

Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto The 7th Asia-Pacific Education and Science Conference (AECon 2021)

CERTIFICATE

Number. C9-II/066-S.Sert/FKIP/II/2022

this is to certify that

Anna Triwijayati

affiliation

Universitas Ma Chung

paper title

The Synergy of Parents and School Involvement in Children Consumer Education since Early Childhood

has participated as

PRESENTER

in the 7th Asia-Pacific Education and Science Conference with the theme

“Digital Literacy in Education and Science”

at Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto

on January 27, 2022



Dean of Faculty of Teacher
Training and Education,

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The Synergy of Parents and School Involvement in Children Consumer Education since Early Childhood

Anna Triwijayati

Program Studi Manajemen Universitas Ma Chung, Malang

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

DOI:

[10.30595/pspfs.v3i.272](https://doi.org/10.30595/pspfs.v3i.272)

Submitted:

January 20, 2022

Accepted:

February 14, 2022

Published:

March 9, 2022

Keywords:

Children, Consumer,
Empowerment, Synergy

ABSTRACT

Children consumer education since their early childhood is important to be done by involving parents and school. Children learn to become consumers; and consumer education on children is obtained from their parents and school. This paper is based on a continuous research on children consumers which is aimed at building the synergy of parents and school involvement in children consumer education since their early childhood. The research was conducted in Malang City, involving elementary schools in a Forum Group Discussion. This research uses qualitative paradigm and is in the method of phenomenology research. The research findings yield a school program that involves parents, namely canteen monitoring; the control of canteen menu and snacks which is conducted by schools; the education of healthy snacks for parents; involving students' parents who would like to sell snacks in the canteen; make the children have their breakfast; include the materials of healthy snacks and food additives in the materials of Physical Education and Health curriculum; educating children so that they choose healthier food; empowering children more with the emphasis and learning about the effects of food; giving information about the ingredients and contents of food as well as the expiry date and interesting children education materials.

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Corresponding Author:

Anna Triwijayati

Program Studi Manajemen,

Fakultas Ekonomi dan Bisnis, Universitas Ma Chung

Villa Puncak Tidar N-01, Malang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia.

Email: anna.triwijayati@machung.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Forty years ago, children were still considered as savers and futures consumers, but today children is viewed as consumers or spenders (McNeal, 1991). Haryanto (2020) consider children as 4th consumer market, which will increase in line with the education and literacy of parents, especially mothers, related to health and education.

Children consumers in Indonesia are identical with the activity of "eating snacks" at school. The previous research (Triwijayati, 2013) showed that eating snacks sold at school becomes a common children activity in Indonesia. The factors that can drive children to buy snacks are the snacks themselves, the teachers at school, the family conditioning, the parents' role and the children's own internal factors. The research also indicates that as a matter of fact, children understand the value of money and the choice of snacks. In some schools, it is the price of snacks that are adjusted to children's pocket money. This is further reinforced by the findings that most of the schools have a school canteen and some schools allow food vendors to sell their foods in front of the schools. The condition of the school canteens varies from the clean ones with healthy food to the ones with minimum hygiene and food quality.

School canteens are closely related with providing healthy snacks for children. On the other hand, children consumers were consumers who are very impulsive and spontaneous decision-makers (Triwijayati, 2012), which also mean that they will buy whatever is currently available at the school canteen. Damanik (2009) also found that the hygiene and sanitation of the students and the snack sellers are not good. If children consumers have yet to be able to make a decision carefully and wisely; while there are canteens and school snacks with poor quality, then what will happen is that the children will consume food in an unhealthy environment. Because of that, cooperation among the schools is needed. Moreover, they also need adequate knowledge about healthy food snacks.

Black and Hurley (as cited in Triwijayati, 2013) stated that parents' educating style, especially regarding eating habit, is related to feeding styles. This issue is supported by Dixey et al. (1999) and Birch et al. (2007) stated that families, especially the parents, have an important role in becoming a role model and regulator for children's habit in choosing food in their early years. Children are the learner. According to their learning, during their school age, schools and friends take that role model. The strategy to stimulate a behavior of consuming healthy food is consistent with parents' habit for not giving unhealthy snacks and candies every day (Ridder et al., 2009).

