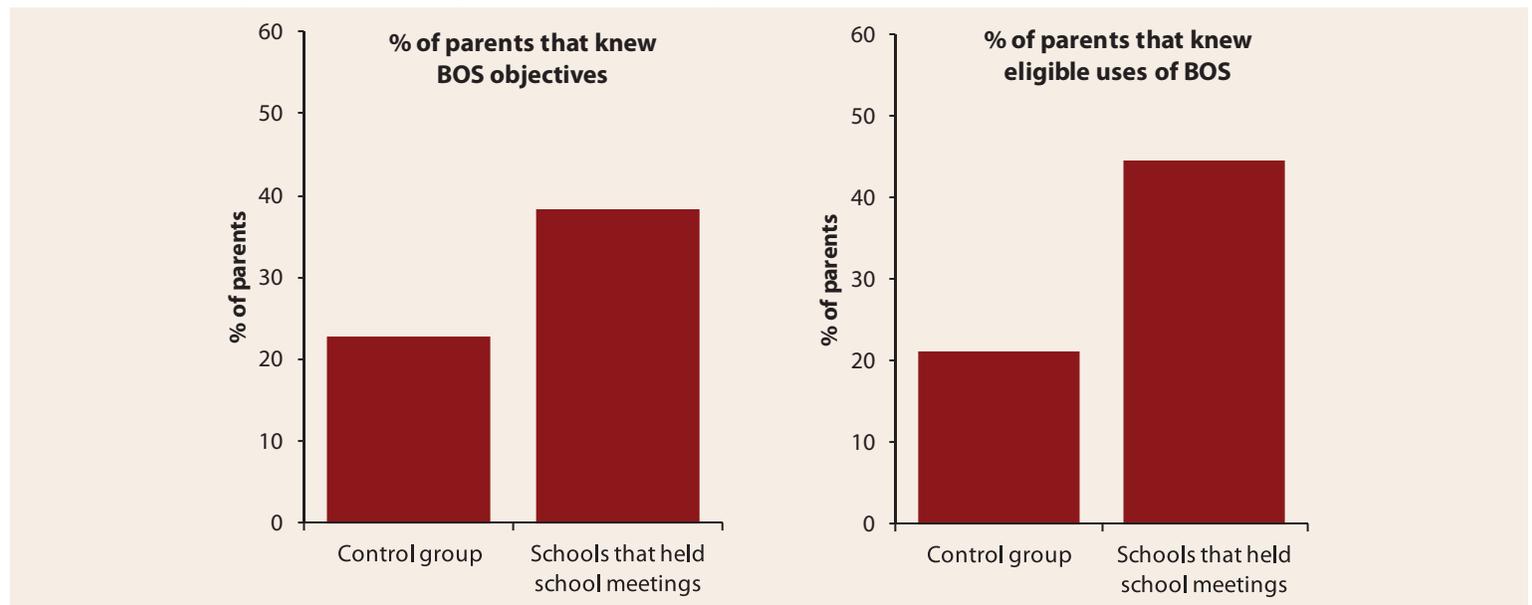
Photo: World Bank

New colorful BOS notice boards provided to schools participating in the evaluation

third of individuals selected to receive the text message actually received it. This was largely because telephone numbers were incorrect or text messages were sent to other family members or were deleted before parents could read them. Some of these problems are clearly risks associated with using an approach of this

Figure 4: School meetings were successful in raising awareness as well as conveying detailed knowledge of the BOS program

Impact of school meetings on parents' knowledge of BOS objectives and eligible uses

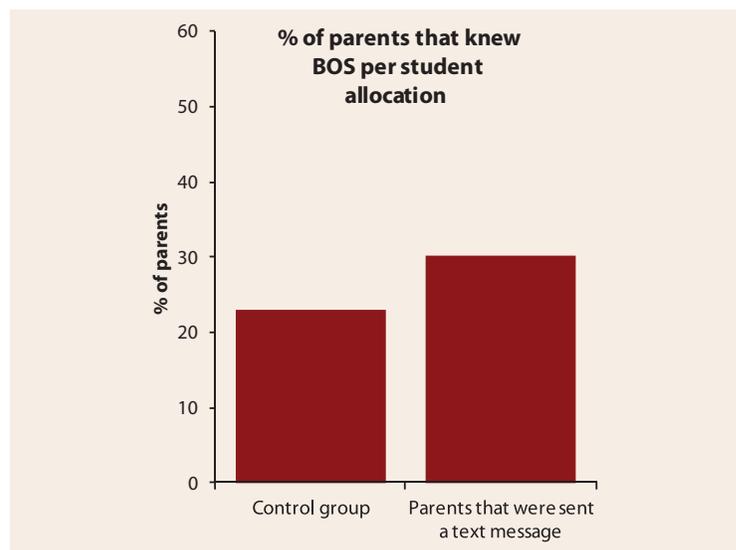


Note: Schools were randomly assigned into two groups – a control group which did not receive the project organised school meeting and a treatment group that did receive the meeting. The difference between the proportion of parents in each group that knew about BOS is the average treatment effect. The difference is statistically significant at the 1 percent level.

kind. However, some of the mis-targeting (e.g. incorrect telephone numbers) could potentially be improved and this would raise considerably the overall impact of this approach.

