

***Promoting Parental Involvement to Prevent Elementary Student Dropout in Indonesia's Backward Regions***

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**Abstract**

The highest dropout rate for elementary school level happens significantly in Indonesia's backward regions (UNICEF for Indonesia, 2012). This will not only affects personal success of students but also create other social disadvantages. Chirtes (2010) classified the factors of school dropout into school factor, social environment, personal factor, and family factor which is the greatest factor.

The main investigation in this paper is to explore the causes of school dropout which more focus on family-related factor and to examine how parental involvement can solve elementary student dropout in Indonesia and the challenges. By using secondary data both from Indonesia and the world, promoting effective parental involvement might be a possible way to overcome the problem with five ways: 1) educating parents (especially disadvantaged family), 2) involving parents in the early childhood years, 3) intensifying parent-children communication, 4) improving parent-teacher partnership, 5) creating school-family-community partnership.

The emerging challenge found in this study is the elementary school-aged children who drop out or potentially drop out mostly have parents with low educational ability or poor socioeconomic background. Hence, involving parents to prevent school dropout in backward areas will need much more efforts. Therefore, supports from interested stakeholders particularly from local and national government are highly important to succeed the solution.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, School Dropout, Backward Regions

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## **Introduction**

School dropout in Indonesia is one of major problems that need to be solved. Underdeveloped provinces are the areas which have the highest dropout rate among others especially for elementary school level. According to UNICEF for Indonesia (2012) most students leave school in elementary education where the highest rate is in grade 1 (3,7 %) and become lower in the following classes, but continue to increase in grade 6. If government, educators, society and other stakeholders do not cooperate to solve this problem, the social failure could happen frequently which not only affects personal success of students, but also could create multiple social disadvantage. By understanding this, the essence of solving the problem is really encouraged. One of ways to overcome the problem is involving parents in children education.

The school dropout is caused by several aspects. Chirtes (2010) classified the factors into school factor, social environment, personal factor, and family factor which is the greatest factor. Family factor needs to point out since education is begun from house. Also, the golden time to teach children effectively is when children is in elementary school-aged, although secondary school level is also important to notice and should not be ignored. Therefore, in this essay, I want to focus on how to involve parents effectively to prevent children dropout particularly in backward areas of Indonesia. This essay will explore school dropout and the causes which more focus on family-related factor in backward regions, examine how parental involvement can solve elementary student dropout in Indonesia and the challenges.

## **Elementary School Dropout, Causes, and Impacts**

Underdeveloped areas are the most left-behind areas in Indonesia that experience slow growth in socioeconomic development including education development. The underdeveloped provinces have relatively lower human resources, education, skill, and limited facilities (Ministry of Underdeveloped Region Development, 2015). In terms of education, backward regions in Indonesia is thought to get unequal education. This is due to the poor socio-economic condition and lack of human resources. According to UNICEF Indonesia (2012), rural areas and eastern Indonesia need to do acceleration to pursue the backwardness in school participation. Most children leave school in transition from elementary to junior secondary school (UNICEF, 2012). The idea about rural areas' acceleration ought to be supported by tangible action from government and stakeholders to help the acceleration.

Another data from Indonesia Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) (2013) cited in Srie, (2013) showed average national rate of school dropout for elementary school in Indonesia was 0,67 percent and equal to 182.773 students in which commonly underdeveloped provinces place higher school rates. There are five provinces which have the highest school dropout rates for elementary school level: West Sulawesi (2,37%), Bangka Belitung (1,88 %) West Papua (1,56%), Papua (1,36%) and Southeast Sulawesi (1,32%) (BPS, 2013, cited in Srie, 2013). Those areas are underdeveloped hence it is significant to know the causes and impacts of school dropout within them then we can withdraw a possible solution.