The next interesting thing about children's snack meals habit is the good conditioning of bringing a lunch pack, having breakfast and pocket money. The essence of children conditioning shows that even though the three habit formations are enforced by parents, there are times when they are not interchangeable. In other words, buying snacks is still done by children because of their buying power granted by their pocket money. A research by Vesela and Grebenova (2010) showed that school children like to buy food at school more than to bring their own food from home. Kraak and Pelletier (1998) stated that children's purchasing power depends on their family's or parents' income. Buying power was called cost cues and the conceptual frame of food selection (Merreiros and Ness, 2009).

In scientific literatures, children consumer education is often called consumer socialization because becoming a wise consumer is due to socialization, especially from parents and the surrounding. Dealing with consumer socialization phase for children, John (1999) stated that there is a relation between children's growth phase and their readiness to socialize as consumers. The children consumer socialization stages are as follow:

1. Age 3 – 7 years old (perceptual stage). The characteristic of children consumers is having a general orientation towards immediate and readily observable perceptual features of the marketplace. Children consumers can show something familiar in a market, for example a brand or the name of a shop/supermarket, but they have a limited understanding. Their buying decision is based on limited information and often a single perceptual dimension, like size, color, or price.
2. Age 7 – 11 years old (analytical stage). This period is an important period in children consumers education because it has several stages of improving the knowledge and skills of consumers. In this stage, there is a dramatic improvement in the ability to process information, which will result in understanding of the market, advertisements, brands, feelings and motives for consuming. The decision making is based on several attributes, adaptive and flexible, and is also based on the ability to think from parents' or friends' perspective at the same time.
3. Age 11 – 16 years old (reflective stage). This stage is marked with the development in various social and cognitive dimensions. Children start to be able to process various complex information regarding the market, brands, and prices. At this stage, children start to turn into adult and socialize with a wider friendship environment. Their consumption decision is more adaptive based on their social condition.

Based on those children consumer socialization phases proposed by John (1999), it can be concluded that the analytical phase is an important phase in children consumer's education. In this phase children's information processing is not complete/complex, but they have socialized with their friends and environment, including advertisements and media.

Becoming consumer is a mental and cognition development process. This process is started since childhood in the form of a socialization process. The process of child socialization is first carried out with family and especially from and with parents (Šramová, 2017). Socialization agents also friends, media, teachers/schools, and direct experience (Elizarova, 2018; Ubayachandra & Eldeniya, 2017). This developmental process takes place naturally, where children gradually build skills by acting in their environment (assimilation process) and then the accommodation process when children build a structure of cognition and skill (Ville & Tartas, 2010).

Children learn by observation and imitation, firstly from replicating parent's behavior (Elizarova, 2018). Family teach value of money, belief, skills, and consumption behavior. Parents is one of main socialization agents of the children (Šramová, 2017; Hota & McGuiggan, 2005). Theoretically, children do not need money and product because parents serve (McNeal, 1991). In recent years, children have purchasing power because parents give them 'power'.

Becoming consumer means have purchase power. Of course, because children are still dependents of parents, purchase power comes from parents or older people in the form of pocket money or holiday money.

Children learning to become consumers and how they get purchasing power is started and influenced by their interaction with parents (McNeal, 1991).

Thus, children as consumer are obtained from socialization process and social role fulfilment which supported by main information sources that are parents, family habits, peers, advertising, and the products (Šramová, 2017). It becomes paradox when parents give pocket money and encourage purchases but on the other hand rely on schools in educating children's about appropriate consumer behavior (McNeal, 1991). Children consumer education on healthy food focus on sensory and pleasure of ingesting healthy food while parents are responsible for family purchases and for bringing home requested foods (Mazzonetto & Fiates, 2014). Therefore the synergy parents and school according to children learning as consumers since early age is very necessary so that's there is a synchronization of the learning model of

After children socialize with the family environment, they develop consumption practices through interactions with social life including schools and teachers (Šramová, 2017). Children's consumption practices are also shaped by the normative requirements of both family and peer consumption style (Ville & Tartas, 2010). With age, the impact of parental influence on children's consumption practices will decrease (Hota & McGuigan, 2005).

