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Eradicating out-of-school-children: strategies and best practices from alternative education context

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ABSTRACT

The process and strategy to prevent children from dropping out of school has been carried out systematically in Indonesia. However, when it comes to the strategy for children returning to school still have difficulties, as well as several obstacles and dilemmas to requires the right strategy. The purpose of this study is to examined the strategies of eradicating out-of-school children and the best practices of alternative schools to provide inclusive and free education. Qualitative methods were chosen in the research process, primary data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) with 28 informants, includes policy makers, principals, teachers and students. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings show that a strong decentralized policy is needed to eradicating OOSC. Furthermore, alternative school plays a role in providing open classes for OOSC with unique characteristics. Good practices of OOSC handling and prevention strategies by alternative school can strengthen the roadmap of OOSC governance and handling strategies at the district level. The implication of this study is that the government, academics, society, and the media need to works together so it can enabling children who have dropped out of school to return to school with awareness.



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Introduction

Children's access to education has become the main focus in human development at both national and international levels. Based on a BPS survey on educational attainment results reports, the percentage of school dropouts in Indonesia shows that the higher the level of education, the higher the dropout rate. At elementary school level it was 0.11%, middle school was 0.98% and high school was 1.03% (BPS, 2023). Currently, many children from various background have successfully attended school, however, as the number of children attending school increases, there are also other problems where they fail to complete or do not continue their education to a higher level. Dropping out of school is an inseparable part of educational challenges in every country and region, both developed and developing, urban and rural areas. Each region has various characteristics and reasons when children drop out of school, however whatever the reason they drop out of school, the impact remains the same. The term 'out-of-school' children and youth is defined as the population between the ages of 6-21 years who do not attend schools or who have studied in schools but dropped out before completing their compulsory or basic education. This also includes handicapped children or children from

families living in poverty who do not have the opportunity to attend schools. Various factors behind Out-of-School Children (OOSC), include low academic achievement, school environment factors, poor family categories that force children to be employed. Economic barriers are still one of the issues that often arise in the evaluation of education equity. In various countries, poverty is believed to be one of the factors that influences school dropout rates, thereby requiring children to work (Shah et al., 2019).

Including in Indonesia, this causes a high percentage of school-age children to work to support their daily lives. Where 2.39% of children aged 10-17 years' work in Indonesia, meaning that 1.1 million people of school age are working while in school (at risk of dropping out) or have already dropped out of school (BPS, 2024). The International Labor Organization (ILO) pays special attention to child labor, it has identified that children work in various countries and industries for various reasons, however the common causes are poverty, the informal economy, and unpreparedness of the education system (International Labour Office, 2016). Meanwhile, Mughal, (2018); Rosada & Lestari, (2022)) views that individual aspects have strong determination so that children drop out of school. Among them, students feel low learning motivation, less able to control themselves, experience psychological disorders (anxiety, resignation, stress). Based on BPS data, the percentage of boys dropping out of school is higher, especially at the junior and senior high school levels. Apart from that, the gap between rural and urban areas also shows different school dropout rates, where in urban areas the dropout rate is low, while in rural areas it is the opposite. Where the dropout rate at elementary and middle school levels in rural areas is higher than in urban areas, as much as 0.05% in urban areas while 0.19% in rural areas at elementary school level. Then as much as 0.78% in urban areas and 1.25% in rural areas at junior high school level (BPS, 2023). OOSC statistics in Indonesia show a high trend at higher levels of education, causing the expected number of years of schooling to slow down in 2022. So, regardless of condition and status, children should have the right to education (International Labour Office, 2016; UN General Assembly, 2015).

Developing and developed countries have implemented early warning systems for all students, including students at high risk of dropping out of school. Australia uses student mapping tools, this system is simply implemented using a spreadsheet, where a warning will appear when students are identified as being at risk of dropping out (UNICEF, 2017). In Serbia, there are 7 factors that are analyzed to see the risk of dropping out, namely socio-economic status of children, absenteeism, behavior, academic achievement, recipient of eligibility for social assistance, level of peer acceptance and other risk factors (e.g. neglect, pregnancy, refugee, etc) (Jovanović et al., 2016). The system was developed by the Ministry of Education with UNICEF. The Netherlands implements a system using teamwork, where there are groups who are concerned about the risk of dropping out (UNICEF, 2017). Teachers, professionals, social workers, police, work to identify student problems. Meanwhile, in England, a calling and reporting system is implemented for students who have cases and learning obstacles (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2017).