In order to understand what school dropout is, the definition should be highlighted. Townsend et al. (2007) explained school dropout encompasses those who had not

attend school in more than 30 days, had not sought a transfer to another school, had not sought re-admission and those not enrolled in school. It is very clear from the definition that school dropout is the condition when students leave school with different occasion. Townsend et al. assumed that if students do not attend school in more than 30 days, do not seek a transfer to another school, do not do re-admission and even do not enroll at all, they can be categorized as a dropout. The limitation that they put up there needs further explanation. For example, if students are eventually back to school after 30 days, will the school accept it by looking for the reasons of leaving? As different regions might have different context for instance in rural Indonesia, some students leave school not because they do not want to go, but the geographic challenge make them prefer to stay at home. The limitation by days of leaving school should be rethinking since we know that school dropout could take children's future expectation.

School dropout could take children's bright future life and cause more disadvantages. Chirtes (2010) elucidated school dropout leads to failure in social integration, and as a result greatly diminishes person's chances to achieve personal success in legally accepted fields of activity. Failure in social integration will cause children's stupidity, workforce, poverty, even criminality. For example, they might get married earlier without having enough knowledge and money to form a household and raise children. They could also be a burden of society that are possible to become gangsters, robbers, and troublemakers bringing disharmony and insecurity in society. In addition, the hope of being both physically and mentally successful could be difficult to achieve due to the lack of skill and knowledge. The idea of school dropout causing failure in social integration and personal success brought forward by Chirtes is essential to think deeply of why and how this could be related. Moreover, we should look beyond factors influencing the school dropout hence we can do prevention and reduction of dropout problems and anticipate the impacts.

Factors which cause school dropout might be various according to the context of nation and region. In backward areas in Indonesia, school dropout mainly caused by poor economic social background which is normally from low income and low educational background of family (UNICEF Indonesia, 2012). According to Chirtes's research (2010) four categories of leading factors school dropout are family factors, school-related factors, social environment, and personal factors. She added (2010, p.32) that "the risk of school dropout is much higher in families with a low standard of living, which have to deal with poverty and marginalization." Chirtes' explanation seems do not focus on school dropout in backward and rural regions alone hence other factors such as low quality of education (both facilities and teachers), inequality of school resources distribution, and geographic impediment could not be neglected since these also contribute to school dropout in rural regions. Chung and Mason (2012) asserted that primarily resource differences between different socio-economic groups in society that are associated with differences in education quality, family poverty and school fees are considered key reasons for student dropout. However, family-related factor is the closest factor that more influence the life choice of a student whether she or he wants to continue to study or not. It depends on the encouragement of family no matter how big the external and social challenges are.

In backward and rural regions which have social disadvantages such as low human resources could conduce to inappropriate ways of family raising their children. As

discussed by Chirtes (2010) the main causes of school dropout are standards of living and low-educational abilities of parents. Furthermore, these factors could influence on how parent could build strong relationship with the children, apply parenting method, and encourage the children to be better. As a result, parents who have poor educational background will tend to abandon the children's progress at school. Also, they will not be interested in supporting their children. Parents might also use their children in rural areas for labor (Chirtes, 2010). When children begin to focus on working as a command from their parents, they probably leave school earlier and continue working to support their family. Owing to know these family-related factors, effective parental involvement are highly encouraged as a solution of children dropout.

### **Parental Involvement and the Prevention of Elementary Student Dropout**

People acknowledged by children for the very first time since they were born are their parents. This also means children will get their first education directly from their parents. Thus, parents will be very influential in children's education. Their involvement on children's education will decide what the children will be in the future. Parental involvement was defined as "parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (Jeynes, 2011 p.42). The definition represented by Jeynes here focuses on educational experiences of students which might cover how parents approach the students when learning at home, how they control their children at school, or decide a good school to go. The students' experiences explained by Jeynes here is still general as children develop with different intelligence. It might be more distinct if the definition could be elaborated whether it is intellectual experiences or emotional experiences.

Parental involvement is necessary in children's educational development since children's time mostly spent at home. The development of children will be affected by how their parents treat and educate them. Even though there will be much more challenges of low educational parents to educate their children, there is always a silver lining. Many cases of poor family background yet could still contribute to their children's education since they realize that it is very crucial to have a good education. A good education can be achieved if parents also involve.