This article is a result of an applied research in the year 2015 which is an implication and continuation of the previous research in the year 2012 entitled "The Decision Making in Buying Snacks by Children Consumers in Malang City". The results of the interview with the school headmasters and the Department of Health, who became the respondents in the previous research can describe the real condition. Children consumers with power will have a high bargaining power over the food products that they will buy. In the long run, powerful consumers can minimize the cases that harm children consumers. Farnsworth and Dunoskovich (2011) found the fact that children consumer who have a consumption training are better than those who do not.

2. RESEARCH AND METHOD

The type of research method used is phenomenology. The variable in this research is the all of the children consumer empowerment programs at the public and private elementary schools in Malang city. The types of data used in this research are both quantitative and qualitative data, primary as well as secondary. The secondary quantitative data are gathered from the techniques of rules documentations, policy letters, work programs, short and long term strategic plans of the schools. The primary data are gathered from the deep interviews with the headmasters in a FGD forum. The technique used by the researchers is inviting the headmasters or the school policy-makers related with this research. FGD is guided and conducted 3 times due to the tight schedules of the FGD participants. The FGD stages are as follow:

1. Making an initial contact with the schools, 3 contacts are needed.
2. Conducting FGD three times in the first year with the agenda: introduction to the research, discussions on rules and policies, and making a program design.
3. Conducting FGD twice in the second year with the agenda: review of the programs planned in the first year; plan of technical implementation.

The informants or participants are 5 headmaster of five public and private school at Malang. Informants are determined based on characteristics as headmaster/principle or person in charge of canteen and consumption management in elementary school.

The data analysis techniques used in this research are:

1. Secondary data analysis technique, used to identify the school programs and policies.
2. Policy mapping technique, used to design children consumers empowerment programs of school snacks.
3. Thematic and interactive analysis technique to analyze the FGD results.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Description of focus group discussion

In this stage, the research team has designed the question instrument beforehand to use as Focus Group Discussion (FGD) materials. As a part of the research credibility, the instrument has previously been reviewed by the researchers from these following aspects:

1. The suitability with the research goal
2. The textural and structural aspects

Theme description: The policies, rules and good practices of elementary schools in children consumer's empowerment

The general view of the schools on the problems dealing with children snacks is summarized in the following FGD quotes of the results:

Ms. Hari Mukti, from Public Elementary School 1
*So, they are actually **more attracted to the snacks outside the school.***

Ms. Ratna, from Public Elementary School 2
*Children are indeed **attracted to what is sold outside the school area.** After school time, children eat snacks outside more than at school. This might be because the **color and taste of the snacks are more attractive than those of what are sold in school.** Or, since the canteen staff wants to attain good nutritional value, the prices automatically raise. **The buying power of the society and students is still very low.***

Ms. Irma from Public Elementary School 3
*Talking about children, well, the proverb says that our neighbor's grass is greener. That's why they are sometimes **attracted to buy from outside.***

Mr. Wiyoto, from Private Elementary School 1
*Generally our children are **indeed attracted to snacks with attractive colorings,** whereas they actually contain lots of colorings. How much better it would be if there is an official who, well, what do you call that, visits schools, to those special canteens.*

Ms. Esti Suriati, from Public Elementary School 4)
*I saw in my class that my students are sleepy, weak, because of **buying noodle at the canteen.** The noodle is just plain noodle, there is nothing else in it.*

From the FGD results with the elementary schools, it can be inferred that:

1. Children are more attracted to the snacks sold by the street vendors in front of the school due to their attractive colors and low prices.
2. The school canteen is less competitive even though it has tried to provide healthy snacks. That makes the prices more expensive and consequently, students prefer the snacks sold outside the school.
3. Children's buying power is limited so that it is often hard for them to buy delicious and healthy snacks.

Meanwhile, the schools also discuss how to educate and empower students regarding the snacks.