In this context, Indonesia also has a holistic system, where preventive steps are taken at the family level, such as including poor family for empowerment family program, providing scholarships for children, and increasing public awareness about the importance of education. Various other countries have also done similar things to increase student participation in schools, such as providing free nutrition, behavioral interventions (Eslamian et al., 2023). Financial assistance and increase funding for disadvantage students (Guntur & Lobo, 2017; Mukisa, 2018). Create programs for the potential dropouts and educating students of the school's guidance and counseling program (Dizon-Luna, 2013). However, in Indonesia there is no early warning system that is used to identify the risk of children dropping out of school at both government and school levels like other countries (Setyadharma et al., 2015). Steps to develop an OOSC early warning system in Indonesia need to be taken immediately. However, apart from preventive steps, a return strategy is needed for children who do not go to school because they dropped out of school or did not continue to the next level.

The process of returning OOSC to school still experiences obstacles such as identification of students who are vulnerable to dropping out of school is only carried out based on documents on student competency achievement. Identification of the socio-economic conditions, social conditions and interests of students' talents has not been carried out relatively optimally. The reasons for out-of-school children differ between regions, for example the biggest reason for out-of-school children in the provinces of Banten, Riau, Lampung, Jambi and West Nusa Tenggara is due to lack of school fees, while in Jakarta, Central Java and Yogyakarta it is because of work. Therefore, the need for strategy implementation will be different in each region based on local approaches (Umbu Reku Raya, 2021). If we look at the various reasons for OOSC in various areas, both urban and rural, when students want to return to school they have dilemmas regarding funding, motivation, the gap between needs and expectations, as well as the issue of confidence in returning to school, especially formal schools (Webber, 2018). For this reason, alternative education is usually the choice for every student who wants to return to school. Alternative education as another option to formal education also does not exclude the potential and self-esteem of students. With a good process and paying attention to other factors such as students'

mental health, self-esteem, it is believed that it can provide a spike in the return of children who have dropped out of school (Lawrence & Adebawale, 2023).

The process and strategy to prevent children from dropping out of school has been carried out systematically and holistically in Indonesia. However, when it comes to the strategy for children returning to mainstream school still have difficulties, as well as several obstacles and dilemmas to requires the right strategy. Indonesia need to achieve the goal *"no child, whether male or female, does not have the right to education"*. But, the process of returning children to school is not an easy task, a strong decentralized policy is needed based on local values. On the other hand, the role of alternative schools is in providing open classes for children who have dropped out of school, and alternative schools need to pay attention to children's psychological dilemmas. Building the perception of alternative schools with branding and marketing based on increasing children's potential and rights, enabling children who have dropped out of school to return to school with awareness. Within the scope of Indonesia, there is not much research that highlights the role and cross-sectoral strategies in eradicating OOSC, including research that pays attention to individual aspects of out-of-school students who will return to school. Thus the aim of this research is to explore the role of OOSC eradication at various levels. This paper examined at the topic of eradicating out-of-school-children phenomenon. The paper looked at the concept of out-of-school-children, causes of school drop-out, strategies for eradicating out-of-school-children phenomenon, an analysis of strategies used by local government, the challenges, and the prospect, it also examining the best-practice from alternative education context to attract more OOSC back to education and providing this groups with inclusive and free education.

Method

Research Design

The choice of the research methodology is interrelated with research questions that drive the study and the reasons why the research is conducted. The purpose of this study is to examined the strategies of eradicating out-of-school children and the best practices of alternative schools to provide inclusive and free education. Qualitative methods were chosen in the documentation process to explore strategies for returning children from school through mapping the roles of the relevant actors. This documentation also seeks to identify good practices and lessons that can be learned from four alternative schools that have successfully returned out-of-school children to receive education again.