There is a strong relationship between parental involvement and children's academic performance. Research by McNeal Jr. (2014) proved that parental involvement could raise the educational expectation, reduce truancy and absenteeism, and improve achievement of the children. Educational expectation means here students have ambitions to pursue their education until finish high school and even enroll at a university. Monitoring has a stronger influence on student behavior and significantly reduces absenteeism and truancy and increases homework hours (McNeal Jr., 2014). Parents who always talk to their children about their school life and help them to study, inspire children to care about school activities and possibly have higher achievement. However, McNeal's research does not clearly touch the effect of parental involvement to children who are raised by parents with low educational achievement. Thus, it is important to know based on empirical research the effect of parental involvement to the family with low level of education.

In backward areas where many parents come from low educational background, the efforts to involve them are much bigger. The parents who are hoped to educate their children could not fulfill the responsibility better due to the socio-economic disadvantages. How the parents could teach their children if they themselves need to be educated. Even though not all parents in underdeveloped regencies have low quality education, the factors should be raised to synthesize appropriate solutions. Therefore, promoting effective parental involvement to prevent dropout of elementary school-aged children needs to involve others stakeholders such as school teachers, educational experts and practitioners, society, interest community, and government. In short, we should think of what can be done to involve parents especially those who are from low educational background or have socio-economic and cultural background in children's education and the challenge that might arise.

### *Educating Parents (Especially Disadvantaged Family)*

Parents' education is correlated with the success of parental involvement. According to Jeynes (2011) higher parental socioeconomic background can sometimes be one of expression of higher level of parental involvement. Based on that argument, socioeconomic background will influence the parental engagement method. Even though family initially comes from the disadvantage, they will likely change if they believe that education is precious, moreover if they want to see their children pursue better education than they had. The involved parents try to address the educational needs of their children may also try to purchase educational aids for their children (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992 cited in Jeynes, 2011). Although Stevenson & Stigler's explanation here does not state clear notion whether disadvantaged family will do the same, we can still assume that parents with low educational ability want to witness their children's success both in academic or social life. Therefore, the government, educators, society and interest group can take part here. To help disadvantaged family to be more involved in their children's education, we could educate them about the significance of education and their roles in children's education. For example, government aided by educators could provide training and counseling with aims to raise parents' awareness. Society or neighborhood could be alerted if there is family who have potential dropout children. Nevertheless, we should anticipate the challenge that might emerge such as the stakeholders' readiness and the budget of implementing the programs.

### *Involving Parents in the Early Childhood Years*

The parent participation in bringing up children is very essential in the early childhood years since this phase is the golden age where students will absorb as much as knowledge they can. Jeynes (2011) claimed that most psychologist and family scientist believe that learning takes place with the greatest rapidity in the first five years of a child's life. Jeyne's explanation voices the importance of parents to involve in child's knowledge acquisition. Even though research has shown the effect of parental involvement in early childhood education is beneficial to children's learning, many parents especially from low educational background do not realize it. Hence, promoting parental involvement in this stage is urged. Children grown in positive environment by the affection of the parents will likely be more positive. Thus, parents could easily direct the children in better educational choices and prevent them in school dropout. However, parents who come from low educational background might

not address a correct parenting method. Nonetheless, we cannot generalize such parents will be failed to educate their children. As long as the parents are literate, it is possible to direct and engage them in children's education. Thus, the help and guidance of government, educators, teachers, and large society are pivotal to educate parents in order to apply effective parental involvement.

### *Parent-Children Communication*

Communication between parents and children determines the progress of children education. Martines-Gonzales (2008) affirmed that frequent communication between parents and children is expected to be an indicator of parental concern. Parents who always discuss with the children related to knowledge improvement might affect the academic performance of the children. Besides, always asking children about what they have learned at school is very significant to engage children in their educational progress. Study conducted by Martinez-Gonzalez (2008) in Spain and Cyprus proved that parents having low level of educational achievement appeared to get involved in different way with limited academic help they could offer, such as talking to their children about school life, providing study resource, showing affection, create supported environment. Therefore, maintaining parent-children communication and discussion will lead to the reduction of school dropout even though parents have low educational achievement. However, the challenge that might arise is parents having lack of interest in children academic progress due to the work bustle and having assumption that education is not vital.