1. **Public Elementary School Sukun I (Ms. Ratna)**
Monitoring the selling in the canteen. We will try to accommodate the parents. **Maybe if parents are the ones who do the selling, they will know which snacks are good for their children's health and which are not.** But if the sellers are outsiders, they will certainly want to get some profit. Still there must be some control, whether by the headmaster or the canteen division. That can be conducted. Or other teachers can do it. So, once in a while the teachers can be brought to eat in the canteen to taste the food and snacks provided there.
2. **Participant from Catholic Elementary School Mardiyayata**
For certain subjects, we integrate education about food in it, so the Physical Education subject also contains materials about health.
3. **Educating children so that they choose healthier food. Besides the punishment is noted, it is also documented in a book.** We should also educate the parents, give guidance to the canteen staff, or the teacher in charge of the canteen, either it is from *Badan Ketahanan Pangan* (Food Sustainability Department) or *Dinas Kesehatan* (The Health Department). The Health Department through *PusKesMas* (Community Health Center) also often pay a visit to monitor the healthiness of the food in the canteen.
4. Dealing with School Health Unit and healthy canteens, the Health Office states that school canteens should not provide food. Children should be conditioned to have breakfast at home, but due to the parents' request, because they cannot prepare breakfast at home, they ask the school to provide it. We also sometimes **control what to sell** for the day.
5. Children empowerment is more about the emphasis and learning about the **effects of food and giving information about the ingredients and contents of foods and the expiry date.**
6. **Parents' role** is also very important. They can tell their children that it is better to buy food in the canteen. **There also should be a written agreement between parents and the headmaster about the punishment for children who buy snacks and food outside.**
7. There must be a commitment between the school and the food sellers around the school area. The snacks sold at the canteen should always be under control. There are many kinds of punishment to implement. The ways to implement them should be clear because street sellers have a right to do the selling. It can be conducted through a **policy dealing with an analysis on environmental impacts.** There should also be a

commitment among teachers, parents and students. A guiding program that takes place for two days can also be held, or separately conducted in several months while maintaining control and punishment.

8. **The government through *Badan Ketahanan Pangan (Food Sustainability Department)*, for example, can cover some programs and must cooperate** with other parties that can provide some donation, and does not handle the programs one by one so that they will not be too hard to conduct. School committees can be driven to carry out the programs, or the CSR of some companies that can brand their products in some appliances like basins. Who and what institutions can push these programs?
9. There should be **a game of guiding** dealing with food security for children, for instance a monopoly game in the form of snakes and ladders. For girls there are games like how to cook. This game can be added with an effect, like when somebody eats something unhealthy, then he will have a stomachache. What effects will it have by eating Rhodamin for a long period of time, for example? **Visualization** should be provided to make it easier for children to understand the long term effects, not the short ones. It is because nowadays elementary school students have been taught Biology and they have learned about the human body. A monopoly game can be inserted when students have sports games in groups. While waiting for their turn, they can play a monopoly game, reducing their chats during the Physical Education class.

From the results of the FGD with the schools, there are some suggestions about education and children consumer's empowerment. From the FGD results, it can be inferred that from the schools' point of view, students' empowerment is linked to various parties: School-internal and external stakeholders, namely the students, the teachers/staff and the canteen, parents, street vendors, and the government institutions and other external stakeholders.

Regarding students empowerment in the perspective of the relationship between schools, students, teachers, and parents, the schools give several inputs in the form of programs and activities as follow:

1. Including healthy snacks and food additives topics in Physical Education and Hygiene subject.
2. Educating children so that they choose healthier food. The punishment is, besides it will be noted, it will also be put in the report book. Parents will be given some education, whereas canteen staff or the teachers who are in charge of the canteen will be given some guidance.
3. Children empowerment is more on the emphasis and learning the effects of food, and giving instructions, giving information about the ingredients, food contents, and expiry date.
4. Giving interesting guidance to children: games, cooking together, visualization, monopoly games on snacks
5. Children should have breakfast.
6. School policies, like providing free drinking water, no packed food policy, no canteen or street vendors one day in a week.

In the relationship with the parents, the schools expect that there is a support as well as involvement of parents in educating children about healthy snacks. The schools suggest that the parents' support and involvement ranges from preventive side to mutual commitment. The support and involvement of the parents that the schools expect are: permitting parents to sell snacks in the canteen; giving parents education about healthy snacks, and making a mutual agreement between parents and the headmaster about the punishment for children who buy food outside the school.

