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ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF GRADUATES IN EAST INDONESIA BORDER AREA (CASE STUDY ON STATE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES IN MERAUKE REGENCY)

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ABSTRACT

Quality of graduates is not merely become the responsibility of teachers. Our previous study on state senior high school graduates pointed out teachers' competence, lack of students' attendance and of motivation and enthusiasm for learning, lack of parental support, and inadequate school facilities and infrastructure as four factors responsible to the low quality of graduates in Merauke Regency, Papua, Indonesia.

The research aimed to design alternative strategies to address the low quality of state senior high school graduates in Merauke Regency, Papua, Indonesia. Profound interviewed with stakeholders and education experts was the tool of collecting data (opinions) needed for further discussion in focused discussion group (FDG).

The result revealed four alternative strategies as follow: (a) socialization on the importance of education to those parents living in the rural and remote area of Merauke Regency; (b) teachers'

in-service training and education; (c) developing local government's boarding-school system; and (d) ensuring an active participation of local government and stakeholders in providing school facilities and infrastructures.

Keywords: socialization, teachers' in-service education and training, boarding school system, active participation.

1. INTRODUCTION

What does quality education mean? So far, there is no common agreement on the concept of 'education quality'. There are various definition which reflect the complexity and multifaceted nature of the concept. Establishing a contextualized understanding of quality means is not merely including principals, teachers, children and their parents, but also including relevant stakeholders which sometimes hold different view and meanings of educational quality. It means that definition of quality must be open to change and evolution based on information, changing contexts, and new understandings of the nature of education's challenges (Rasheed, 2000).

Quality education is directly connected to the quality of teaching learning process in the classrooms and the teacher's competence is considered as the most important factors in teaching learning process (Errant, 1994). EFA Global Monitoring Report (2005) pointed out two important elements that characterize the most attempts to define quality education. First, cognitive development is identified as a major explicit objective of all education systems. The degree to which systems actually achieve this is one indicator of their quality. The second element is education's role in encouraging learners' creative and emotional development, in supporting objective of peace, citizenship and security, in promoting equality and in passing global and local cultural values down to future generations (p. 29).

Children have the right to a quality education. Quality education refers to how much and how well children learn and the extend to which their education translates into a range of personal, social, and developmental benefits (Grimo, 2008). Rasheed (2000) pointed out five elements which are included in terms of quality education as follow:

- Learners who are healthy, well nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities;
- Environments that are healty, safe, protective, and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities;
- Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the aquisitions of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace;
- Process through which trained teachers use child-centered teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities;

□□ Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society (p. 3).

To ensure the quality education, in the last few decades Indonesian government prioritizes the development of educational facilities and infrastructures to support the teaching learning activities. Unfortunately, this effort has become a narrow path only for children to pass through since other aspects are never touched. In previous study, Werang et al. (2011) mapped, at least, four main factors affecting the low quality of state senior high schools graduates. First, teachers competence. Curriculum, availability of school facilities and infrastructures, and adequate education fund, no matter how good it is, will never create students' competencies as long as the teachers are not competent. Low of teachers competence in mastering teaching materials, method, and strategy in Merauke Regency indicated that initial training was not good enough to develop the knowledge and skills teachers need to deal effectively with the challenges they face in today's classroom. With the pace of change both in content and pedagogy, as well as technology, continual updating of teachers' knowledge and skills should be considered a high priority and should be an important component of the career development of teachers as well as an important aspect of the education (Pacific Island Forum, 2010). No chance for teachers' in-service training and lack of academic events conducted in Merauke Regency are more likely to aggravate teachers' opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills to deal with today's challenges. This real condition has become a very serious factor that affecting the low quality of state senior high school graduates in Merauke Regency, Papua, Indonesia.

Second, factors related to the students themselves. Students are the subject of teaching learning processes conducted in a school. Werang et al. (2011) pointed out two sub-factors affecting the low quality of state senior high school graduates as follow:

□□□ Lack of students attendance

A number of studies have established that students with higher absenteeism rates tend to have lower grades of academic achievement than peers. U. S. Departmen of Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2001) reported that students with higher truancy rates have the lowest academic achievement rates, and are more likely to drop out of school which indicates that there is a relationship between student attendance and student academic achievement (as cited in Jones, 2006). Similarly, a study conducted by Rothman (2001) reported that high student absenteeism rates were found to affect the achievement of students that attend regularly by disrupting the existing learning groups. Lack of students' attendance due to have something else to do was viewed as one of the factors affecting the low quality of state senior high school graduates in Merauke Regency, Papua, Indonesia (Werang, et al., 2011).

□□□ Lack of students motivation and enthusiasm for learning.

