

Reformulation of the Education System: Negotiating the Gap in Access to Education Through Strengthening Social Capital Capacity

Alce Albartin Sapulette^{1*}, Benico Ritiauw²

Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Ambon¹, Universitas Pattimura Ambon²

Correspondence Email: sapulettealce@gmail.com*

Abstract

The development of the education system in the 3T region has always been a never-ending discourse. Suboptimal development progress, limited access to basic infrastructure, and acute disparities that impact the quality of community education make the 3T region interesting to discuss in order to formulate various functional approaches to the community and regional context, as seen in Abio and Huku Kecil. Using qualitative research methods, this research prioritizes a community-based perspective as an option to formulate an adaptive and functional education system to the objective conditions of the community, by formulating social capital as a basic framework for developing an inclusive and bottom-up education system as an effort to reform the characteristics of the education system that tends to be top-down and direct rules. This research found that the activation of a community-based social approach that includes bonding social capital, bridging social capital, and linking social capital, functions to bridge various strategic educational needs through the active involvement of community members as networked subjects and forming a support system in the implementation of education. The span of regional control that hinders the redistribution of educational resources, without realizing it, frames the creative efforts of the community in overcoming the complexities inherent in itself.

Keywords: education, community, social capital.

INTRODUCTION

Educational inequality has always been a fundamental issue in the effort to produce superior and competitive human resources. Limited access and infrastructure, the availability of educational resources, the economic capacity of families, and even culture is among the many reasons why education remains vulnerable for many communities. This depiction reaffirms the basic proposition that education is not given, but rather constitutive, shaped by various external aspects such as environment, economy, family, and even the most sublime elements like friendship. Isolation has a real impact on inequality, particularly in terms of access to education, as seen in the villages of Abio and Huku Kecil in Elpaputih District, West Seram Regency.

Geographically, Elpaputih District is located about 135 km from the capital of West Seram Regency. The district's administrative center is in Elpaputih Village. This district comprises seven villages, two of which are Huku Kecil and Abio. These two villages are located in mountainous areas with significant isolation. Huku Kecil has a population of 2,107 people, a number almost identical to that of Abio. The journey to reach these two villages is

particularly complex. Road access is only available up to Sumeith Village, while the distance from Sumeith to Huku Kecil is 32 km and 40 km to Abio (Field research data, 2024).

Similar complications are evident in the educational facilities and infrastructure. Inadequate school conditions and the lack of library materials expected to supplement the teaching and learning process hinder efforts to transform education and improve human quality. Why is this situation critical to be addressed? Despite the current educational development direction heavily relying on technology, many regions are still struggling, negotiating complexities just to access basic educational facilities. The educational system's orientation, which emphasizes input-oriented strategies and a macro-oriented governance structure dominated by central bureaucracy, seems to have resulted in a non-linear realization at the micro level (Usman; 2014). Infrastructure issues, educational facilities, and the qualifications of educational personnel are significantly intertwined within the national educational landscape, with considerable impact on the quality of students (Abduh, Basiru, Narayana, Safitri & Fauzi; 2022).

These complexities call for alternative models or approaches to manage education that is both accessible and adaptive to the community's social conditions. This research reflects on the importance of a community-based approach as a preventive step to fulfill basic educational needs by positioning civic social networks as the primary foundation supporting the education system. This concept is commonly referred to in the education system tradition as alternative schooling. Alternative schooling is not meant to replace formal education, but rather to seek new didactic materials and methods (Pradipto; 2007). Operationally, this model of civic social networking is activated through three types of social capital: Bonding Social Capital (close relationships such as family or inter-ethnic relations), Bridging Social Capital (more instrumental relationships such as business associates, acquaintances, and friends from various ethnic groups), and Linking Social Capital (relationships with formal state institutions) (Foxton & Jones; 2011, Putnam; 1993).

The utilization of social capital can be seen as an effort to reform an education system that has long emphasized top-down policies and direct rules, without anticipating the possibility of diverse social conditions with specific local characteristics. This approach provides access for communities to actively participate in development activities, including education. In other words, communities are not positioned as objects but as subjects of policy. Values, norms, kinship, and patterns of social relations function as support systems to back strategic educational programs.