Schools and canteens are one unity in supporting students' health. Schools and canteens have a very important role. So far, schools are still a place to transfer knowledge about healthy snacks. However, that knowledge is limited to the information from the teachers in class, for instance from Physical Education and Hygiene or from Natural Sciences subjects. Up to now, there is no complete material on healthy food consumption, snacks and healthy environment. In several other countries like Australia, USA, and European countries, the material on healthy snacks becomes a part of the elementary school curriculum.

Parents have the role to condition children to be accustomed to eating snacks. From Triwijayati (2013), it was found that parents' knowledge and anxiety becomes the basic reference for them to talk to their children about healthy snacks at school. Parents' anxiety becomes the material referred to by parents to improve their children's knowledge. Parents' reference determines their children's decision in buying snacks. In other words, parents' permissive behavior is related to children's obedience and decision in buying snacks at school. McNeal (1991) stated that children can become consumers at an early age through the encouragement and support of parents, who also provide financial support. The majority of parents allow their children to make product selections (Sengheu, 2001).

Children consumers are actually complex enough in making a decision. In the previous research (Triwijayati, 2013), it was stated that the factor that can drive children to buy snacks are the snacks themselves, the teachers at school, the family conditioning, the parents' role, and the children's internal factor. The snacks factors that drive children to buy snacks are the affordable prices and the delicious taste or matches with their

preference. Although children have knowledge about snack products, they tend to ignore the hygiene and nutritional values of the snacks.

Children's needs of snacks can be divided into two, which are physical motive and psychological motive. Physical need is marked by hunger and thirst, especially when children use a lot of energy during school time. Psychological need is marked by the absence of reason for children consumers to consume snacks. Children consume snacks mainly because they want to and there is no specific reason that drives them to do it. So the decision to buy snacks might be taken without any consideration because children have buying power, exposed to the snacks at the school canteen, or because of hunger.

The consumption evaluation stage by children consumers is quickly done and they do not feel a 'loss' when the snacks that they want are not available. Children also do not show too much involvement in the evaluating process. They only consider the price and taste of snacks. The evaluation stage is a response stage towards a stimulus that is very quick and attractive.