Sites and Participants

This research was conducted in Tangerang Selatan City and and Serang City, Banten Province, Indonesia because both cities concern with OOSC eradication project to reduce the number of OOSC in Banten Province. Banten province has significant number of OOSC along with Riau, Lampung, Jambi and Nusa Tenggara Barat province due to poverty. Conditions in more specific areas such as Serang City, which represents urban and rural communities as the capital of Banten Province, are still quite high in children not attending school at all levels. Most of the reasons for out-of-school children to drop out of school or graduating and not continuing are family economic constraints. Meanwhile, in Tangerang Selatan City, as an urban area, the majority of out-of-school children are due to work. Apart from involving policy stakeholders such as the local education department in province and municipality level, this research also explores information regarding best practice of alternative schools to accommodate out-of-school children to return to education. Four alternative schools were involved in field research with the following characteristics:

Table. 1 Selected Sites

Location	Name of School	Characteristics
Urban area	Binar School	Binar School was founded in 2020 with the main program of providing high school level education services free of charge for underprivileged communities. Binar School also organizes courses and skills for students to facilitate graduates to be able to work or become entrepreneurs.
	YPAB School	YPAB School is a non-profit organization that has been organizing alternative schools at elementary, middle and high school levels since 2012 for local communities in Tangerang Selatan city area where majority of students are also worker in informal sectors.
Suburban area	Maleo School	Maleo School was founded in 2005 to provide free and fully subsidized schooling at the junior high school level, and then

Location	Name of School	Characteristics
Rural area	Insan Madani School	<p>in 2013 it opened a high school program. Maleo School is also equipped with a Community Reading Garden and the majority of educators at Maleo School are volunteers and the main support is foster parents.</p> <p>Insan Madani School was founded in 2009 as an effort to answer educational needs in the Pancur Village area, Taktakan District, Serang City. Insan Madani began organizing the Early Childhood Education program and then supplemented it with alternative schools for elementary, middle and high school levels in 2011 free of charge for school-age children and adults who have dropped out of school. The majority of students are young housewives and home workers.</p>

The informants in this research are those involved as education policy makers, including the Serang City Education Office, sub-district and sub-district officials where the out-of-school children group is located, alternative schools (principals and teachers) where the out-of-school children group is present so that the possibility of returning the out-of-school children can be identified to school. The informant selection process uses snowball *sampling* based on predetermined criteria, including knowing the research topic and being an alternative school manager. There were 28 informants involved in the research, and taking into account gender representation and position in school or government organizations.

Data Collection

The primary data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) with informants. Liamputtong (2007) states that in-depth interviews aim to elicit rich information from the perspectives of particular participants and selected topics under investigation. The focus group discussions, on the other hand, facilitate access to research participants who may find one-on-one or face-to-face interaction 'scary' or intimidating (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009). Interviews were conducted with policy stakeholders such as the Serang City Education Office, sub-district and sub-district officials where the out-of-school children group is located, and alternative school managers. There were 12 informants interviewed and each informant was interviewed 1-2 times at the place where the informant was. The researcher, in this case the interviewer, uses an interview guide and also asks spontaneous questions following the dynamics that occur, so this process is called a semi-structured interview. The interview aims to explore stakeholder perspectives regarding the return of out-of-school children to schools in accordance with the needs and challenges in Banten Province. Specifically, interview questions for informants from alternative schools centered on the question (1) what is the description of the causes of the condition of children who have dropped out of school who continue their education in alternative schools? (2) what alternative school strategies are in helping children who have dropped out of school to continue their education; (3) what is the school's acceptance mechanism for out-of-school children from a managerial and learning perspective.

There were 16 informants who participated in the FGD activities who were members of four FGD groups. The questions in the FGD related to; (1) what is the mechanism for returning out-of-school children to educational services in an inclusive manner? (2) what is the mechanism for returning out-of-school children to mainstream schools, Community Learning Center or Islamic boarding schools based on a local approach and the problems that occur to each individual for various reasons? (3) what is the mechanism for returning children from school due to low economic conditions in the community through an empowering approach? This primary data is then complemented by secondary data which includes out-of-school children regulations and policies at both national and regional levels, alternative school documents which are the object of this research, as well as national data related to primary and secondary education.

Data Analysis

Creswell & Poth (2016). provides general analysis procedures in preparing and organizing qualitative data. The activities of data analysis in this study include: (1) organizing data; (2) reading and memorizing; (3) describing, classifying and interpreting data into codes and themes; (4) interpreting data; and (5) representing and visualizing data. In analyzing qualitative data, we begin by manually using techniques such as 'cut and paste' to categories data and develop theoretical explanations. The process of coding involves aggregating text or visual data into 'small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code' (Creswell & Poth, 2016). We use a priori or empirical codes (additional codes) that guide the coding process in order to distinguish categories from theoretical models or the literature

and codes from the views of participants. Then, the similar codes are organized into themes or broad categories of the idea from the data. The themes connect to each other to display a chronological structure based on the research sub-questions. After the procedures are completed, we approach the final step, which is representing and reporting the findings.

