



Education : Hope in the Midst of Poverty

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes poverty status and condition in East OKU regency, South Sumatera. Living in poverty will make it difficult for a person to acquire quality education and often even prevent a person from accessing education. This leads to low productivity, which leads to poverty. This reciprocal relationship is often referred to as the vicious cycle of poverty or the poverty cycle. In fact, according to scholars, education is considered as one of the strategies that can overcome the problem of poverty. This paper also explores the constraints faced by the students to continue their education and provide education strategies to reduce poverty.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a phenomenon that is often discussed in measuring the success of economic development, especially in developing countries. Based on Presidential Regulation No. 7/2005 on the National Medium-Term Development Plan, poverty is defined as a condition in which a person or group of people, men and women, do not fulfill their basic rights to maintain and develop a dignified life (Indonesia, 2005). This definition of poverty moves away from a rights-based approach that recognizes that the poor, both men and women, have the same basic rights as other members of society. Poverty is no longer understood only as economic inability, but also the failure to fulfill basic rights and differences in treatment for a person or group of people, men and women, in living life with dignity.

Poverty also has an intergenerational aspect. Based on the results of research by the SMERU Institute in 2019, it is stated that children who are born into poor families tend to have lower incomes as adults. The research, which has been published in the international magazine of the *Asian Development Bank* (ADB), concluded that the income of poor children as adults is 87% lower than those who have not lived in poor families since childhood (Diningrat, 2019).

Eradicating poverty is one of the biggest challenges for developing countries. Although the global extreme poverty rate fell by more than half between 1990 and 2015, many individuals still struggle just to meet their basic needs. To address this issue, 193 countries through the United Nations (UN) general assembly agreed to commit to the *Sustainable Development Goals*, the first sub-point of which is to eliminate extreme poverty entirely by 2030. Although the target was later changed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the President of the Republic of Indonesia set a national target of 0% extreme poverty by 2024 (TNP2K, 2022). This is because Indonesia is considered to have sufficient potential and resources to achieve this accelerated target. Indonesia's optimism in eliminating poverty is of course supported by the significant downward trend in the poverty rate from 1984 to 2021. In 2021 the national extreme poverty rate was around 2.14%. Then it decreased to 2.04% as of March 2022 as reported by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2022). This means that if we want to approach 0% in 2024, a decrease of 1 *percentage point* per year is needed.

South Sumatra Province itself recorded that the regional poverty rate in 2021 reached 12.79%, while the poverty rate in East OKU Regency was recorded at 10.60% and decreased to 10.05% in 2022 with a total of 69.69 thousand people. Based on this data, the percentage of poor people in December 2022 decreased by 0.55 percent or 3.2 thousand people compared to the same period in the previous year (BPS, 2022). This shows that the efforts of the East OKU Government in alleviating poverty have yielded positive results by reducing the number of poor people. However, various efforts must still be maximized to achieve the national target of 0% extreme poverty by 2024.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a qualitative study using convenience sampling. The population of this study is students of junior and senior high school in East OKU regency. Required data are collected through triangulation method which are documentation, questionnaire, and interview.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Education Problems in East OKU Regency

In 2022, the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) of OKU Timur recorded the net enrollment rates (APM) of various education levels. The APM is the ratio between students of a certain school age at an education level and the population of the appropriate age and is expressed as a percentage. Its purpose is to determine the number of school-age children attending school at the appropriate level. The higher the APM score, the more school-age children are attending school at the legal age at a particular level of education. BPS data shows that the APM score at the primary school level is 99.90%, the APM score at the junior high school level is 76.58%, while the APM score at the senior high school level only reached 53.49% of the national target of 82.15% (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). This shows that out of 100 students of senior high school age, there are around 47 children who are not receiving education. If we look at the APM score at the primary school level which is almost 100% and the junior high school level which is quite high at 76.58%, it can be concluded that some of these students do not continue their education to the upper level.

The Central Bureau of Statistics of South Sumatera Province also released data on the average length of schooling of the population aged 15 years and over in 2013-2017 in the 2019-2023 RJPMD, the results showed that the average length of schooling of the population aged 15 years and over in East OKU Regency was 7.82 years for the male population and 7.49 years for the female population (South Sumatra, 2019). This figure is still below the national indicator of 8.5 years.

These two sets of data show that the education level of the community in East OKU is, on average, only at the junior high school (SMP) stage, and has not yet reached senior high school (SMA). This is an indicator of low level education in East OKU regency.

Relationship between Poverty and Education

Living in poverty will make it difficult for a person to acquire quality education and often even prevent a person from accessing education. This leads to low productivity, which leads to poverty. This reciprocal relationship is often referred to as the vicious cycle of poverty or the poverty cycle.

In fact, education is considered as one of the strategies that can overcome the problem of poverty. Economists (Adelman Irma & Morris, 1973) state that education is the most strategic step as an effort to overcome the problem of poverty.

Jundi (2014) explains that the higher the education achieved by a person, it will increase the ability and opportunity to get decent income and job so that it can avoid poverty.

According to Pohan (2013) education has a central role in improving family welfare. The increase in a person's income based on their level of education has an impact not linearly but exponentially, which means that an increase in a person's education will increase their income with acceleration. On average, a worker with a high school education will earn 45% more than a worker with a junior high school education. A bachelor's degree increases a person's income by about 55% compared to a high school graduate.