Students' motivation and enthusiasm is the key of success in teaching learning process. High or low student motivation can be influenced by external factors and internal factors. The external

factors include the students' social life, the teacher, the method and learning environment. While internal factors include students' needs, interest, and enjoyment. The needs of students can engage them to achieve learning goal. In other hand, interest also has a role in increasing motivation level of student. Then, enjoyment is also important in increasing motivation of student. If the students do not feel enjoy in learning class, the material taught is difficult to be transferred. Most researchers and methodologists have come to the view that internal factors of motivation are especially important for getting success (Harmer, 1988, as cited in Abdussalim, 2008). Lack of students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning due to working exhaustion or having no meal for breakfast are viewed as other factors that affecting the low quality of state senior high school graduates in Merauke Regency, Papua, Indonesia (Werang, et al. 2011).

Third, parental support. Quality teachers need similar support for their task in schools. Healthy children with positive early learning experiences and supportive, involved parents are thus most likely to succeed in school (Rasheed, 2000). Many studies have shown that parents consider their assistance with homework to be particularly effective for their children's academic achievement. Students themselves, in addition, claim to do better in school, at least some of the time, if they receive help from their parents (Erlendsdóttir, 2010). Parents unawareness on the importance of being involved in their children's education has also identified as one crucial factor that responsible for students' truancy and absenteeism and, in turn, responsible for the low quality of state senior high school graduates in Merauke Regency, Papua, Indonesia (Werang, et al., 2011).

Fourth, the availability of school facilities and infrastructures. School physical facilities and infrastructures are the plant facilities and infrastructures provided in the school in order to facilitate teaching learning process (Khan and Iqbal, 2012). Physical learning environments or the places in which formal learning range from relatively modern and well- equipped buildings to open-air gathering places. Many authors argued that the quality of school physical facilities and infrastructures have an indirect effect on learning. But, in reverse, a study conducted by Willms (2000) in Latin America has become a real proof that the inavailability of school physical facilities and infrastructures could directly affect the teaching learning process either in the classrooms or in the laboratory and, in turn, affect the students' academic achievement. Willms (2000) said that children whose school lacked classroom materials and had an inadequate library were significantly more likely to show lowest test scores and higher grade repetition than those whose schools were well equipped (as cited in Khan and Iqbal, 2012).

2. METHODS

This research aimed to design alternative strategies to address the low quality of state senior high school graduates in Merauke Rengency, Papua, Indonesia. This research is a qualitative research that was conducted using a case-study method. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated that researcher should consider the following five things in order to conduct good qualitative research. First of all, the researcher must treat his/her participants with respect and develop a close relationship built on trust. Equality, closeness, and informality in the relationship should be stressed. Secondly, the

researcher must secure the participants' interest and make sure that participation in the research does not lead to loss of prestige or cause any harm to them. This can be secured by anonymity, where the researcher does not use participants' real names in the research. Third, the researcher must seek the cooperation of participants and do his/her utmost to avoid the appearance of coercion. Fourth, the researcher must be particularly sensitive when explaining himself/herself and gaining consent of vulnerable people, such as mentally disabled people, the very young or very old or those who lack formal educations. Fifth, the researcher must tell the truth when reporting his/her findings. Case study is preferred in the following situations (Yin, 2009): (a) when, how, or why questions are being asked; (b) when the researcher has little control over events; and (c) when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon. The researchers case study design as the method of the research under the following considerations: (a) the researchers attempt to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and (b) the researchers can utilize the variety of data sources [Bogdan & Biklen, 1998]. Profound interview with education stakeholders was the tool of collecting data. In order to design alternative strategies for addressing the low quality of state senior high school graduates, the researchers used the help of 20 educational experts which involved actively in focused-discussion group. The research procedures are as follow: (a) mapping opinions which related to the effort of addressing the low quality of state senior high school graduates; (b) categorization of opinions based on the mapped factors that affecting the low quality of state senior high school graduates; (c) presenting categorized opinion to the experts which involve in focus group discussion; (d) developing tentative design of alternative strategies for addressing the low quality of state senior high school graduates; (e) presenting the tentative design of alternative strategies to the experts in order to be examined and criticized; and (f) finalizing design of alternative strategies to address the low quality of state senior high school graduates in Merauke Regency, Papua, Indonesia.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Continuing Socialization on the Importance of Education

Continuing socialization on the importance of education is the first alternative strategy offered by the researcher to address the lack of parental support, of students' attendance, and of students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning. Previous research showed that many parents, especially those parents living in the rural and remote area of Merauke Regency are more likely hope their children to work or to cast fish in the river than to attend the school. Lack of students' attendance in school and of students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning were believed as the direct impact of the parents' hope. This condition indicates parents's unawareness on the importance of education for the future life of their children. The following quotation pointed how important the involvement of parents in their children's education is. Parental involvement with children from an early age has been found to equate with better outcomes (particularly in terms of cognitive development). What parents do is more important than who they are for children's early development – i.e. home learning activities undertaken by parents is more important for

children's intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education, and income (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008, p. 4). The outcomes which are expected to be emerged from the first alternative strategy as follow: (a) parents, especially those parents living in the rural and remote area of Merauke Regency are more able to aware on the importance of education for the future life; (b) parents are more able to consider their assistance with their children's homework; and (c) parents are more able to involve in their children's schooling.