Results and Discussions

The following results primarily refer to the patterns identified in the data. The results predominantly correspond to strategies of Indonesian alternative school to facilitate OOSC back to education. The results are reported following a chronological sequence of the research topics. Below are the data analysis and representation derived from research data:

Table 1. Data Analysis and Representation

Theme	Category	Coding
Policy regarding the return of OOSC	Open school	<i>SMP Terbuka</i> (Open JSS) SATAP (One Roof School)
	Local government policy	<i>Aje Kendor</i> <i>Gerakan Sarerea Lulus Sekolah (GSLs)</i> <i>Smart Tangerang</i>
Strategies for eradicating OOSC	Education fund	School operational assistance (BOS) Indonesian conditional cash transfer programs (PKH)
	Penta-helix strategy	Universities, government and industrial partner
Re-enrolment campaign	Information dissemination	Social media publication Outreach/campaign to JSS Neighbourhoods head Alumni
Pro-poor economic incentives	Social assistance programs	Smart Indonesia Program (PIP) Free school services Foster parents
	Aid funds	Implementation Operational Assistance (BOP) Vocational program funding Affirmation of education in 3T Donation
Alternative Learning Strategies	Flexible learning strategies	Small study group Various learning methods School structure
	Alternative schools	Nature school (<i>sekolah alam</i>) Street school (<i>sekolah jalanan</i>) Homeschooling

Based on the data analysis in the table 1, the result and discussion of this study begins with a description of policy and strategies for eradicating OOSC, followed by the explanation of re-enrolment campaign, pro-poor economic incentives, and alternative learning programs for OOSC.

Policy and Strategies for Eradicating Out-of-School-Children

The policy of returning OOSC to schools is carried out in a decentralized manner where local governments have autonomy in deciding the policies and strategies taken by considering central government policies. Serang City is currently implementing OOSC returns through a program *Aje Kendor Sekolah*. Terminology *Aje Kendor* From Serang Javanese, this means “*don't give up your enthusiasm for going back to school*”. This program was initiated jointly by USAID ERAT (funding from the US government) with the Serang City Government, intended to address students who have dropped out of school as well as returning those who are no longer of school age to participate in equal education programs. As said in interviews by stakeholders at the education authority in Serang City that:

“Aje Kendor Sekolah AKS in collaboration with USAID ERAT is designed so that children get their educational rights. The point is to return our children who have dropped out of school, where we will return

school age children to school and those who are no longer school age we will direct them to participate in equality education.” (Interview with Stakeholder-2024)”

Other cities and regencies also implemented similar programs with locality-based taglines, such as in Pandeglang Regency which established a program *Gerakan Sarerea Lulus Sekolah* (GSLS). Terminology *Sarerea* means togetherness to complete school graduation. Meanwhile, Tangerang City is developing a program *Smart Tangerang* where the government provides scholarships to underprivileged children to remain in school, then the sector is developed for out-of-school children to return to school.

As mandated by law, education is the responsibility of various parties such as schools, parents and the community (UU No 20, 2003). In this case, the government is also implementing a multi-level and multi-disciplinary strategy, where not only three educational centers play a role but there are other roles such as the media, NGOs and the industrial world. This strategy is known as penta-helix. The government in charge of education authorities in Serang City, Tangerang Selatan City and Pandeglang Regency is implementing a penta-helix strategy to return OOSC to mainstream and alternative schools. As is the case with the Serang City Government which involves academics, society, media and industrial partners. Program *Aje Kendor Sekolah* with USAID ERAT as the initiating partner. USAID ERAT supports the central, provincial and regional governments to strengthen policy coherence, policy implementation, as well as budget planning and implementation, including the OOSC return program to equivalency education schools. In Pandeglang Regency there is a policy for developing road infrastructure with the name "Jakamantul" which can encourage the *Gerakan Sarerea Lulus Sekolah* (GSLS) program to return children who have dropped out of school. Due to proper physical infrastructure it can accelerate the convenience of school children.