In the case of the Huku Kecil and Abio communities, a major task lies in raising community awareness to view educational limitations and inequality as part of a crisis. The approach described above is seen as capable of being applied, particularly when considering contextual aspects. Contextualization is a serious issue, not only within the landscape of education equity policies but also more technically in the learning curriculum. The social conditions of remote communities, with their specific socio-cultural characteristics, as seen in Huku Kecil and Abio, serve as a prerequisite for the importance of contextualization in education. This is done to ensure that learning traditions are more adaptive and applicable (Nurchamid; 2021). Based on this description, this research article aims to examine how civic social networks are formed, activated, and implemented as a foundation for the education system in Huku Kecil and Abio Villages.

METHOD

The approach used in this study is qualitative. This approach was deliberately chosen by considering the nature of the research problem, where answers in the form of research findings need to be explored through in-depth data collection. Thus, it is expected that this

approach will yield knowledge, understanding, and detailed explanations about the case being studied. The research was conducted in two remote villages, namely Huku Kecil and Abio, located in Elpaputih District, West Seram Regency. In order to access relevant, valid, and reliable data, this study will determine key informants purposively in accordance with the research context. Field data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews and non-participant observation. The in-depth interviews were conducted using an interview guide that had been prepared beforehand, while the observations were made on several social situations as outlined in the observation guide.

Regarding the field data collection process, data validation was also carried out using triangulation methods. Triangulation is a technique used to check the validity of data by utilizing other sources outside the data itself for the purpose of cross-checking or comparison (Moleong, 2005). Of the four types of triangulation methods proposed by Denzin (1978), the process of validating data in this research used source triangulation, in which the researcher compares and rechecks the credibility of data through different times and different key informants. Investigator triangulation was also applied, where the researcher made use of the knowledge or perspectives of other experts to ensure the quality of the collected data. The data obtained in this study were also tested using document triangulation to verify the validity and reliability of the data by comparing it with findings from previous research conducted in the same location.

The qualitative data collected from the field through both in-depth interviews and observations were analyzed through three activity flows. Miles and Huberman (2007) stated that qualitative data analysis occurs through three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction is understood as the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the “raw” data that emerge from written notes in the field. Data reduction is used to simplify and transform qualitative data in various ways, such as through tight selection, summarization or brief descriptions, and then categorizing them into broader patterns, among others.

Data display is an organized assembly of information that allows for conclusion drawing and action taking. Based on data displays, researchers can understand what is happening and what actions should be taken next, whether further analysis or decision-making based on the understanding derived from these displays. According to Miles and Huberman, better data displays are one of the primary ways to achieve valid qualitative analysis. As for conclusion drawing, they asserted that it is only part of a comprehensive configuration process. Conclusions are also verified throughout the course of the research. All meanings that emerge from the collected data need to be tested to ensure their validity and reliability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Scrutinizing National Education Policy

The facts surrounding inequality have long been acknowledged by the State and have become the basis for formulating a number of mitigation policies to ensure equitable education reaches even remote villages. The foundation of policy innovation is at least outlined in Presidential Regulation No. 63 of 2020 concerning the Designation of Disadvantaged Regions for 2020–2024, which includes six main criteria for categorizing disadvantaged areas, including community economy, infrastructure, and regional characteristics. This provision also forms the basis for policy innovations in equitable development across sectors, including education. The primary spirit is as formulated in Article 31, paragraph 3 of the 1945 Constitution, which reads, “The government shall endeavor and organize a national education system that enhances faith and piety as well as

noble character in the context of educating the nation, regulated by law.”

This spirit is operationalized in the mission of the Ministry of Education and Culture as outlined in the 2020–2024 national strategic plan document: First, to realize education that is relevant, high-quality, equitable, and sustainable, supported by infrastructure and technology. Second, to realize the preservation and advancement of culture as well as the development of language and literature. Third, to optimize the participation of all stakeholders to support the transformation and reform of education and cultural management. These missions are then distilled into four main strategic goals of the Ministry of Education and Culture: expanding access to quality education for students that is fair and inclusive, strengthening the quality and relevance of education centered on student development, developing students' potential with character, preserving and promoting culture, language, and literature and mainstreaming them in education, and finally, strengthening a participatory, transparent, and accountable education and cultural governance system.