### *Parent-Teacher Partnership*

The cooperation and communication between parents and teacher to assist children development at school could prevent children dropout. Bridgeland (2010) analyzed the significant disconnects among the insights and perspectives of dropouts, parents, and teachers as the causes and solution to the dropout challenge. Bridgeland (2010) pointed out that the main cause of student dropout is the gap between what parents and teachers expect and what students demand. Reflecting to this study, parent-teacher partnership is prompted to appear as a solution. For instance, teachers could always inform parents about the children's school life and vice versa. In addition, teachers could tell parents about the strength and weakness of the children hence parents become more concerned with what children should maintain and work on. Furthermore, what has been suggested by Martinez-Gonzalez's study needs to be considered:

“As far as parent-teacher meetings are concerned, it seems that there is a need to focus more on the positive intellectual and attitudinal characteristics of the children as a way to facilitate communication between teachers and parents, to aid in mutual decision-making about how to proceed with teenagers at risk. In this way, promoting effective parenting programs in schools could help parents to bring up their children and to interact with teachers at school more effectively” (Martínez-González, 1998 cited in Martinez-Gonzalez et al., 2008 p.516).

By conducting parent-teacher meeting, both parents and teacher could work together to prevent children from risky dropout case. This will be very helpful particularly for

parents with low educational level because teachers can provide some solutions or ways that parents could apply at home. Nevertheless, another factor should be accounted for if teachers face the difficult parents.

### *School-Family-Community Partnership*

Another way to prevent school dropout is building school-family-community partnerships. To maximize students' sense of connectedness in school requires cooperation and collaboration among school, family, and community (Goss & Andren, 2014). This collaboration can create positive learning environment hence could increase enthusiasm for children to love school. For instance, school allows parents even encourages them to participate in school activities both in class and extracurricular activities. However, Goss & Andren's claim seems perfect for school who have good resources since creating positive learning environment might demand much money. Schools in marginalized areas will be more difficult to afford that ideal. In addition, though school can provide equipped facilities, low income parents will unlikely to be involved because they are incapable to register their children in resourceful school. In terms of community partnership, Goss & Andren (2014) argued that the dropout problem is not school's responsibility alone, but it is the responsibility of the whole community. This such community partnership could give supported service to family and the potential dropout students. Yet, it is significant to know whether community partnership is commercial or non-commercial because it will limit the type of family who will work with them.

### **Conclusion**

As school dropout in elementary school places the highest rate in Indonesia's backward regions, the need to reduce the rates is highly important. By tracing the causes and the impacts, promoting effective parental involvement might be a possible way to overcome the problem since parents are closely related in children's life. However, the emerging challenge in this investigation is most dropout cases happen in backward and rural regions hence it is more likely the elementary school-aged children who dropout or potentially dropout have parents with low educational ability or poor socioeconomic background. Therefore, involving parents to prevent school dropout in this context will need much more efforts. Supports from stakeholders particularly local and national government are very crucial. Nevertheless, parents with any background including those with low educational experience expect their children more successful than they had. So, it is still possible to engage them in their children educational process. As long as the parents want to see the betterment of their children, the family-related factors that cause school dropout can be resolved.

Since this essay aims to promote parental involvement to prevent elementary student dropout, the factors that have been discussed only explore the family-related factors in dropout problem. Other possible issues could be raised in another investigation are the low-quality of education (both facilities and teachers), inequality of school resources distribution, and geographic impediment that can cause student dropout in underdeveloped areas in Indonesia. By then, another possible solution might be withdrawn such as improving school resources and enhancing teachers' professionalism.

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