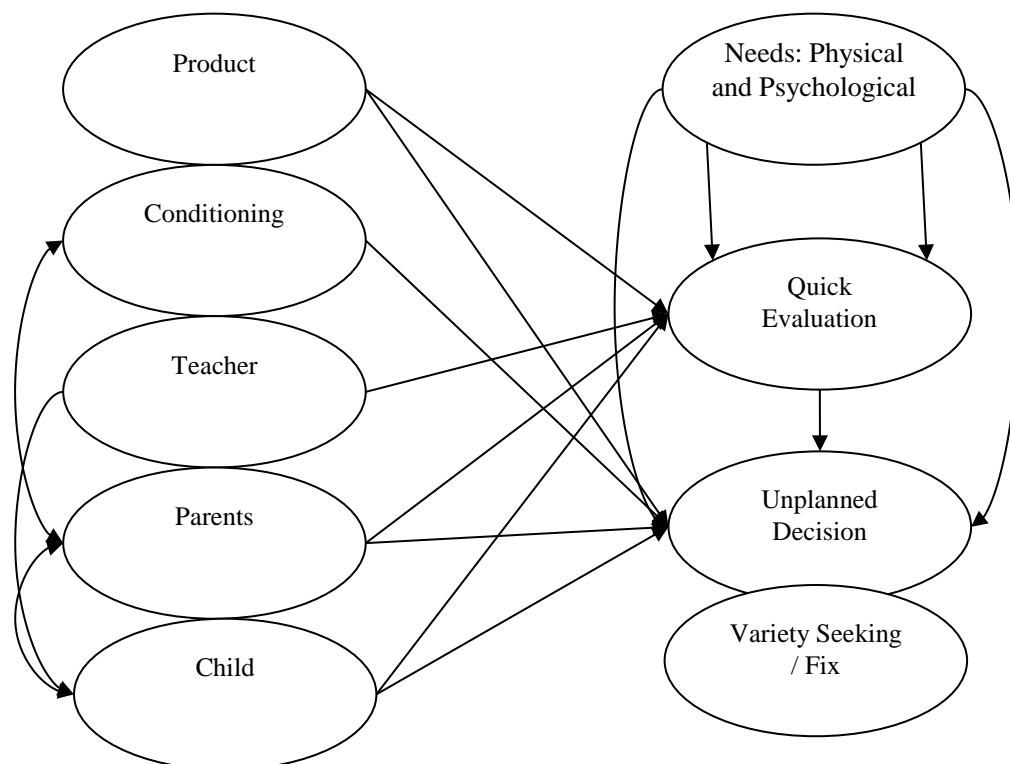


Figure 1 . Model of snack buying decision making by a child consumer
Source: Triwijayati (2013)

The results of the interview with the headmasters and the Health Department describe the real condition. The schools state that the involvement of parents is necessary in giving children education about consumption since their early age. Meanwhile, the other factors that can drive children to buy snacks are the snacks themselves, the teachers at school, the family conditioning, the parents' role, and the children's internal factor (Triwijayati, 2013). The snacks factor that encourages children to buy snacks is their affordable prices and their taste that is delicious or matches with the children's preference. Although children have knowledge about snack products, they tend to ignore the hygiene and nutritional value of foods. From the interviews, it is found that children understand the value of money and their snack options. In several schools, it is the price of the snacks that matches with children's pocket money.

In this research the role of teacher in transferring knowledge about healthy snacks becomes meaningful for children. A teacher's advice directs how children evaluate their snacks options. The advice and information from teachers are very similar to that from parents. However, parents have a greater role in family/home conditioning factor, which is in giving pocket money, breakfast habit and lunch pack (McNeal, 1991). These three activities seem to be interesting phenomena and typical family routines in the morning. This habit formation has a contradictory behavior, that is, between having breakfast and bringing a lunch pack, and giving pocket money. According to the results of Triwijayati (2012), parents (mothers) enforce those three habits, but most often they do not replace one another. In many cases in Indonesia, pocket money is still given even if the child has had his

breakfast or brings a lunch pack from home. The situation will give impact that parents' permissiveness is the drive of giving pocket money.

It is also revealed that parents are actually worried about children snacks at school, how they search information and use it as a reference when talking to their children, but on the other hand, they are also permissive in the sense that they let their children buy snacks at school and give them some pocket money. In this research, an interesting phenomenon is found, namely the "dual behavior" of parents regarding children snacks. On one hand, parents have enough knowledge, experiences about children's health and have given a good reference to their children about healthy and unhealthy snacks. On the other hand, parents' permissive behavior makes children consume snacks by giving them pocket money. Pocket money makes children have buying power and buy snacks. In children's perspective, even though they have a very close relationship with their parents and they are obedient, their character determines whether they tend to like buying snacks or not. This finding is in line to McNeal (1991), Šramová (2017), and Hota & McGuiggan, (2005).

Children disposition regarding food consumption is also formed by parents' parenting style in giving food. Black and Hurley (2007) explained that in this following matrix:

Table 1. The Pattern of Nurturing and Feeding Style

		Nurturance	
		High	Low
Structure	High	<p><i>AUTHORITATIVE</i> Involved Nurturing Structured Sensitive/ Responsive Feeding Style</p> <p>Parents are very sensitive and responsive but also involved.</p>	<p><i>AUTHORITARIAN</i> Forceful Restrictive Structured Controlling Feeding Style</p> <p>Parents very tightly control what their children consume but they are not much involved. This research shows that children can be distressed and really avoid vegetables and fruits.</p>
	Low	<p><i>INDULGENT</i> Involved Nurturing Unstructured Indulgent Feeding Style</p> <p>Parents let their children decide what to consume. Children tend to eat food with high sugar and salt contents.</p>	<p><i>UNINVOLVED</i> Unengaged Insensitive Unstructured Uninvolved Feeding Style</p> <p>Parents are less involved with what their children consume, very often because they are not well informed or due to their economic condition. Children's condition tends to be worrying.</p>

Source: Black and Hurley (2007)

The matrix shows that the Pattern of Nurturing and Feeding Style in children determines how and what children will consume. Besides, parents' involvement in giving and choosing food for children determines the kinds of food that children like (Mazzonetto & Fiates, 2014). Parents are supposed to be sensitive and responsive in feeding style, or in other words, they should have an authoritative style.