This formulation serves as a compass for the Ministry of Education and Culture in determining the direction of national development policy in education. One of the most discussed efforts is the improvement of equitable access to quality education services. The Ministry of Education and Culture has set five main strategies to ensure the achievement of this policy direction: improving the quality of teaching and learning, increasing equitable access to education services at all levels and accelerating the implementation of the 12-Year Compulsory Education program, enhancing professionalism, quality, management, and equitable placement of educators and education personnel, strengthening the quality assurance of education to improve the equity of service quality between education units and regions, and improving education development governance, financing strategies, and the effectiveness of education budget utilization.

These provisions are certainly intended to improve the quality of human resources on one hand and equitable access to education services on the other, which are implemented simultaneously through many programs such as the “Guru Penggerak” program, the “Ruang Guru” application, the “Indonesia Mengajar” program, and the School Literacy Movement (GLS) program. These are designed with a common background problem, namely the inequality in the quality of education resources (both human and infrastructure), and limited educational reach to 3T (frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged) areas.

The Reality of Inequality and Its Implications for Education Governance

The progressive spirit inherent in the formulation of the above strategic policies is expected to functionally address problems that arise in the management of the education system. However, a fundamental question arises: how extensive and impactful are the missions, policy directions, and strategic education programs for remote communities? This question serves as an entry point to dismantle the implementation of national education programs, which are specific realities experienced by communities in two remote villages: Huku Kecil and Abio, Elpaputih District, West Seram Regency, Maluku Province.

As an illustration, Abio and Huku Kecil are categorized as isolated areas with complex territorial control. Geographically, Elpaputih District is about 135 km from the capital of West Seram Regency. Meanwhile, the district government center is located in Elpaputih Village, 62 km from Abio and Huku Kecil Villages. These two villages are located in mountainous areas with considerable isolation. Huku Kecil has a population of 2,107, nearly the same as Abio Village. The territorial control to reach these villages is very difficult. Paved road access is only available up to Sumeith Village. The distance from Sumeith to Huku Kecil is about 32 km, and 40 km to Abio. To reach the villages, the only transportation available is motorcycle taxis,

costing around IDR 350,000 for a one-way trip with a minimum travel duration of 3 hours.

Meanwhile, residents travel from the village to the district center on foot with a minimum journey time of 12 hours. Given such complicated and isolated terrain with difficult and inaccessible control, isolation becomes the main cause of hampered educational progress and transformation. In terms of education infrastructure, Abio Village has only an elementary school managed by the Christian Education Development Foundation (YPPK), while Huku Kecil Village has two levels of education: YPPK Elementary School and Elpaputih 3 Junior High School. For secondary and higher education, facilities are only available in the district, regency, or provincial capitals. The complexity of accessing education does not stop there.

The availability and quality of educators also pose a fundamental problem. For instance, in Abio Village, there are only about three civil servant teachers and seven honorary staff. Due to the difficult road access and travel distance, teachers often take up to a week to resume their duties after traveling to the district or regency centers. During this time, teaching responsibilities are taken over by honorary teachers who are all native villagers, most of whom have only a high school education. The lack of infrastructure, facilities, and teaching staff is a serious issue caused by limited accessibility and a lack of sustainable policy intervention.

Optimizing Social Capital Capacity and Community-Based Social Networks.

Several fundamental issues in education development include the availability of educators, accessibility, and facilities (infrastructure). These problems have a tangible impact on student quality due to ineffective knowledge transfer practices. Therefore, optimizing community-based social capital capacity needs to be formulated as an alternative effort to address these gaps. This approach emphasizes the importance of involving the community by leveraging the system's capacity and social networks.

The formation of social actors and institutions has so far played an important role as a safety valve (read Simmel, 1964) in overcoming the various complexities inherent in social realities. However, there is a strategic function that can be optimized to support the education system within communities. Each actor, such as traditional leaders and school principals, represents an institution with different functions and roles. Although different, each is connected to civic nodes that enable the mobilization of community resources in educational practices. At this point, efforts are needed to filter actor and institutional formations to identify strategic networks that can contribute maximally. This must be done while considering the dilemma between status, role, function, and legitimacy.

