# Education in Remote Areas: Expectation and Facts

Muslih Hambali*

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**Keywords**: Human resource, infrastructure, facilities and environment

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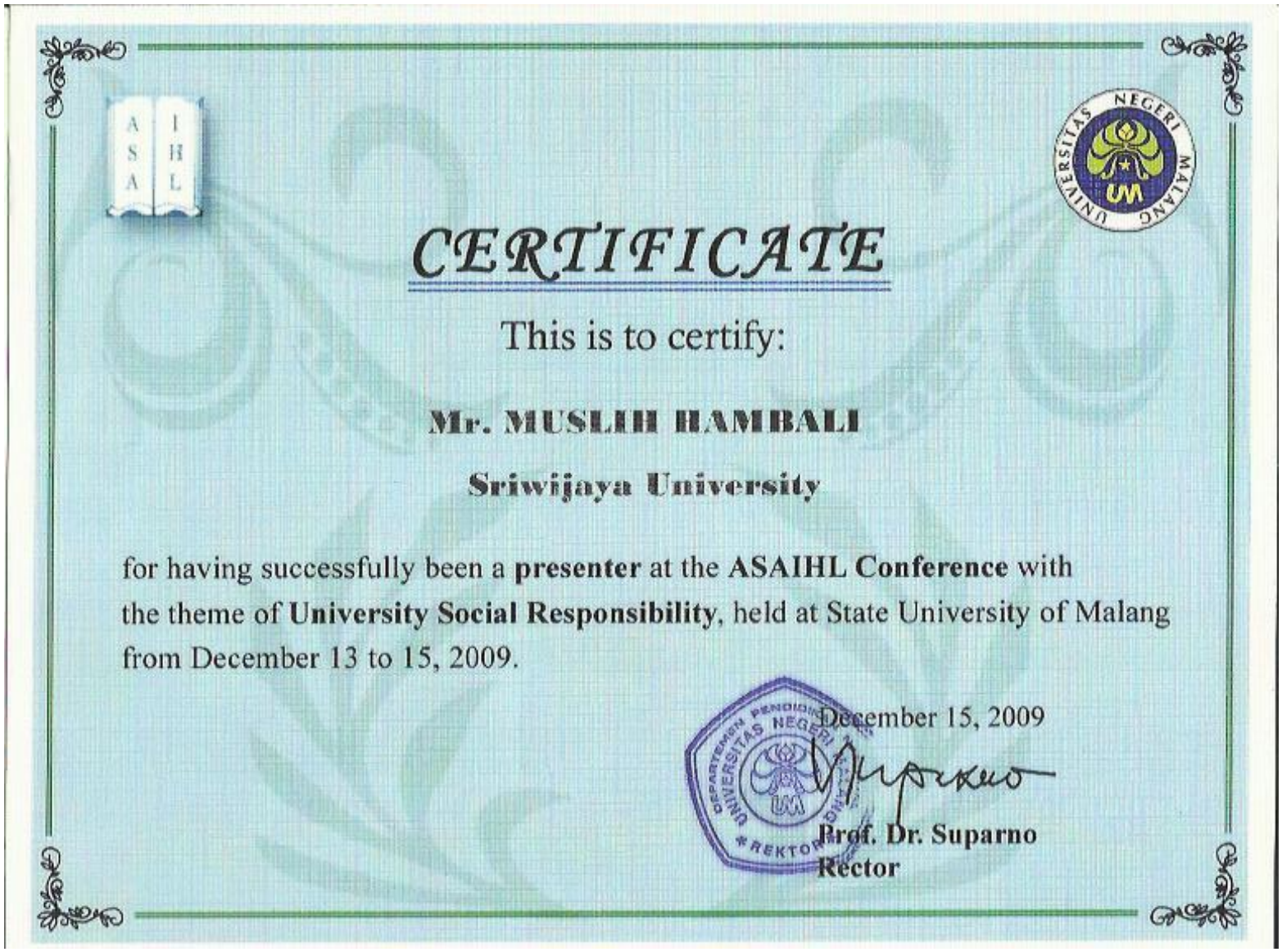

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# PAPER
# INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

## ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEST ASIAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING (ASAIHL)

**MALANG STATE UNIVERSITY**
**DECEMBER 14-15, 2009**

# Education in Remote Areas: Expectation and Facts

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**MALANG**
**DECEMBER 2009**

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**Keywords**: Human resource, infrastructure, facilities and environment

## Introduction

Education has become a major need among the society who has a view of the importance of education in their life. This kind of view usually exists among people in urban areas more than in rural areas because those living in urban areas can feel and see directly the product of education in which plenty of fields of job requires different kinds of disciplines of education. This later will cause many school buildings for various types of education to grow. On the contrary, people in rural areas have view of education which is limited to their education as farmers or to other jobs surrounding them such as teachers, paramedics, local government officials.