In Indonesia children consumer education that is structurally given since their early childhood, hit the target, that is children consumers, and involves parents and other stakeholders has not been much conducted by organizations, universities, as well as government institutions. So far, children consumer education has been done un-structurally, not organized in one institution and not properly aimed at children.

From the literature study, it is shown in some countries, children and parents' consumers education is common and it is handled by a special unit in the local and central government. For examples, breakfast and lunch program at school in USA (Wilde and Kennedy, 2009), School Food-The Essential Guide with 7 School-food programs from Department of Education, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland, School-based gardens program to drive children to eat the vegetables and fruit from the plants that they grow in the school garden (Morris, Briggs and Zidenberg-Cherr, 2000), Nutrition Education in schools (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1996), Drummond (2010), and Health Promoting Schools model is an integration of school curriculum, environment, school organization and the

external school community (Health Promoting Schools by Community Health, ACT Health and the Curriculum Development and Support Unit, ACT Department of Education and Training (DET), 2007).

The program that involves students' parents is important to implement because parents are the people who understand their children's consumption behavior best. Parents are also valuable sources for schools. Various parents' backgrounds can be very beneficial for schools to provide learning for their students.

The school program and policy related to children consumers have not yet hit the target of the program, that is, children consumers. Some programs are still meant for school canteens. On the basis of the results of the FGD with some schools in Malang city, one of some empowerment programs which involving parents are proposed, that is training and involvement of parents in the school healthy food program.

Besides, schools are closely related to various parties, internal as well as external ones. This proves that the problems of children consumers are closely connected and need some synergy with many parties. Table 2 summarizes the various programs that are proposed and conducted by schools in relation with the empowerment of children consumers. It is suggested that in parallel those programs be conducted for teachers, canteens, street vendors, parents and the children themselves.

Table 2. Elementary School Programs and Policies Dealing with Canteens and Healthy Snacks based on The Aimed Target: Parents and Children

Internal (Teachers, Canteens)	Parents	Children/Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canteen monitoring • Menu and canteen snacks control done by the school • Availability of healthy canteen tools and equipment, basin, drinking water and shelves for lunch box 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy snacks education for parents • Allowing parents to sell snacks at the canteen • Making an agreement between parents and the headmaster about the penalty for students who buy snacks outside the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inserting the material on healthy snacks and food additives into the Physical Education subject • Educating children so that they choose healthier food. The punishment will be noted and documented in the book. • Children empowerment is more on the emphasis and learning about the effect of foods and giving instructions. It is also on giving information about the ingredients and contents of food, and expiry date. • Fun children guidance in the form of games, cooking together, visualization, a monopoly game about snacks • Children are obliged to have breakfast.

Source: Research data (2015)

The basic problem of children consumers is very complicated. The problem of children consumers and snacks is not only on how to make children understand the danger of consuming just any kind of snacks but also it is related to the existence of street vendors and parents' involvement. Besides, the government institution and the related government offices carry out the tasks in accordance with their own main tasks and functions.

4. CONCLUSION

The complexity of children consumer needs the involvement of the parties other than the government. If the target of the empowerment program is children consumers, it should be acknowledged that the government in the rural and urban areas has limited sources. Technically, indeed the problem of children and their snacks is the problem of schools and parents. On the other hand, the schools and parents' competence is equally limited if so far there is no empowerment material that is integrated into the intra curriculum or at least becomes an extracurricular activity. The Food and Drug Administration and the Health Office admit the importance of the involvement of the cross-sectoral parties to empower student consumers. Some of the activities proposed by and to the government institutions are:

1. Making the material for consumer education for school children. This effort is conducted by inserting the material on smart consumer for elementary school children. If the material cannot be inserted into the curriculum, it can be given in an interactive extracurricular activity.
2. School programs that involve parents. A structured training material for parents related to healthy food for children and consumption education for children should be taken into consideration.

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