“The collaboration between the Jakamantul and GSLS programs makes it easier to access schools. When children drop out of school due to lack of infrastructure to go to school, this government program becomes an alternative solution” (Interview with Stakeholder-2024)”

The way the penta-helix strategy works is greatly influenced by its success by the five layers that work together simultaneously (Amrial et al., 2017; Shyafary et al., 2021). Initially, this concept was only conceived as trilateral involving universities, government and industrial partners, so it was called the triple helix (Etzkowitz, 2008; Leydesdorff & Etzkowitz, 2015). Then the media appeared as a balancer for conflicts of interest, then called the quadruple helix (Kimatu, 2016). It ended with the involvement of social communities which succeeded in moving the wheels of sustainable economic development, resulting in the emergence of the penta-helix concept (Capetillo et al., 2021). In terms of handling OOSC, the government works as a catalyst for applicable policies, academics play a role in providing evidence and empirical studies, the industrial world jointly supports third party funding, the media is involved in disseminating information and civil society moves with awareness to encourage OOSC to return to schools.

Apart from the government having a policy of returning and preventing OOSC, in this case at the school level it also has a procedure for returning OOSC to schools. As with the schools that are research subjects, in all schools the location characteristics (urban, sub-urban and rural) have implemented OOSC returns by looking at four aspects (locality values, valid data, individual needs and mentoring). These four aspects are not standard government procedures. However, it is important to look at these aspects to ensure appropriate OOSC return steps. Firstly, in this case the OOSC returns have different variations based on the local approach such as existing social, cultural and local conditions. Each location characteristic has a different reason when students decide to leave school, these reasons must also be followed in the return process. Based on Vincent et al., (2010) that the educational process cannot be separated from local values including managerial processes, curriculum, methods, also in this context the process of returning OOSC to schools.

Second, a number of individual reasons that cause children to drop out of school also need to be considered, such as children who are forced to work, disabled, victims of bullying, dissatisfied with formal school, choosing to become *Santri*, or children who are in conflict with the law (Masing & Astuti, 2022; Munir & Ahmad, 2020; Sumardi, 2020). In this case, schools need to provide individual needs and a humanist educational approach. Indonesia itself has provided many alternative education services that pay attention to individual needs. Such as learning carried out in prison for students who are in conflict with the law (Rosmilawati et al., 2020).. Alternative schools for disabilities to fulfill inclusive learning. Also Community Learning Activity Centers which usually provide distance learning facilities as well as learning using local wisdom (Mutakim et al., 2024; Rahma et al., 2019). Several schools that are the subject of research such as Binar School, YPAB School, Maleo School provide alternative education services that reach individual reasons such as those who work, have disabilities, and have been victims of violence in previous schools. Meanwhile, Insan Madani School reaches out to the characteristics of working students, *Santri*, as well as disadvantaged children. However, none of the 4 (four) schools that were respondents provide educational services for students who are in conflict with the law (prisoners), this is because of limited accessibility in prisons.

Third, before students participate in the learning process at an alternative school, there are procedures that need to be carried out such as collecting valid data such as previous school, reasons for dropping out of school, and the last class attended. Data collection is carried out to provide appropriate services to students, as well as as an early warning system that can be used by schools. Fourth, the psychological conditions of students who drop out of school are quite diverse, such as lack of self-confidence, low motivation, and anxiety due to past conditions. For this reason, assistance to students and families is very necessary both before returning to school and after returning to school, this is intended to foster hope that students returning to school will also have good resilience. Once students return, schools need to ensure that students feel safe, happy, valued, and meaningful (Mewafarosh & Agarwal, 2021; OECD, 2015). It can also be said that the school provides an environment with student well-being, so that students feel that returning to school is the right way.

Inseparable from the implementation of the OOSC return policy that is already underway, accurate statistical baseline data is needed for regular OOSC mapping in each area that requires further intervention. Currently, the government has the digital platform *DAPODIK* (Students Basic Data) as a database of students who are actively attending school, continuing and not continuing. There have been previous efforts to record educational statistical data using different methods, such as data collection carried out by the Integrated Database which lists people for social protection programs with demographic data on school dropout rates. There is also an Education-Management Information System (E-MIS) for education units under the Ministry of Religion. The government centrally through the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS) conducts periodic surveys every four years through the National Economic Survey (*Susenas*), where the census also captures educational data including school dropout rates, literacy rates, school enrollment rates, and other educational statistical data.