Though the government has strongly been promoting the importance of education by building schools in every area of Indonesia from cities to remote and even isolated areas, the result perhaps needs to be evaluated further. The effort of Indonesian government to build schools is unquestionable. There have been more schools built than ever before in most parts of Indonesia. However, some questions may arise whether the schools are running well in the sense they receive enough students, enough human resources, facilities and whether they produce good products with at least minimum standard achievement. Besides, does the existence of school help people to change their life the way of thinking for the purpose of development or does it just become a real work to show that the government has fulfilled the instruction of education law?. Those sorts of things certainly need to be evaluated, but will not be discussed further in the following. Instead, my interest is to simply describe the condition of education in remote areas

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which may influence the imbalance in education and later can cause to produce unsatisfactory product.

**An overview of Remote Areas**

In the era of modern Information Technology (IT), when people talk about education in remote areas they think of how IT can be applied for long distance learning such as e-learning so that people there could also get educational access as do people in urban areas. In the discussion below, it is different. The discussion is not that far, but it is just not more than what the school in remote areas owns in relation to its standard one.

There have been some definitions of remote areas. Generally remote areas refer to the distance of regions from capital city. In www.hreoc.gov.au/disability-rights/employment/rfc/remote.htm., remote areas can be defined as regions where the nearest Capital city is a thousands plus kilometers away … and/or, where the largest population centers have only thousands of occupants and are hundreds of kilometers away. Meanwhile, in www.explora.com/about-us/art-of-travel/remote-area/., it is said that in addition to distance, remote areas include a difference. The difference covers surroundings, way of life, etc. The following discussion is limited to the definition of remote areas whose general characteristics are as follows.

- The distance is not necessarily more than 100 kilometers away, but it could be less, and is sometimes hard to find public transportation operate frequently.
- Their location is in the sub district or near the capital city of sub district. Sub district, so called Kecamatan in Bahasa Indonesia, is under the government of regency, and regency is under the government of province.
- The majority of population occupation is usually to have one type of job such as farmers, fishermen, or something like that.

Of course there are many other characteristics describing remote areas which are particularly characterized by infrastructure such as public transportation, public service, etc. which are not a major concern to discuss.

There are two examples of places representing remote areas in the following discussion: Sub districts Cengal and Tulung Selapan. Both Cengal and Tulung Selapan, located in the eastern part of South Sumatra, are about 130 kilometers away from Palembang, the capital city of South Sumatra. They are included in the regency of Ogan Komering Ilir.

**The Condition of Education in Remote Areas**

The imbalance in education in remote areas must not be neglected. This may influence the ineffectiveness of teaching and learning outcome. The imbalance of education may produce poor benefits for both sides of education provider (government) and users (students). From the side of education provider, there will be poor target achievement of nine-year education program because of some factors such as dropouts. It still found in remote areas that many children aging between six and sixteen could not finish their nine-year compulsory basic education because of certain reasons. In the side of users, they are usually left behind. The quality of education they get is not satisfactory or even far from the target required by the government. Perhaps, there are many factors that might cause education in remote areas not run smoothly, and these factors may result in imbalance in education. Some of the major factors to be discussed are human resources, facilities, infrastructures, and environment. The first two are categorized as internal factors since they appear in internal institution (school), and these two will much influence the quality of education school graduates. Whereas, the last two factors are external ones because they come from outside of school though in fact they are also related to the quality of education. It is interesting to discuss these four major factors as they could represent expectation and fact of education.

