

TEACHER ABSENTEEISM IN RURAL INDONESIAN SCHOOLS A Dilemma

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Abstract

One of the problems faced by rural Indonesian schools is teacher absenteeism which leads into low motivation of students in their teaching and learning process as their teachers rarely come to their schools. The research aims to investigate the causes of teacher absenteeism in rural Indonesian schools. The participants of this research were two former SM-3T teachers who were teaching in Sambas, West Kalimantan and Mamberamo Raya, Papua. This research employed a narrative descriptive method. The techniques of data collection comprised of in-depth interviews. The result of this research shows that the causes of teacher absenteeism in rural Indonesian schools are the teachers' low welfare, difficult access to schools, and natural environment problems, such as bad weather and floods. This study can extend the existing knowledge on rural Indonesian schools, especially in the problematic matter such as teacher absenteeism.

Keywords: teacher absenteeism, rural Indonesian schools, SM-3T program

Introduction

Government and private parties in Indonesia are organizing programs to support education in rural areas, such as *Sarjana Mendidik di daerah Terdepan, Terluar, dan Tertinggal* (SM-3T), *Indonesia Mengajar*, and *Sekolah Guru Indonesia*. These programs send young teachers from all over the country to many schools in rural and remote areas. The young teachers will devote their lives for a year teaching in those rural schools, and are expected to revive the education atmosphere in the schools. Their existence in the 3T area schools becomes a hope to advance education in rural and remote areas by conditioning the schools not only as the places to gain knowledge but also as the centers of social activities in these areas. This is line with the study conducted by Autti and Hyry-Belhammer (2014) which found that the schools in rural areas are not only a place to educate children but also the center of village social lives.

Indonesian government through the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education enacted a program called SM-3T which stands for *Sarjana Mendidik*

di daerah Terdepan, Terluar, dan Tertinggal (Graduates Educating in the Disadvantaged, Outermost, and Frontier Regions). SM-3T Program is a year program for teacher education graduates to devote their lives teaching in the rural areas of Indonesia which is disadvantaged, outermost, and frontier (3T) regions as a professional teacher preparation which will be followed up with Teacher Professional Education Program. The goal is to help the rural area overcome educational problems especially the shortage of teachers. It provides teacher education graduates with experiences as a form of professional attitude, nationalism, patriotism, care, empathy, and problem-solving as a part of developing education in rural Indonesian schools.

SM-3T program can be a solution in rural Indonesian schools with limited number of qualified teacher. Wang (2006) argue that it is difficult to invite teachers to teach in underdeveloped rural areas; as a result, schools in rural areas are left with old and less competent teachers. The problems raised by Wang also occur in Indonesia, where teachers who teach in rural Indonesian

schools are local teachers who are old and do not have enough competence to teach.

The problems in rural Indonesian school was revealed by Myriad Research (2015) who conducted a study in rural and remote areas in Papuan provinces, Indonesia. The study revealed that teachers had to teach multiple early grade classrooms because of a lack of teachers and there was a mismatch between teachers' academic backgrounds and the subjects they taught. This is of particular concern as the availability of teachers in rural Indonesian schools is in critical condition.

The limited number of teacher in rural schools leads to the situation where teachers have to take multiple roles: as the school principal and classroom teacher. As a result, he cannot do his job as principal optimally. In line with this, Raggl in Smit et al. (2015) stated that teachers in small schools share certain characteristics, such as dual roles; for example, a head teacher who also becomes a classroom teacher.

Besides, Prouty (2012) studying the phenomenon of teachers absenteeism in Papua and West Papua, Indonesia, stated that the access to the schools was one of the challenges facing the teachers in Papua and West Papua. One of the reasons the high rate of teacher absenteeism was due to the access to the schools. Yustina and Dahnilyah (2015, p. 530) stated that "problem encountered in Lany Jaya Papua are among others: shortage of teachers, unbalanced distributions of facilities and teaching staff, underqualified teachers, low competence and mismatched educational background of teaching staff". In this current study, the causes of teacher absenteeism that occurred in rural Indonesian schools especially in Mamberamo Raya, Papua and Sambas, West Kalimantan will be explored more deeply through the stories told by former SM-3T teachers.