Referring to Soekanto (2002), a role is the dynamic aspect of a position (status). When someone exercises their rights and duties according to their position, they perform a role. Status is a set of rights and duties associated with a person's position. Precisely at this point, function is realized as the concrete implementation of status and role. However, status, role, and function do not always correlate with legitimacy. This is because legitimacy is entirely related to recognition. There are at least several forms of legitimacy, including: Traditional Legitimacy, where the public recognizes and supports leaders due to lineage; Personal Quality Legitimacy, based on charisma or outstanding achievements; and Procedural Legitimacy, derived through formal processes according to legislation (Surbakti, 2010).

The issue of legitimacy underpins the effort to identify the inherent potential within actor formations and social institutions to find strategic network models. In the context of the Abio and Huku Kecil communities, there is a shared understanding in identifying key strategic actors commonly referenced by the community, namely religious leaders and village heads. These two actors simultaneously justify two forms of social institutionalization: religious institutions and village government institutions. Both actors and institutions are

dominant and possess social legitimacy in mobilizing and consolidating citizen-based social forces. Moreover, they can consolidate various societal components in joint actions, along with other alternative actors such as youth leaders, traditional leaders, and school principals. This ability demonstrates the capacity of civic social systems that can be optimized as supporting components for the development of accessible education systems in Abio and Huku Kecil.

Severe inequality has not entirely hindered the creative efforts of community members in independently addressing limited educational access. Models of civic bonding formed through ongoing interaction are functionally used to navigate acute limitations, particularly in accessing education. Conceptually, civic engagement can be divided into two forms: (1) associational forms of civic engagement, formal associations such as business associations, professional organizations, sports groups, labor unions, etc.; and (2) everyday forms of civic engagement, informal ties seen in routine community interactions (Varshney in Pamungkas, 2005). In different forms, both civic engagement models significantly support community efforts to access education.

The first form (associational) is embodied in family-based networks categorized by cultural similarities such as traditional and village institutions, as well as educational advocacy communities connected to the public such as NGOs or other civil society groups. On one hand, shared culture and a sense of “shared fate” as community members provide opportunities and ease of sustainable educational access, relying on the principle of “baku topang” (mutual support). On the other, NGOs and civil organizations provide support through the distribution of educational tools via service programs. At this point, stakeholder networks are formed to support ongoing educational needs. Meanwhile, the second form (everyday civic engagement) is reflected in daily interactions within the community. Here, the sense of belonging is embodied in practice. In Abio and Huku Kecil, one can still observe situations where groups of students wait for one another to go to and return from school and even complete assignments collectively.

This reality at least demonstrates an alternative space originating from within the community, used as a force to negotiate complexity and disparity. Operationally, these social network models and civic ties are activated through three types of social modalities: Bonding Social Capital (close relationships such as family or inter-ethnic ties), Bridging Social Capital (more instrumental relationships such as business associates, acquaintances, or interethnic friends), and Linking Social Capital (relationships with formal state institutions) (Foxton & Jones, 2011; Putnam, 1993).

The utilization of social capital can be seen as an effort to reform the education system, which has long emphasized top-down policies and direct rules without anticipating the diversity of social conditions with specific local characteristics. This approach provides communities with access and the opportunity to actively participate in development activities, including education. In other words, communities are not placed as policy objects, but as subjects. Values, norms, kinship, and social relations serve as support systems for strategic education programs.

CONCLUSION

The variety of strategic national policy exercises in addressing the need for equitable access to education services for communities in remote areas still faces serious challenges. Isolation, which has a tangible impact on inequality, remains a significant obstacle in ensuring the quality and sustainability of education for these communities. In such circumstances, creative efforts by local communities are evident in negotiating the complexities inherent in educational practices. Strengthening the capacity of social systems through social capital, social networks, and the reactivation of civic engagement models functions effectively to

consolidate societal social forces, utilizing the principle of “baku topong” (mutual support), in order to access various educational needs.

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