

MAKING RURAL SCHOOLS MORE USEFUL FOR THE COMMUNITY; PREVENTION OF BRAIN DRAIN

Sugiono¹

¹Institut Agama Islam Nurul Jadid, Paiton, Probolinggo
Email : ss.sugiono@gmail.com

Abstract

Rural schools in Indonesia face various problems that are uniquely rural. A comprehensive report on rural schools in Indonesia has found high rates of poverty and low levels of educational attainment (Improving People's Access Towards More Qualified Education 2004). It has found that rural schools are staffed by younger, less well-educated faculty members and administrators, who earn low salaries and benefits compared to their urban or metropolitan counterparts. The report also documents persistent problems related to rural school finance, teacher compensation and quality, facilities, curriculum, and student achievement.

Kata Kunci: *Rural Schools, Brain Drain*

Introduction

Rural schools in Indonesia face various problems that are uniquely rural. A comprehensive report on rural schools in Indonesia has found high rates of poverty and low levels of educational attainment (Improving People's Access Towards More Qualified Education 2004). It has found that rural schools are staffed by younger, less well-educated faculty members and administrators, who earn low salaries and benefits compared to their urban or metropolitan counterparts. The report also documents persistent problems related to rural school finance, teacher compensation and quality, facilities, curriculum, and student achievement.

It can be obviously recognized that the aforementioned report implies the lower quality of rural schools in the country, which might be the most likely motivations youth leaving for cities to pursue better education and better jobs; this phenomenon is known as *brain drain*. This article employs a review of

related literature to detail the strategies in the improvement of the quality of Indonesian rural schools in order that *brain drain* can be prevented. In addition, the implications of these strategies toward leadership and management will also be covered.

Understanding Brain Drain

Historically speaking, the term *brain drain* first appeared in a report by the Royal Society of London published in the early 1960s (Royal Society 1963 as cited in Hansen 2007). It is contended that in its original sense, the term referred to the exodus of British scientists to the United States. This fact was hardly surprising given the conditions in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Only the number of researchers who moved from England to the United States during that period had been both numerically and economically significant. Furthermore, by 1960s and 1970s, the term was chiefly concerned with the emigration of academics and professionals from developing countries. From the start of 1970s new political and economic realities had led to a shift in focus, and the term *brain drain* was also used to refer to burgeoning phenomenon of students from poorer countries opting to stay on in the developed countries after they had studied.

On the basis of the concept, more specifically, *brain drain* can be connected with the rural youth 'emigrating to metropolitan areas for more qualified education and better jobs' (Chalker 1999; Goetz & Rupasingha 2005, p. 6). In Indonesian context, rural communities have already seen the reality that schools in big cities are more qualified than those in rural areas. It has been proved by the attainment of educational outcomes where urban students constantly achieve better than rural ones from year to year. The reality then arouses the perspective of most parents that sending their children to urban schools can provide better competence and skills. Even the parents are not wishing their children to return back to their rural communities for the pursuit of a good job and life in big cities. Rural places then turn to be appropriate merely for retirement. Children commonly return to rural areas not to improve the quality, but to enjoy their life after *devoting* their quality to urban areas.

With that kind of trend, the implications of a declining youth population in rural areas will be far-reaching and worrisome. Rural communities will unavoidably be suffering from a 'bitter harvest' (Chalker 1999, p. 13). According to Goetz and Rupasingha (2005), the phenomenon not only deprives local employers of an educated workforce, but also represents a drain on local resources because the communities that invested in the education of these

workers do not reap any returns on that investment.

Hemingway (2002, p. 1) notes three areas of particular concern which could be the impacts of *brain drain*: (1) *impact on labour force*, in which rural areas will experience a labour shortage in entry-level positions typically filled by young workers; (2) *impact on public education system*, where in the absence of young adults and their children, enrolments will be down in nearly all elementary schools; *impact on culture*; culturally, the loss of youth potentially advances the decay of the community's vital institutions such as schools, businesses, clubs and organisations. In other words, rural community will suffer for lack of young residents. With higher educated youth who are more likely to go away, educational attainment state-wide will fall. To resolve this, the quality of local education institutions needs to be improved.