3.2. Teachers' In-Service Education and Training

Teachers' in-service education and training is the second alternative strategy offered by the researchers to address the low of teachers' competence. Rahman, et al. (2011) stated,

As one does not finish learning with graduation, likewise the teacher 's training goes on improving with the passage of time by gaining experience and study throughout the life span of a teacher. It is means to achieve educational change that will persist in-service education and training refers to all those activities that contribute to professional growth and qualifications of an employee, e.g. reading educational general, participating workshops, seminars, conferences, and visits to educational institutions that give the employee a sense of security and a feeling of self confidence while discharging his routine duties in the school. [...] With the rapid increase in human knowledge new approaches, new method of teaching, and new avenues for the teachers are being introduced. If a teacher fails to keep himself in touch with these developments he is proving himself as inefficient and ineffective (p. 3). Previous research showed that state senior high schools' teachers in Merauke Regency have no chance to develop their knowledge and skills to deal with the challenges they face in today's classroom. The outcomes which are expected to be emerged from the second alternative strategy are follow: (a) teachers are able to increase their personal and social capacities; (b) teachers are able to improve their method of teaching; and (c) teachers are able to develop their knowledge and skills in utilizing particular media in order to increase children's understanding.

3.3. Developing Local Government's Boarding School System

Developing local government's boarding school system is the third alternative strategy offered by the researchers to address the low of students attendance due to work or casting fish in the river. The debate about whether boarding schools are a better option is an old one and there are different opinions that each of us can hear. But a study conducted by The Association of Boarding Schools (TABS) validates the advantages of boarding school education as follow:

- Boarding schools provide unequalled academics, supported by small classes and heightened interaction between students and their teachers, who see their work as a calling, not a job;
- In the unique residential school environment in which they live, students are immersed in a special setting that promotes the camaraderie of common experience, friendship among peers, and a trust and honesty with mentors and adults that endures for a lifetime;

□□Boarding school graduates are uniquely prepared for college life. Statistics reveal that graduates, on average, attend the nation's finest universities and arrive at college better prepared for both the academic rigor and social challenges that universities present.

□□Boarding school graduates are conditioned for future success. Studies have shown that boarding school graduates not only excel at some of the leading universities, but also advance rapidly in their professional careers, and are more civically engaged than their peers;

□□Boarding schools bestow on students what they not only want but need – a calibrated independence. Living on schools provides an unparalleled setting for learning how to live with and among peers, and provides countless teachable moments for mentors to reinforce the myriad lessons of both schools and life. By the time graduates arrive at university or their first professional job, they're fully prepared for the challenges and responsibilities of adult life.

In the context of Papua, the boarding school system has been pioneered by the Catholic and Protestant missionaries and it was quite imprinted within all of the Papuan academics and politicians nowadays. The belief in the boarding school advantages, few boarding schools are still running in order that children are able to have a more proper education. Unfortunately, the noble mission carried out by the boarding school administrators eventually dealt with the lack of annual operational funds. To eliminate the possibility of the lack of annual operational funds, the boarding school systems developed by researchers are the local government's boarding schools which are fully funded by the local government. To keep the sustainability of this local government's boarding schools, the presence of a regional norm concerning that matter should be taken into account.

3.4. Ensuring an Active Participation of Local Government and Stakeholders

Ensuring an active participation of local government and stakeholders is the fourth alternative strategy offered by the researchers to address the unavailability of laboratories and its equipments, unavailability of school library and its equipments, and inadequate teaching learning materials for teachers and students. According to Lackney and Picus (2005),

An effective school facility is responsive to the changing programs of educational delivery, and at a minimum should provide a physical environment that is comfortable, safe, secure, accessible, well illuminated, well ventilated, and aesthetically pleasing. The school facility consists of not only the physical structure and the variety of building systems, such as mechanical, plumbing, electrical and power, telecommunications, security, and fire suppression systems. The facility also includes furnishings, materials and supplies, equipment and information technology, as well as various aspects of the building grounds, namely, athletic fields, playgrounds, areas for outdoor learning, and vehicular access and parking. In a study conducted by Khan and Iqbal (2012) reported that, There was a strong need for creating an excellent and suitable learning environment where all sorts of physical facilities were available both to teachers and taught. Such environment could be created, among the things, which include

plants facilities. Effective teaching learning would not be possible without adequate facilities to the students and teachers (p. 210). In order that schools have an excellent and suitable teaching learning facilities and infrastructures, there must be a best funded through regional budgeted allocations. This means that adequate funds need to be allocated each year by the local government and stakeholders as well in order to be sure that the investments in school physical facilities and infrastructures is not lost.

3. CONCLUSION

In order to address factors affecting the low quality of state senior high school graduates in Merauke Regency, Papua, Indonesia, the researchers offered four alternative strategies as follow:

- a. Continuing socialization on the importance of education for those parents living in the rural and remote area of Merauke Regency, Papua, Indonesia;
- b. Teachers' in-service education and training;
- c. Developing local government's boarding schools; and
- d. Ensuring active participation of local government and stakeholders in providing school physical facilities and infrastructures.

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