If poverty has an intergenerational aspect, so does education because someone who has received an education tends to send their children to a higher level. A child's chances of continuing their education will be higher when they have educated parents (Pohan, 2013). Thus, providing access to education to a person increases opportunities not only for himself but also for the next generation to get a higher education so that his income can continue to increase and therefore the poverty rate will continue to decline.

Education Strategies to Reduce Poverty

With the low level of education in East OKU regency, improving the quality of education should begin with opening up the widest possible opportunities for the community to receive education. To investigate the low APM data for the senior high school level in East OKU, the author conducted a study aimed at finding out the obstacles faced by junior high school students in continuing their education to the senior high school level. The results showed that 57.1% of respondents stated that they were constrained by the high cost of education, while 45.2% of respondents were constrained by the distance of the school from their residence.

Regarding the high cost, the author confirmed this by interviewing one of the students of a public senior high school in East OKU. The statement of D, an eleventh grade senior high school student, mentioned that the fees that must be paid at the beginning are quite high, totaling 2.6 million rupiah with details of 1.8 million rupiah in uniform fees and 800 thousand rupiah in committee fees, while per month students are charged tuition fees worth 200 thousand rupiah.

To overcome this cost problem, the central government has made a policy through the Smart Indonesia Program (PIP) which has also been realized. However, this policy needs to be evaluated because, according to the 2019 National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) data, PIP recipient students who are still in school are recorded at 97.29%, while those who drop out are recorded at 2.71%. Meanwhile, when compared to students who are not PIP recipients, there are 88.5% who stay in school and as many as 11.5% decide to stop (drop out). Then, in the results of the same survey in 2021, the dropout rate remained higher for students who did not receive PIP, namely 11.28%.

Meanwhile, the dropout rate for students who received PIP was recorded at 2.92% (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019). It can be concluded that, although the Smart Indonesia Program (PIP) has been implemented, the dropout rate tends to be still high so that the effectiveness of the Smart Indonesia Program (PIP) policy needs to be continuously studied in order to reduce the dropout rate.

One strategy to overcome this problem is to optimize funding for compulsory education programs. As stated in the Sisdiknas, the government funds the implementation of compulsory education for all education units. This will certainly solve most of the problems faced by students in their education. Looking at the high cost of one of the public high schools in East OKU, it seems to confirm that the problem of high school fees can not only be resolved by providing scholarships to underprivileged students, but other groups of students who are not scholarship recipients sometimes have difficulty paying school fees while these students are not 'poor' enough or do not qualify as scholarship recipients. The Governor of South Sumatra, H. Herman Deru himself termed the free school program in South Sumatra 'between existence and nonexistence' ("Herman Deru: Free School in South Sumatra 'Between Existence and Nonexistence,'" 2019) because this program has long been heralded, but in its implementation there are still discrepancies. Therefore, it is hoped that the local government of East OKU Regency can execute this 12 years compulsory education program which will have an impact in increasing school enrollment rates and helping to reduce poverty rates in East OKU Regency.

In addition to the cost issue, based on the results of research, the problem that also faced by the students is the long distance to school. Lavy (1996) conducted a study in rural Ghana and found that difficult access to schools significantly reduces school enrollment. In line with Lavy, Filmer (2004) has conducted a study on various factors that can affect school enrollment rates. The study involved 21 low-income countries, the majority of which are on the African continent. He found that the time a student has to spend on the way to his/her school is one of the determining factors of the decision to attend school. Difficult access to school due to long distances will reduce the probability of a child achieving higher education. The probability of a child pursuing higher education becomes 0.99 times lower for every additional kilometer in travel distance to school (Pohan, 2013).

Of the 42.9% of respondents who were constrained by this problem, some respondents stated that they did not have a private vehicle for transportation to and from school. Owning a private vehicle is important because the distance traveled is quite far while not all families can provide a private vehicle as a means of transportation for their children. The use of motorcycle for school-age children also raises concerns for parents given the risk of traffic accidents that occur on the road.

Considering the problem of students' distance to school and transportation problems, the strategy to optimize the accessibility of education that can be pursued is through filial schools. A filial school, also known as a distant class school, is a school that is established outside the core school, either because of the limited number of seats or the distance of the school as well as the cost.

The implementation of the filial school program has been implemented in other areas such as Musi Banyuasin, Penajam Paser Utara, Nunukan and Palembang. In Palembang, filial schools are specifically for street children and school drop outs. In accordance with Article 3 of Palembang Mayor Regulation Number 20 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Filial Schools for Street Children and School Dropouts, filial schools have the task of carrying out technical operational activities of the Education Office in providing special education services for street children and school dropouts (Palembang, 2020). Research results (Rahmayanti, 2022) concluded that filial schools are effective in reducing the dropout rate in Palembang.

Of course, the implementation of this filial school must be adjusted to the needs of each region, this distant class can be in the form of a study group that hitchhikes the local junior high school / equivalent school, but still refers to the public high school in the nearest area, so that the implementation of orientation, exams, and other important agendas is still carried out in the main school.

CONCLUSIONS

It is hoped that with the policy of funding the compulsory education program and the filial school program, all levels of society can access inexpensive and convenient education so that there are no more obstacles in continuing their education to the senior high school level. Along with the increase in community education, it will be directly proportional to the income and standard of living of the community, which as a result will reduce the poverty rate in East OKU regency.

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