Improving The Quality Of Rural Schools

Since the issues of quality of schooling and employment opportunities have become factors which bring about *brain drain* in Indonesian rural areas, the improvement of quality in both sectors should be taken into account. However, it is not an easy task as for decades, it has been recognized that rural people, despite comprising the majority of the Indonesian population, are severely disadvantaged in terms of access to a more qualified educational system due to the geographical location (Sugiono 2016). Even the problem becomes more complex when the discussion of educational opportunities is related to the provisions of employment which can, hopefully, provide rural people with a relatively good income. Accordingly, if rural communities are to survive, they must develop new economies, attract working-aged people and redesign schools so that the students are not at a disadvantage simply because of the geographical factor (see Sugiono 2016).

Collins and Flaxman (2001) state that in both rural and urban areas, there is a widespread agreement that parental engagement is a crucial component of school improvement. In some cases, schools are seeking community engagement that might include businesses and non-profit organisations. Hence, in both rural and urban areas, there is a connection between communities and schools. Nevertheless, Collins and Flaxman (2001) see the difference in relation to the emphasis of the connection. In rural areas, the connection is so close that in fact, historically, resistance to certain reforms and consolidation is part of an effort to maintain local control over schools. In the meantime, the connection in urban areas seems to be more tenuous, with more emphasis on staff professionalism than on staff relationships with community members. Thus, in

both rural and urban areas, there are obstacles to school-community relationships, but these obstacles seem to be more pronounced in city schools. Headmaster Moreover, Chalker (1999) has put the close connection between communities and schools in rural areas into the major strength of rural communities. At this stage, a review of the rural education literature suggests at least four trends to make the schools more useful to the community, particularly for the prevention of *brain drain*:

1. Healthy relationship between rural communities and their schools is of great importance to school effectiveness and the communities' quality of life.
2. Although it is impossible for rural communities to alter global changes that put them at risks, they can have broad-based local discussions, develop agreed-upon policies, and pursue educational, civic, and economic activities that enhance their sustainability and growth.
3. Rural students must be prepared to work, learn, and live well, not only as participants in the global economy but also as citizens in their own communities.
4. Rural schools, as central institutions in rural life, must assume a role in community economic development.

In short, the literature suggests that the mission of rural schools is now changing.

The change of the mission implies that rural schools are regarded as unique institutions, and thus they need unique leaders and managers that are responsive to the expectations of the communities, understand the rural cultures and traditions, and recognize the history of rural education. Schwahn and Spady (2001) recommends the so-called cultural leadership domain. This is because rural schools as organisations have cultures, which take root, grow, evolve, and silently control the attitudes and behaviours of organisational members, even when no one pays them any special attention. In addition, cultural leaders bring the value and purposive dimensions of authentic leadership to life in a direct, interpersonal way. The quality and consistency of cultural leaders' relations with others are key points in determining how well the other domains of leadership (strategic, educational, and responsive leadership) are carried out and how strongly those domains motivate organisational members to involve and invest themselves in organisation's changing efforts (Caldwell 2000).

Moreover, the essence of cultural leaders are that they can shape the orientations, quality, cohesiveness, and energy of their organisation's culture, which refers to unspoken values, beliefs, norms, symbols, actions, and

pressures that exist beyond organisation's policies and rules. The culture of an organisation also powerfully influences how its members relate to each other, do their business, value and reward each other's productivity and contributions, and participate in the organisation's social, recreational, and work life (Schwahn & Spady 2001). Cultural leaders are highly perceptive, consist of mindful people, and are shaped by core values of *integrity* and *commitment* and principles of *inclusiveness* and *win-win*. Their skills and qualities of cultural leadership are appropriate for carrying out the enrolment process, which is necessary for developing ownership of organisational purpose and change in rural areas. Led by capable cultural leaders, it is highly likely that enrolment in rural areas will represent the open-arm approach to welcoming and fully engaging both internal and external clients in an organisation's productive change process.

STRATEGIES FOR A NEW START

Miller (1995 as cited in Collins 2001, p. 18) presents three potentially interrelated strategies, which are mutually beneficial to the rural schools and their communities: (1) the school as a community centre, a lifelong learning centre, and a vehicle for delivering numerous services; (2) the community as curriculum, emphasising the community in all of its complexities as part of students' learning activities in the classroom; and (3) the school as a developer of entrepreneurial skills (Nactigal 1994; Hobbs 1987; Sher 1977 as cited in Collins 2001, p. 18). Meanwhile, the fourth strategy (Odasz 1999 as cited in Collins 2001, p. 18) suggests the role of new technologies in building and preserving the rural community by linking students to the rest of the world. The strategies, as below;

1. *Strategy 1: Schools as Community Centres*

It has been widely known that public schools across rural areas in Indonesia have been community ventures. The tradition of schools as community centres become central to intergenerational process of constructing community agency. Schools, in this case, go beyond serving students to become a resource for the broader public. For instance, schools can provide public space for meetings and other activities, promote lifelong learning by establishing a learning resource centre and offering adult education and literacy classes. In addition, schools can lead networking, coordination, and delivery of social services to enhance the community's social infrastructure, and provide space for businesses to train employees or help businesses with their training.