- **Facilities**

A general trend across school building types has been found in some schools in cities for example the architect of building with a variety of styles from traditional, modern up to ancient ones. The schools are equipped with complete educations facilities such as multi media of ICT, sports and art gymnasium, computer-based instruction, etc. There is no question about how the design and facilities of schools in cities are. On the other hand, when we look at school in remote areas, we often find far from the fact, the standard one. The government built school buildings usually based on the minimum standard ones having spaces for offices, teachers' room, classrooms, library, labs for secondary schools, open space for sports, etc. Yes, we do find those minimum school facilities in terms of space in remote areas, but the problem faced now is different. We often find some school facilities incomplete. Library as an academic supporting unit for example, has not enough book collection except few books for some lessons or even we find nothing but an empty room. Similarly to the lab class for science, we also find nothing except space for tables and chairs or not even a single apparatus or other related science equipment as shown in the following figures of SMA Negeri 1 Cengal.

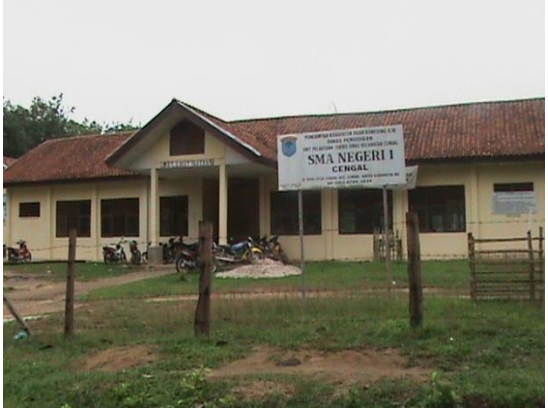


**Figure 1**. School Building of SMA Negeri 1 Cengal

**Figure 2**. Science Laboratory

**Figure 3**. Library

The effort of government to build school buildings in remote areas has been proved by the availability of school buildings in every sub district in South Sumatra. The schools vary from primary to secondary level (junior high school in particular). This goes with the demand of government to succeed a nine-year compulsory education program).

School facilities play an important role in improving the quality of education. School facilities should be made available so that students can get access for their education without looking at what their social, economic background is and where they live. Library, at least conventional one, for example should be completed with its collection related to the needs of users (especially students and teacher) such as textbooks as well as supplementary textbooks, references, etc. Science laboratory must be equipped with its apparatus so that students could practice their knowledge rather than just learn theory. Lack of school facilities may cause to have n effect on academic outcomes.

- **Human Resource**

Whether or not schools run well may depend on several points, of which is human resources. Human resources at school can generally be divided into two categories: teachers and administrative staff. The earlier is a major point to be discussed since it is directly transferring knowledge to students. Teachers play an important role in advancing education. The quality of teachers with their competence has become a big issue for the government to improve better quality of education. This can be seen from the number of primary teachers for example, furthering their studies in Open University in South Sumatra. Besides, the effort of Indonesian government to send thousands of teachers for certification for the purpose of their professionalism has been made for the last few years. However, the imbalance in education in remote areas still cannot be avoided. The provision of teachers is not well spread. There still found in some places having not enough teachers especially in remote areas. In SMAN sub district Cengal for example, the number of teachers are 15. Out of these fifteen teachers 5 are full time teachers (public servant or PNS) including the head master and 10 part-time teachers. In addition to their own subject, they also teach other subjects. To see the teacher profile of SMAN Cengal, let's see the following table.

**Table 1**. Teacher Profile of SMA Negeri 1 Cengal
Kabupaten Ogan Komering Ilir (OKI) South Sumatera

| No | Name | Work Status | Major | Subject Taught | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hasan Qodri | PNS | Islamic Education | Religion | |
| 2 | Rusianto | PNS | Indonesian Education | Indonesian | |
| 3 | Rama | PNS | Islamic Education | Religion | |
| 4 | Arief Wibowo | PNS | English Education | English | |
| 5 | Vivin Ekawati | PNS | Mathematics Education | Mathematics | |
| 6 | Abdul Manan | Non PNS | History Education | History - PPKn | Part-time |
| 7 | Umi Kalsum | Non PNS | Health Science Education | Biology-Economics - ICT | Part-time |
| 8 | Kiki Zakiah | Non PNS | Islamic Religion Education | Religion- Art and Culture | Part-time |
| 9 | Sisca | Non PNS | English Education | English-Economics-Sociology | Part-time |
| 10 | Dedi Rohani | Non PNS | Physics Education | Physics-Chemistry | Part-time |
| 11 | Sherli Febiani | Non PNS | Biology Education | Chemistry | Part-time |
| 12 | Zuhri Azhari | Non PNS | Islamic Education | Arabic | Part-time |
| 13 | Leni Marlina | Non PNS | Islamic Education | Religion, Geography | Part-time |
| 14 | Rahma S. | Non PNS | Islamic Education | Geography | Part-time |
| 15 | Sino | Non PNS | English Education | English, Sport | Part-time |