Figure 5: Text messages had a more modest impact on awareness of BOS

Impact of text messages on parents' knowledge of BOS per-student spending uses



Note: Parents were randomly assigned into two groups – a control group which did not receive the text message and a treatment group that did receive a text message. The difference between the proportion of parents in each group that knew about BOS is the average treatment effect. The difference is statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

Sending **letters** and giving away **pocket books** to parents had no discernible impact on knowledge of the BOS program. While most parents received the letters and pocket books, it appears that the letters were not read or the messages were unclear and that pocket books were either given away or the messages about BOS ignored.

In two of the trial districts, new colorful **BOS notice boards** were provided to schools participating in the evaluation. It was not possible as part of the evaluation to assess their impact on parental knowledge because all schools, rather than a randomly selected sample, were provided with the notice boards. However, many parents reported seeing the new notice boards, and it is likely that the messages and information on the BOS program they provided improved overall awareness levels.

V. Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Empowering parents and the community with knowledge about BOS is essential if the program is to be transparent, accountable and open to parental participation. It is also important for broader school-based management reforms. Ensuring that parents, particularly poor parents, understand the resources that

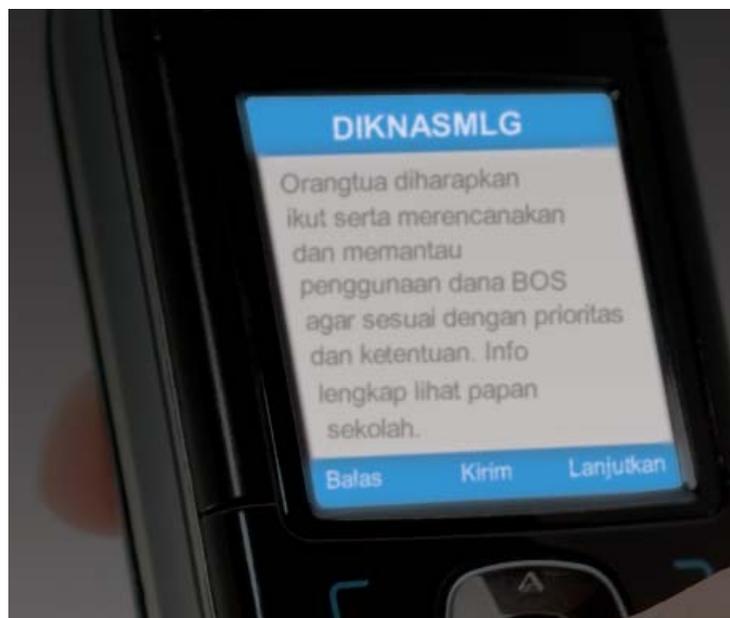


Photo: World Bank

A text message used to deliver BOS information directly to parents in Malang, East Java

schools have available to them and the reduction this implies for their own contribution to the school is also crucial. Indonesia, no doubt partly because of its broad geographical range and diverse, often scattered population, understood that a significant information campaign about BOS was essential. Just as important was the decision made to use the campaign to test a variety of dissemination techniques.

The national television campaign appears to have been remembered by a large proportion of parents in Indonesia. There is some evidence to suggest that knowledge of overall BOS objectives was higher for parents who were exposed to the campaign. Adverts which contained popular personalities or were centred on a logo or icon (e.g., the balloons “lightening” the burden on children) tended to be most memorable. However, national television campaigns are expensive, and their effectiveness needs to be considered against the cheaper and more effective school-based interventions trialled in the campaign.

Print advertorials did not seem to be an effective way of communicating with parents but working with journalists to improve reporting had pay-offs. The media interventions conducted encouraged a more accurate and balanced reporting of BOS and have been effective at both raising the amount of BOS reporting in the press and also its tone. Continuing to work with journalists is important to ensure that BOS is reported fairly and that it remains a topic that receives wide attention in the popular press.

Direct school-parent interactions offer an effective way of informing parents about the BOS program. In particular:

- **School meetings** appear to be a very effective way of communicating with parents. They are inexpensive to arrange and, given the large impact they have on parental knowledge, relatively cost-effective.
- **Text messaging** also appeared to be a promising approach, but difficulties in implementing this approach limited its impact. If difficulties in reaching the correct parents could be overcome, this could provide an alternative to school meetings.
- **Notice boards** appear to have the potential to improve parental knowledge of BOS and are a useful complement to the other approaches trialled.

The different communication strategies also improved different areas of BOS knowledge. For example, school meetings increased knowledge of BOS objectives and eligible uses whereas text messaging improved the knowledge of the per-student allocation. While further study is clearly required to understand the reasons underlying these findings, they tentatively suggest that a combination of approaches may be most effective in raising awareness and parental participation in school affairs.

Information campaigns need to be conducted regularly to reinforce earlier information and also to communicate program changes. Since the evaluation was conducted, the amount of BOS grant per-student has increased, and it is vital to communicate these changes if parents are to continue to hold schools accountable for BOS funds. Furthermore, recent research from India suggests that regular information campaigns are much more effective than single events.²

² Pandey, P., Goyal, S. and V. Sundararaman. (2011). 'Does information improve school accountability? Results from a large randomized trial'. World Bank South Asia Discussion paper series, No. 49



A school meeting held as part of the information campaign in SDN Kukin, Sumbawa, West Nusa Tenggara

Finding the resources necessary to conduct information campaigns on a regular basis is difficult. But the costs associated with campaigns of this kind must be weighed against the potential benefits that come from stronger parental accountability at the school level. The findings from this study suggest that the costs of information campaigns do not have to be excessive and are a small price to pay for encouraging parents to take a more active role in their children's school.