Moreover, one of the reasons why schools need to make connections with the communities in which they exist is that neither are isolated. Gonzalez et al. (2005) acknowledge that connecting daily life with school is a possibility as both are interrelated. Similarly, Taylor and Adelman (2000, p. 298) states: 'Properly done, enhanced connections among schools, families and communities [not only] lead to a marked reduction in [students'] problems' but also resolve a dichotomy between homes and classrooms (see also Gonzalez et al. 2005). When schools become an integral part of homes and communities, students' involvement in school learning can potentially increase (Taylor & Adelman 2000; Haneda 2006). Hence, schools need to show their utmost respect for and appreciation of students' homes and cultures and attempt to make students' experiences in both homes and schools coherent and mutually reinforcing. Making these connections can be incidental, or can be more structured in the classroom.

2. *Strategy 2: Community as Curriculum*

This strategy is connected with a place-based education curriculum, which provides an ideal bridge between the classroom and community development. Developing a place-based curriculum in rural education involves listing community assets that can be used in the classroom.

Place-based curriculum can also help the community build the *culture* of education that both students and adults will become lifelong learners. Student learning will not be limited to what goes on inside the classroom but extends into the community to embrace ecology, economic, and civic involvement, spirituality and living well in the community (Haas and Nachtigal 1998 as cited in Collins 2001, p. 19; Gruenewald 2003; Sugiono 2016).

The *beauty* of a place-based curriculum is that it could play differently in different communities. There should be common themes included in the kind of curriculum. Elder (1998 as cited in Collins 2001, p. 19) notes four themes of place-based education: attentiveness to students' home landscapes, which leads to interdisciplinary study; convergence of natural sciences and the arts through drawing, writing, identifying plants and animals, and studying processes of biological change; time spent outdoors doing systematic, experimental fieldwork that fosters exploration and attentiveness; and human connections to the land that emerge out of exploring the cultural aspects of the community's relationship to its natural history across the generations.

Furthermore, the specialised form of place-based education is rural

service learning, which moves beyond community service. In this stance, students engaged in service-learning projects apply classroom skills to solve community problems as part of their coursework. The work not only enhances a sense of citizenship and a sense of responsibility for the community but also gives students practical skills in thinking about, conceptualizing, creating, planning, leading, and managing projects.

3. *Strategy 3: Schools as Developers of Entrepreneurial Skills*

This strategy puts rural schools in the role of developing students' entrepreneurial skills. Hobbs (1987 as cited in Collins 2001, p. 19) suggests that small businesses, including knowledge-based enterprises, have potential to create new jobs, particularly if they find the right market. It is essential to create new networks and partnerships to support this strategic model. Rural schools need to provide sound basic education, train students to be innovative, teach multiple skills, and enable students to work together in teams to solve problems.

School entrepreneurial programs are on the basis of the premise that students who learn to earn a living and keep in the community are less likely to out-migrate (Collins 2001, p. 20). It is also stated that entrepreneurial students can prosper in the rural community by becoming business owners, creating a new segment of a revitalised middle class, which supports lifelong community education and development by promoting sustainable economic diversity.

Lawrence (1998 as cited in Collins 2001, p. 17) reveals that the fundamental characteristics of a sustainable community are economic security, ecological integrity, quality of life, and empowerment and responsibility. Nurturing these characteristics within a rural school can forge stronger links to the community, strengthen the local economic base, encourage students to live within the community, and increase the likelihood that the school will be adequately funded. Lawrence believes that a school can increase the economic security of its community by encouraging local and national businesses to set up branches within the school, teaching entrepreneurialism, establishing small student-run ventures, and offering local and state incentives to attract business partnerships.