Source : SMA Negeri 1 Cengal (November 12, 2009)

**Table 2**. Teacher Profile of SMP Negeri 3 Tulung Selapan
Kabupaten Ogan Komering Ilir (OKI) South Sumatera

| No | Name | Work Status | Major | Subject Taught | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Husnadi | PNS | Indonesian | Counseling | |
| 2 | Satri | PNS | Geography | Geography/Mulok | |
| 3 | Agus Sugangat | PNS | Physics | Physics/Chemistry/Art and Culture | |
| 4 | Amrullah | PNS | Mathematics | Mathematics | |
| 5 | M.Hasrinaldi | PNS | History | History/Economic | |
| 6 | W.Indriana | PNS | English | English | |
| 7 | Sakdiah Isrowati | PNS | Biology | Biology/ Mulok/P.Diri | |
| 8 | Sri Utami | Non PNS | Law | PPKN/Art and Culture | Part-time |
| 9 | Fauziah | Non PNS | Indonesian | Indonesian | Part-time |
| 10 | Al Aswad | Non PNS | Islamic Education | Religion/Sports | Part-time |
| 11 | Yurian Paner | Non PNS | English | English/TIK | Part-time |
| 12 | Mulyadi | PNS | Biology | Art and culture | Part-time |

Source : SMP Negeri 3 Kayuara Tulung Selapan (November 15, 2009)

From the Table above, there are few teachers teaching other subjects that, it is believed, are not their field. Teaching subject without one's field of study is something questionable. We often think that how a teacher could teach other subjects if sometimes his/her own subject is irrelevant. For examples, an English teacher teaches sociology, a health science graduate teaches economics, a biology teacher teaches arts & culture, etc. This condition will produce an ineffectiveness of learning outcome, and may result unsatisfactory quality of education.

Ideally and theoretically, the number of teachers in a junior or senior high school depends on the number of lessons offered in the school. At the junior high school for example, the number of lessons offered is 13. Therefore the number of teachers should be 13, while at the senior high school the number of teachers should be 15 for both social and science departments. However, in case of emergency for example having not enough teachers or completing minimum requirement of teaching hours, a teacher may teach other subject other than his field. Again the subject to be taught should be relevant such as a mathematics teacher teaching physics, a history teacher teaching civics, etc.

In addition, the following table shows the condition of secondary schools in Cengal seen from their number of teachers.

**Table 3.** Description of Schools of Sub-district Cengal, Kabupaten Ogan Komering Ilir (OKI) South Sumatera

| No | Name of School | Number of Teachers | | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | PNS | Non PNS | |
| 1 | SMP N 1 S.Jeruju | 4 | 7 | |
| 2 | SMP N 2 Cengal | 9 | 10 | |
| 3 | SMPN3 Parit | 1 | 0 | SMP 1 Atap* |
| 4 | SMPN 4 K.S. Jeruju | 1 | 0 | SMP 1 Atap* |
| 5 | SMPN 5 Kebon Cabe | 2 | 2 | |
| 6 | SMAN Cengal | 5 | 10 | |

Source: UPTD Kecamatan Cengal, Ogan Komering Ilir, South Sumatra (Nov 12, 2009)

SMP 1 Atap* refers to SMP whose building shares with primary school, and the teachers are mostly primary school teachers. The SMP will move and build its own building provided that the program has been 3 years of its operation and has teachers with S1 graduates. Again if we look at the number of teachers available in some schools listed in the above table, the condition of the school in the sense of promoting good quality of education is apprehensive.