Methodology

This study aims to find the cause of teacher absenteeism in rural Indonesian

school by using a narrative descriptive. Clandinin & Conelly (2000) postulated that "narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through collaboration between researcher and participants in the certain place" (p. 2). In this research, the causes of teacher absenteeism in rural Indonesian schools were narratively explored.

As a narrative study, the stories in this study were collected from two former SM-3T teachers who taught in Sambas, West Kalimantan and Mamberamo Raya, Papua. The technique of data collection was in-depth interview which later on was transcribed. After data collection, the research data were analyzed by using Constant Comparative Method (CCM). Constant Comparative Method is the process used in the qualitative research in which any newly collected data is compared with previously collected data that were collected in one or more earlier studies.

Results and Discussion

The in-depth interviews with the two research participants resulted in the explanation on the causes of teacher absenteeism in rural Indonesian schools as elaborated in this section. Participants in this research were former teachers from two different areas, namely Sambas, a part of Borneo Island, and Mamberamo Raya, a part of Papua Island. The data from the interviews indicated that the reasons for the absence of teachers in these two places are different. Therefore the explanation on the causes of teacher absenteeism is reported according to the contexts as follows.

1. The Cause of teacher absenteeism in Mamberamo Raya, Papua

Mamberamo Raya is one of 3T areas located on the island of Papua. Similar to other rural Indonesian schools, schools in Mamberamo Raya also faced critical teacher absenteeism issues. This was described by the former of SM-3T teacher where he had to teach alone in the school for several months.

He further claimed that the local teacher saw his arrival at the school as an excuse not to come to the schools. This is described by the participant in the following interview.

Dengan kedatangan saya di sana seperti sebuah 'kesempatan' buat mereka untuk memasrahkan sekolah kepada saya. Bahasanya "mumpung ada guru dari Jawa, kita bisa istirahat dulu" (MR, field note, interview, April 2018).

My arrival there is like an 'opportunity' for them to hand over the school to me. In their words "we got a teacher from Java, so we can have some rest" (MR, field note, interview, April 2018)

The bold (in Bahasa Indonesia) or underlined (in English) wordings indicate the reason of the absence of teacher from the school. MR reported that his arrival at the school was considered by local teachers as an opportunity for them not to come to teach because they thought the school was well-handled by teachers who came from Java. This attitude reflected the well-entrenched belief in Indonesia that teachers coming from or educated in the island of Java are superior compared to those from other big island. In line with this, the SM-3T participants have already possessed the pedagogical, social, personal, and professional competence as the indicators of the professional teacher (Hidayah and Marhaeni P.A., 2016, p. 167). This local teachers' mindset left the SM-3T teacher alone to handle the entire teaching and learning at school consisting of three classes. The teaching and learning process then couldn't run well since the teacher should move from one class to other classes in the same time.

After enduring several months of teaching alone, MR revealed that local teachers' welfare was another reason for teacher absenteeism. Late salary payment and poor financial management were the causes of local teachers' poor welfare as summed in this extract:

*Mereka lebih banyak menghabiskan waktunya **buat memenuhi kebutuhan***

hidup mereka di pedalaman, karena terkadang pemberian honor atau gaji dari PEMDA sering telat. Mereka sering beralasan "ngapain capek-capek mengajar di sekolah kalau kita punya hak tidak dibayarkan" (MR, field note, interview, April 2018).

*Mereka dapat sekitar 7,5 juta per tiga bulan ditambah tunjangan jadi total sekitar 10 juta. Tapi masalahnya itu mereka dapatkan sesuai dengan regulasi pembayarannya, di samping itu, **sifat mereka yang konsumtif membuat berapapun gaji yang mereka dapat serasa kecil dan tidak cukup*** (MR, field note, interview, April 2018).