4. *Strategy 4: Technology in Schools and Communities*

In relation to this fourth strategy, there are two fundamental questions, which remain unanswered: Will the technological revolution change teaching and learning in the classroom? Will the technology have a

positive effect on student achievement?

These questions relate to the differences in rate of change. In reality, Indonesian rural areas tend to develop slowly behind urban areas in getting access to the internet. In this case, rural educators in the country need to ensure that they have adequate advocates for rural technological solutions. Collaborations of rural educators are required to hire consultants to determine that the most efficient solution for rural areas is being found. In addition, rural educators can lay the groundwork for not only active participation in the information highway of the 21st century, but for actively leading the world in the creation of high-technology-based jobs and careers. Hence, they can point out that the high-tech communities for which the rest of the world so intensely searches can easily be found in the same place (Chalker 1999, p. 218).

Conclusion

The lower quality of rural schools has brought about a phenomenon known as 'brain drain' among young adults in Indonesia. Somehow, in whatever context it occurs, 'brain drain' provides implications on labour force, public education system and culture of (rural) areas they have left. To prevent 'brain drain', although it is not an easy task, the quality of rural schools should be improved under the perspective of the four aforementioned strategies. In addition to it, with the review of the complexity and 'uniqueness' of rural schools and communities and the features of those strategies, cultural leadership domain seems to be more appropriate to create a school which will be more useful to its local community.

REFERENCES

- Baharun, H. (2018). Penerapan Pembelajaran Active Learning untuk Meningkatkan Hasil Belajar Siswa di Madrasah. *PEDAGOGIK*, 1(1).
- Caldwell, BJ. (2000). 'A Blueprint for Successful Leadership in an Era of Globalization in Learning', a paper presented as an Invited Address at a conference on the theme 'Learning and Leadership: The Global Dimension' organized by the Central Bureau of the British Council, Queen Elizabeth 11 Conference Centre, Westminster, London, November.
- Chalker, DM. (1999). *Leadership for Rural Schools: Lessons for All Educators*,

Technomic Publication, USA.

- Collins, T. (2001). 'Rural Schools and Communities: Perspectives on Interdependence' in Perspectives on Urban and Rural Schools and Their Communities (Eds), *The ERIC Review*, Volume 8, Issue 2, Winter.
- Collins, T & Flaxman, E. (2001). 'Improving Urban and Rural Schools and Their Communities' in Perspectives on Urban and Rural Schools and Their Communities (Eds), *The ERIC Review*, Volume 8, Issue 2, Winter.
- Goetz, S & Rupasingha, A. (2005) 'How the Returns to Education in Rural Areas Vary Across the Nation' in Education, Human Capital and the Local Economy (Eds), retrieved 3 October 2007, from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1b/ea/0e.pdf>
- Gonzalez, N, Andrade, R, Civil, M & Moll, L. (2005). 'Funds of Distributed Knowledge', in N Gonzalez, LC Moll & C Amanti (eds), *Funds of Knowledge: Theorising Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, New Jersey, pp. 257-271.
- Gruenewald, DA. (2003). 'The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place', *Educational Researcher*, 32 (4) pp. 3-12.
- Haneda, M. (2006). 'Becoming Literate in a Second Language: Connecting Home, Community, and School Literacy Practices', *Theory into Practice*, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 337-345.
- Hansen, W. (2007). 'The Brain Drain - Emigration Flows for Qualified Scientists', United Nations University, retrieved 2 October 2007 from <<http://www.merit.unimaas.nl/braindrain/>>.
- Hemingway, MT. (2002). 'Maine's Disappearing Youth: Implications of a Declining Youth Population', a briefing paper prepared for Maine Leadership Consortium, Augusta, Maine, May 2002.
- Peningkatan Akses Masyarakat Terhadap Pendidikan Yang Lebih Berkualitas (Improving People's Access Towards More Qualified Education) 2004, retrieved 3 October 2007 from <http://agribisnis.deptan.go.id/web/dipertan/produkhukum/bab_26_narasi.pdf>.
- Schwahn, CJ & Spady, WG. (2001). *Total Leaders: Applying the Best Future-Focused Change Strategies to Education*, the Scarecrow Press, London.
- Sugiono, S. (2016). 'Social Justice Across Indonesian Schooling', PhD Thesis, Deakin University, Australia.
- Taylor, L & Adelman, HS. (2000). 'Connecting Schools, Families, and Communities', *Professional School Counseling*, vol. 3, no. 5, pp. 298-307.