- **Infrastructure**

Infrastructure in relation to roads is one of the crucial issues among not only teachers but also people who inhabit the place. Roads are to link people from place to place for different purposes. Farmers can do their business smoothly if the roads are good, and students could easily get access to their school though the distance is long. In remote areas, most villages are usually spread, and the schools (especially junior and senior) are not found in every village, so children need to travel a little bit further for their higher education. The problem faced by people in remote areas is road. Some places are surrounded by water (swamps). Building roads is sometimes not such an easy thing to do as we need to pile swamps to link one village to another, so it is really costly. Water transportation is another alternative, but when it is dry season, this kind of transportation is also not running well. In the area of Tulung Selapan and Cengal, the roads are not so good. They could be passed during rainy season only by certain vehicles such as trucks, motorcycles. During rainy season, most roads are muddy and full of water, while during dry season, they are full of dirt. Similarly to water transportation, during dry season rivers cannot be passed through as there is no water flowing. The following figures show roads that link one place to another place.

**Figure 4**. During Rainy Season
Road that links Kayuara village to Sub-district
Tulung Selapan (November 5, 2009)

**Figure 5**. During Rainy Season
River that links Kayuara village to Sub-district
Tulung Selapan (March 10, 2009)

**Figure 6.** During Dry Season
River that links Kayuara village to Sub-district
Tulung Selapan (October 2, 2009)

**Figure 7**. During Rainy Season
Road that links Kayuagung to Sub-districts
Pedamaran and Cengal (November 13, 2009)

*What causes of poor infrastructure?*

As has previously been mentioned both sub-districts Cengal and Tulung Selapan are covered by land and water. The distance of one village to another is surrounded by either swamps or forest (local rubber plantation). Secondary school students need to walk, drive or sail long distance to reach the school (especially junior or senior). During rainy season roads are not good and full of mud and sometimes cause vehicles get stuck. At the same time, water transportation (river) is often not used if it rains since students might get wet, or it does not run at all during dry season since the river is too shallow for ship or canoe to pass through. As a result, students sometimes fail to go to school regularly, and they would rather stay home instead.

Another factor of poor infrastructure is that teachers feel reluctant to stay in remote areas. Not all teachers prefer to stay there, and even if they do, they commute from a big town where the condition of public services is good. This usually happens if teachers are not native of those areas. Having seen the condition of the areas such as poor infrastructures, unavailability of public services such as transportation, health center, light (electricity), inappropriate accommodation, etc. they prefer to leave the job or even try to move away though they have already got their SK (letter of appointment) to work there. That's why the number of teachers in remote areas is sometimes not enough from time to time.

Aside from the above factors, a poor infrastructure might certainly cause local business of people is not running well and cost of living such as 9 basic needs is high.

- **Environment**

Environment is also a major factor causing the failure of education, which of course creates the imbalance of education. Student environment in education may cover several aspects such as family, society, school, etc. In the following discussion, family is a major concern to discuss since the family, which is meant by parents, is the first people to whom children get closed and probably get informal education. Family is the key point to determine the education of children. Whether or not children grow up and are educated will largely depend on parents.

Most parents in remote areas especially in sub districts of Cengal and Tulung Selapan are farmers of local rubber plantation, and few fishermen. Their knowledge about education in general is relatively little. They believe that they send their children to schools with the hope that the responsibility of their children's education is fully from teachers. They are busy most of the time as rubber plantation farmers for example, tapping latex, nursing new plants, growing some vegetables, etc.

Family environment to children is something crucial on the quality of education of children. Little knowledge of education among parents might cause children drop out from school. The time for children to learn outside of school reviewing their lessons for example is too little or even nothing. They spend most of the time playing or doing something interesting such as watching TV, going to PS station, etc. They do not learn much and they fail to promote to the higher class. As a result, they feel reluctant to go back to school and drop out. In fact, the monitoring of children by parents is more than that of teachers. The average time of children studying at school is 6 hours. The rest of the day they spent is mostly at home. It is the parents' job to watch and educate their children outside of school time.

Furthermore, some parents in remote areas think of educating children how to read and write is enough since the purpose of life is to earn money. Therefore, in case of finance, they tend to make their children help their work in the farm so that in the future, the children will follow the way they do now. By working in the garden such as tapping latex with high price, they are really motivated and competitive to open more land for rubber plantation. Children having dropped out from school are not only found in the poor family but also in the rich family sometimes.

The following table contains the number of children in one junior high school who dropped out. The school serving the local children and its surrounding had only three classes consisting 87 active students for the whole grades 7, 8, and 9.