Currently, government policies and strategies target simultaneous preventive and curative steps. Preventive steps are taken by providing free education through School Operational Assistance (*BOS*) to support equal distribution of education and there are individual incentives in the form of Smart Indonesia Card (*KIP*) scholarships for economically disadvantaged students (Romlah et al., 2023). Apart from that, students who live on the poverty line have other incentives from the Indonesian Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (*PKH*), where the program provides assistance in economic, food and empowerment aspects. Poverty is one of the problems that needs to be resolved gradually, where poverty has the potential to directly encourage children to drop out of school so that the *PKH* program can reduce poverty rates and also reduce school dropout rates (Singh, 2013). However, at the school level, preventive steps need to be taken well before dropout occurs, where schools need to identify students' conditions starting from socio-economics, motivation during learning, attendance, interdisciplinary behavior, and learning progress. Because factors that can determine OOSC include individual student character (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Re-enrollment Campaign for Disadvantaged Groups

Alternative schools have strategies in carrying out their mission to help children who have dropped out of school continue their education. The enrollment campaign is the main strategy in socializing the existence and objectives of alternative schools in serving OOSC. Re-enrolment campaigns help dropout return to school, especially when the campaign successfully combined information and tuition-waiver treatment (Ortagus et al., 2020). Furthermore, (Castleman & Page, 2015) stated that their re-enrollment campaign with text-messaging tool increase the enrollment of high school graduates in college. Another method by (Hyman, 2020) mailed letters encouraging high school seniors to consider college in America. In African countries, such as in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, re-enrollment campaign post-Ebola successfully happens through community engagement (Voothaluru et al., 2021). Likewise, the four schools that are research subjects have ways of attracting the public's attention, starting from looking at the community culture, to seeing what needs can be met if their children's education is adequate. These four alternative schools implement inclusive school enrollment practices. Inclusion can be defined as "a process that helps overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners" (UNESCO, 2017). In Indonesia, OOSC experiences many obstacles to returning to education because of various problems, including lack of funds, barriers to work and motivation after failing at their previous school.

The out-of-school children screening carried out by alternative schools in this study was carried out through social media publications, especially Instagram. The Instagram accounts of alternative schools in Urban Areas, namely Binar School, Maleo School and YPAB are quite active in disseminating information about school activities, including information about school registration. These schools often post daily, weekly and major activities so that many people know about the existence of alternative schools. Uniquely, this school's social media and website are managed by students, both as content creators and as content idea creators. The use of social media is very effective in campaigning for education for the poor. These three schools in urban areas also carry out outreach/campaigns to junior high schools in the area, and to old schools where alternative school students received their previous education. Outreach is also carried out in areas where children are out of school.

Students in all schools are also active in inviting their fellow students who are not yet in school to follow in their footsteps by attending alternative schools. In contrast to the Insan Madani School which is located in a rural area, the re-enrollment campaign is more effective by approaching sub-districts and neighborhood heads in the local area, because they know more data about community members. Key informants such as the neighborhood heads then visited several families who had children dropped out of school, and from here a spiral of information would develop between residents. Alumni and students also play a role in helping to socialize this school, including to their closest neighbors or through networks of friends. Successful campaign typically involves connecting OOSC to multiple resource and caring relationship with the family, friend and neighborhood. These campaign efforts carried out in various ways have proven to be able to increase the number of OOSC who return to school through alternative school routes. Although, it is not the case their enrollment automatically results in greater learning, but education may confer benefits other than in terms of learning outcomes, it is including the expectation about the future and on adolescent mental health (Filmer et al., 2009).

Pro-poor Economic Incentives

Equal distribution of education is a statutory mandate as stated in Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2023 concerning the National Education System. Law No. 20/2021 article 11 paragraph 2 also emphasizes "The government and regional governments are obliged to guarantee the availability of funds to provide education for every citizen". Free education policy aims at providing equitable right to every child to access and benefits from education and making a responsible and resourceful citizen to the society (Alawattegama, 2020). Indonesia law requires that 20 per cent of the budget be allocated to the education sector. The Indonesian government has introduced a number of social assistance programs to support children and families in education sector, such as the Smart Indonesia Program (*PIP*) provide cash assistance for education to school-age children from poor and vulnerable families. The Indonesian government also provides facilities for schools, including alternative school under Nonformal Education sector, a policy to finance education called School Operation Assistance (Romlah et al., 2023). BOS aims to cover various items of educational needs or financing. The operational assistance fund (BOS) received by schools has been used as appropriate for education financing, especially school operational costs (Ahmad & Weyai, 2021). Abolishing school fees and providing support for additional costs, such as books can encourage disadvantaged group to attend school.