They spend most of their time to work to fulfil their daily needs in remote areas because the salary payment from the district government is often late. They argued "why tired ourselves out by teaching if they don't pay for our work" (MR, field note, interview, April 2018).

They earn about 7.5 million rupiahs every three months, or in total of 10 million rupiahs in addition to their allowance. But the problem is they don't receive it in accordance with the payment regulation. Besides, their consumerist behavior makes whatever number of salary they receive insufficient to fulfil their needs (MR, field note, interview, April 2018).

MR reported that late salary payment forced local teachers to do side jobs in addition to teaching. He added that this issue also affected the local teachers' motivation to go to school to teach.

Additionally, another reason for the absence of teachers at school was the remoteness of the area they were living at. This circumstances isolated them from many public facilities. For this reason, local teachers often took days off to travel to the city for buying their daily needs and to collect salary and grant. MR highlighted several excuses that led the teachers to take days off from teaching. Those excuses are portrayed in the following excerpt:

Intinya, mereka tidak hadir ke sekolah karena malas, pemenuhan kebutuhan sehari-hari dan terlambatnya gaji atau honor yang mereka terima. Oh ya, ketersediaan ATK juga pengaruh, karena hampir satu tahunan kami tidak punya kapur tulis (MR, field note, interview, April 2018).

The point is, they don't come to school because they're lazy, daily needs fulfilment, and the late salary and allowance payment. Actually the availability of stationary also influenced their attendance, because for almost one year we don't have any chalk (MR, field note, interview, April 2018).

2. The Cause of Teacher Absenteeism in Sambas, Kalimantan

In contrast to the causes of teacher absenteeism in Papua, the cause of teacher absenteeism in Sambas, Borneo is the natural environment factors. Local teachers in Sambas were reported to be absent from school for the reason of bad weather. This is expressed by respondent KD in the following interview.

Sebenarnya ketika musim kemarau, guru-guru aktif datang. Tapi kalau sudah musim hujan, banyak guru yang tidak datang (KD, field note, interview, April 2018).

Actually during the dry season, teachers attend the school. But when the wet season comes, many teachers are absent from teaching (KD, field note, interview, April 2018).

The excerpt shows that the cause of teacher absence in Sambas is natural factor, namely bad rainy weather in wet season. He contrasted the absence of teachers in the wet season with the good attendance of teachers in the dry season. This becomes an irony because students keep going to school despite the rainy weather. This then becomes the cause of students not having teachers to teach them.

Another reason for the absence of teachers at school during the wet season was

poor school infrastructure such as muddy streets which made the access to school difficult. In addition, frequent flooding in the area was also cited as a reason for teachers not to come to school.

Ketika hari hujan, kondisi jalan menuju sekolah sangat sulit dilalui. Bahkan sering pula terjadi banjir (KD, field note, interview, April 2018).

When it rains, the road becomes very inaccessible. Sometimes, the rain also causes flood (KD, field note, interview, April 2018).

In addition to natural environment factors, the absence of teachers in schools was because teachers who were studying for undergraduate degree found the distance between their university and school too far away. KD stated that the local teachers who actively came to the school were only teachers who lived nearby the school.

Guru lokal yang aktif datang cuma dua orang, itu karena rumah guru-guru itu dekat dengan sekolah (KD, field note, interview, April 2018).

There are only two teachers who attend the teaching at the school regularly because they live nearby the school (KD, field note, interview, April 2018).

Conclusion

From the results of the above study it can be concluded that the characteristics of the absence of teachers in different context varied enormously. The cause of absent teachers in Mamberamo Raya can be attributed to teachers' welfare and the attitude that SM3T teachers are the replacement teacher, while the absence of teachers in Sambas is caused by natural factors, such as rain and floods that hinder them from going to school.

From the results of the study, the implications that can be elaborated are the need for a teacher training in rural Indonesian schools where in the training teachers are equipped with a responsible

attitude towards their duties at school. The government and involved stakeholders should also attempt to support the local teachers with an improvement in the salary system and local infrastructure.

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