**Table 4**. Number of Students Having Dropped out in the Years of 2007-2009
In SMP Negeri 3 Kayuara, Sub-district of Tulung Selapan

| No. | Name | Parents' Occupation | Level of Education | Reason for Drop Out |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Tania | Farmer | Grade 7 | Less motivation |
| 2. | Desvi | Farmer | Grade 7 | Less motivation |
| 3. | Nurjanah | Farmer | Grade 7 | Financial problem |
| 4. | Fredi | Farmer | Grade 7 | Less motivation |
| 5. | Ari Irawan | Farmer | Grade 7 | Financial problem |
| 6. | Ela Marisa | Farmer | Grade 7 | Serious Disease |
| 7. | Muhaimin | Farmer | Grade 7 | Financial problem |
| 8. | Nurhalin | Farmer | Grade 7 | Financial problem |
| 9. | Regen Renaldo | Farmer | Grade 7 | Financial problem |
| 10 | Anwar | Farmer | Grade 8 | Financial problem |
| 11 | Ani Asmira | Farmer | Grade 8 | Financial problem |
| 12 | Iisnadi | Farmer | Grade 8 | Less motivation |
| 13 | Ali | Farmer | Grade 8 | Less motivation |

Source: Sakdyah Isrowati, a biology teacher of SMP Negeri 3 Kayuara, Sub-district of Tulung Selapan (November 10, 2009)

In summary, little knowledge of education and poor finance among family are the major family environment factors related to education faced by children in remote areas. From Table 4, it can be seen in 3 years there are 13 students failed to finish their studies at the Junior High School. This means 13% of the total number of 100 students could not complete their nine-year compulsory basic education.

**The Participation of Institutions of Higher Learning**

An Institution of Higher Learning as a producer of educators (teachers) plays an important role in promoting education in remote areas. The effort of a university, as an institution of higher learning, for example, has been made as stated in the "Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi" which

mentions that one of the lecturers' activities is to do community service. This community service is also made by sending senior students planning to graduate to rural areas. Here they share their knowledge and experience from university to the community based on their discipline. Students from Faculty of Teacher Training and Education for example, could do some educational activities such as giving extra class or do extra-curricular activities to students at schools and delivering educational speeches to the society (both youth and parents). That kind of activity is a part of their subject called Kuliah Kerja Nyata, (KKN) Student Social Internship, to take during their studies. Therefore, I believe KKN subject should always be included in the curriculum and be taken by the students as it will give good benefits for rural people. Hence, university students should also know the real condition or life of remote areas in Indonesia at present time so that they could contribute their knowledge and dedicate to the people of remote areas when they work later.

Meanwhile, lecturers could do some community services visiting remote areas giving guidance and counseling to the local people for different kinds of activities depending on their disciplines. A chemistry lecturer for example, can give knowledge on how to clean water from swamps or the effect of corrosion to food.

Furthermore, another contribution that has been made is that Sriwijaya University with its faculty of Teacher Training and Education has been opening the program called Alih Program (Transfer Program) for diploma graduates who are planning to continue their education for the second degree (Strata 1). Open University of Palembang Branch Campus for example, has been participating in serving primary school teachers to further their studies in higher level. One of its activities is to give weekly tutorials which involve some lecturers from educational higher institutions including Sriwijaya University. Besides, Sriwijaya University itself, has also participated in the activity of National Exam of Secondary Schools by sending their lecturers and senior students for supervision.

**Summary**

The imbalance of education in remote areas has become a serious problem and needs not to be neglected. Both the government and institutions higher learning must work together and be active in participating to succeed the nine-year compulsory basic education. It is advisable that the government as a policy maker should facilitate all the needs of school with standard facilities and adequate human resources. The distribution of teachers for example should be equally spread to all over remote areas without looking at whom to be sent and where to be sent, and those to be sent must be cooperative to accept the fact well. Therefore, the adoption of new teachers must be

done selectively. Meanwhile, institutions of higher learning should provide their human resources to help the schools prepare their teachers to be professional and guide the local people about the importance of education. This can be done through community services as a part of university activities to the society. It is the job of the government and institutions of higher learning to maintain good quality of education for all. Besides, it is advisable that ASAIHL members should be active in seriously thinking of promoting the slogan "education for all" to be really equally spread all over places in Indonesia and to be well implemented without any discrimination.

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