Apart from the funding above, the Indonesian government also has Implementation Operational Assistance (*BOP*) funding for Equivalency Education, that is aid funds allocated to fund non-personnel operational costs to support the implementation of Equivalency Education. Fund of Implementation Operational Assistance for Equivalency Education is directed at meeting the learning needs of society that cannot be reached and fulfilled by nonformal education channels. The allocation of Implementation Operational Assistance funds for each institution depends on the number of students it has. The Community Learning Center also has vocational funding to support student training, for example barista or car mechanic training, although this vocational curriculum is considered not yet synergistic with the cognitive skills in the general equivalency education curriculum (Nurkholis & Cahyono, 2022). Insan Madani School has a program to improve life skills through cooking class activities. This is in accordance with the needs and potential of high school students, the majority of whom are women at this school. Then, in the community around the school there are also many people who have home businesses/local food industries, so this activity supports students to have a home cake business which can be sold online via the *Gojek* application. These vocational skills receive funding support from the government by previously submitting funding proposals.

Education funding is an educational intervention strategy that can be directed at increasing access and quality of education. In other developing countries such as on the African continent, including Cameroon, Togo and Congo, they also have free school policies which have an impact on increasing the number of student participation in school (Amaha, 2022). In some countries (for example Cambodia and Colombia) include conditional cash transfers, which have prevent efficient in improving enrolment (Filmer et al., 2009). In Latin America, social protection programs and cash transfers conditional on attendance have been consistently been beneficial to enrolment, dropout, and completion (UNESCO, 2020). Another intervention impacted to school enrolment and retention is school meals, particularly for disadvantaged students in food-insecure areas (Bedasso, 2022; Crawford et al., 2022).

All alternative schools in this study are alternative schools that provide free school services. The four schools are committed to taking part in solving the problem of out-of-school children through the PIP (Smart Indonesia Program) school incentive program. PIP is designed as educational cash assistance given to school age children (6-21 years) who come from economically disadvantaged families. The aim of this program is to prevent children from dropping out of school because there is lack of money for school supplies such as uniforms, books and so on. PIP also aims to attract children who have dropped out of school so they can continue their education, including at alternative schools managed by Community Learning Center (*Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat* -

PKBM) and Studio Learning Activity (*Sanggar Kegiatan Belajar - SKB*). The government also has Affirmation of Secondary Education, namely a scholarship program given to children in 3T (disadvantaged, frontier, outermost) areas. Through this program, children in the 3T area can still carry out their education so that the quality of human resources sources competes with the same as human resources in urban areas. Alternative schools also receive BOS funding assistance from the government which has been budgeted for every educational unit in Indonesia.

Apart from educational scholarships from the government, alternative schools also have funding strategies through donations, foster parents and establishing collaborative partners. Binar School and Maleo School have a foster parent system to help students financially. The foster parent program is an educational mutual cooperation program to pay for school fees for disadvantaged children or children who are vulnerable to dropping out of school due to the family economy. This program is voluntary and the amount of funds deposited by foster parents is in accordance with their abilities and willingness. Meanwhile, YPAB schools and Insan Madani schools have collaborative partners who not only help meet the school's financial needs, but also learn programs that are interesting and relevant to students' needs, including life skills training program partners.

Alternative Learning Programs for OOSC

The OOSC prevention strategy emphasizes the availability of a flexible learning system that allows students to continue learning outside of class time and space. The emergence of an alternative school is to provide an option for people who want to complete 12 years of education, which will hopefully provide better life opportunities. Based on a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018), OOSC has high motivation to return to education, and alternative schools are more popular (77%) compared to mainstream schools. The strategy for handling OOSC needs to emphasize a learning system that is accommodating to OOSC conditions, including OOSC that works through alternative schools or PKBM. The characteristics of alternative schools that are accommodated in more flexible non-formal education pathways make it easier to reach out-of-school children who need education.

The form of education that can be created by non-formal education can be in the form of small study groups to facilitate learning. In accordance with Law Number 20 of 2023 concerning the National Education System, the education system in Indonesia is divided into three educational pathways, namely informal education, formal education and non-formal education. Non-formal education is an educational path outside formal education that can be implemented in a structured and tiered manner. Non-formal education is needed now and in the future, because it is part of an inclusive education system and can reach every level of society that is not served by formal education (Mustangin et al., 2021). Non-formal education is open in terms of age and learning methods, where all citizens without age limits can take part in equal education programs with various learning methods. Varghese, (2022) stated that standardization and non-adaptability education can lead to direct discrimination through school admission.

The emergence of alternative schools such as nature schools (*sekolah alam*), street schools (*sekolah jalanan*), homeschooling, and Community Learning Centers (CLC) should be appreciated because they influence the level of public concern for education. Alternative schools provide educational services that are suitable for their students, starting from providing infrastructure that is adapted to learning to providing teachers who understand the diversity of students. YPAB school and Insan Madani School have study hours on Saturday and Sunday at 8am-6pm, this is because the students are not only school age children, but also working adult students. Meanwhile, Maleo School and Binar School have requirements, namely that students must still be of school age, so these two schools have study hours like mainstream schools, namely Monday to Friday 7am-2pm. The subjects at this alternative school are similar to mainstream schools, including the use of an independent curriculum. Teachers at alternative schools often provide interesting and contextual teaching to students, this is done as an effort to make students interested in learning, and think that learning at school can be used in everyday life. Many re-engagement approach in alternative learning programs emphasize coordinated system support, flexible curriculum and school structure, such as weekend classes, night classes, and online learning (Varga et al., 2019)

Flexible learning strategies are inclusive interventions that support children educationally excluded from acquiring learning experiences and competencies that meet their needs and circumstances. Flexible learning strategies occur outside mainstream school context, focusing on the needs of children in local context. The multiple entry system also provides greater flexibility for transferring to an alternative school after dropping out from mainstream school. This system provides opportunities for those who have not achieved academically to join alternative school by taking the prior learning assessment and recognition test. Alternative schools are more flexible and the requirements for becoming a student are not as strict as formal schools. At the Insan Madani School, for example, there is no entrance test for prospective students who are categorized as adults, and only an interview session is provided to hear their motivation and hopes after returning to school. Other countries,

for example Malawi which has a significant number of OOSC also have a Complementary Basic Education (CBE) program as an alternative approach for OOSC to return to school (Ngware et al., 2018). Similar to this, several countries also have this *bridging program*, is a transitional program that enables the youth to re-enter the formal system. Furthermore, (Ngware & Mutisya, 2022) mentioned Adult Education and Literacy program in Kenya, the Community Oriented Education Program in Uganda, and the Complementary Basic Education (COBET) in Tanzania. Alternative Learning Programs (ALPs) in Pakistan covers a broad range of type of Learning Centre (LC), they clustered ALPs into four different categories; Federal programs, Provincial programs, NGO programs, and Madrassah (UNICEF, 2015)

Alternative schools are different from mainstream schools. They have a life skills program to support students in having special skills that can be used in the world of work. For example, Binar School has a special education program for technology & informatics, accounting and office administration starting from grade 10. The existence of this additional program is to prepare the students to enter the world of work after graduating from high school. Binar School also has extracurricular programs to provide a platform for students to express or deepen their skills. These include martial arts, soccer, badminton and sewing activities. Foreign languages are also available, such as Arabic, English, Japanese and Korean. The additional program services provided by the Binar School are an attraction for prospective students, because even though the school is free, the quality of the Binar School is very good and is supported by additional activities that are very suited to the needs of students and the world of work. Meanwhile, YPAB School provides an Oracle program, namely learning coding, which is very suitable for current conditions. This is different from Flexible Learning Options (FLOs) in Australia, which are alternative school pathways to serve students who have not completed high school, they are more concentrated in providing well-being support – social and emotional, as well as physiological and material so that students feel safe and comfortable (Myconos et al., 2016).

Conclusions

Education has been identified as an instrument of development of societies and individuals. Therefore, no child, whether male or female, does not have the right to education. The process and strategy to prevent children from dropping out of school and also to return OOSC to the school is not an easy task, a strong decentralized policy is needed based on local values. In this regards, the government, academics, society or community, entrepreneurs and the media need to work together so it can enable children who have dropped out of school to return to school with awareness. Alternative school plays a role in providing open classes for OOSC with their unique characteristics. Good practices of OOSC handling and prevention strategies by alternative schools in this study can strengthen the roadmap of OOSC governance and handling strategies at the district/city level. As well as the need to strengthen collaboration among OOSC multistakeholder with the involvement of sub-district and village government, as well as ensuring understanding of task and functions between levels of government.

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