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Efforts Toward Child Scavengers' Educational Welfare at the *Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat* School, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses efforts toward child scavengers' educational welfare at Community Learning Centre (CLC), a school in the scavenger community in the dump site area at Sumur Batu Bantar Gebang Bekasi West Java. This is a qualitative study with a descriptive approach where the informants were the principal and teachers at CLC as well as child scavengers and their parents. In this report, conditions and problems associated with child scavengers' education, the objectives and efforts of CLC to date, and the changes that are seen in child scavengers after they received some education are observed and recorded. The child scavenger education problems for example many children are not attending school or have dropped out of school due to the economic conditions of their families, which motivate child scavengers to work either scavenging garbage or at home. The main objectives are to describe and analyse whether the presence of CLC actually helps improve the welfare of children in the scavenger community, especially with regard to the fulfillment of their educational needs.

Keywords: Child welfare, child scavenger, education, poverty alleviation

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INTRODUCTION

Efforts toward child welfare are certainly related to the fulfillment of basic needs. The basic needs approach as explained by Djoke et al. (2010) states that every individual should be able to meet his or her basic needs as a means of support in working to achieve a better quality of life. These basic needs include education, health, hygiene, sanitation, drinking water, housing, and

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access to basic infrastructure. From this perspective, education becomes a matter of concern for child welfare.

Most of the residents in the Bantar Gebang dumpsite area on the Indonesian island of Java engage in "mulung," that is, garbage picking, as their main livelihood. Most scavengers are unskilled migrants and workers who collect garbage such as aluminum cans, bottles, and plastic cups and then sell them. Scavengers who are also parents often encourage their children to be scavengers as well, so that their education is rather neglected (Baines, 2013).

It is necessary to pay attention to child scavengers' education in order to realize their welfare. Research has found that the education of child scavengers is affected primarily by their poverty and the attitudes of their parents toward education. Poverty often causes scavengers to prefer collecting garbage to pursuing education because of their severe need for the money they can earn. Accordingly, education is a lower priority in this situation. Many children are eventually forced to drop out of school altogether because of the poverty of their families.

Education as something that must be achieved in order to realize that child welfare was also discussed by Lehman and Smeeding (1997), who assessed child welfare in terms of cognitive, social, intellectual, educational, and other measures in child development. It can be seen that child welfare is closely connected to child development and that education becomes a way to promote good development .

The link between child welfare and child development was also discussed by Webb (2009), Harden (2004), and Newton et al. (2000), who discussed child welfare more broadly as the set of conditions necessary to support the whole person rather than just the child's physical function. Security and stability are also related to child well-being, functional development, and mental health. Further studies on child development with specific attention to child functioning have revealed the importance of health or physical function along with academic/cognitive and emotional/social development, as mentioned by Webb (2009).

RESEARCH PROBLEMS

Children who live in poverty face many problems that form a barrier to their learning (Santrock, 2010). Like their parents, children in dire economic conditions are at high risk of facing mental health problems (McLoyd et al. as cited in Santrock, 2010) including depression, lack of confidence, conflicts with friends and conflicts with the law, and experience these crises more frequently compared to children from economically stable families.

This confirms that promoting education among children from low-income families should be a top priority. Not only parents but also society and the government play a role in providing children with education. Kabubo-Mariara et al. (2010) mentioned that government intervention was expected to open access to education that could effectively prepare children from poor families to seize the opportunity to escape

from poverty. The community can also play an encouraging role in child education.

For children who do not seek formal education, the support from the community for education at the community level can come in the form of informal education through Community Learning Center (CLC). CLC is a community development institution established by the community under the guidance of Indonesia's Department of Education. All forms of learning activities are based on, by, and for the community. This is a program-based activity, particularly, linked to poverty alleviation programs and education (Direktorat Pembinaan Pendidikan Masyarakat, 2014). To resolve children's education problems, especially those of impoverished children, the field of community school services strives to respond to children's educational needs. As Rose (2006) had mentioned, the concept of the community school was essentially comprehensive, as it included early intervention, access to healthcare and mental health treatment, family resources, support centers, and community involvement.

One form of support available to the community of scavengers at the Sumur Batu dump site is the informal educational institution known as CLC. CLC is present in the scavenging community as a system promoting the welfare of children with regard to education and healthy living from outside the family. As mentioned in the study by Annisah (2014), such external resources can become a source of family strength in the fulfillment of child welfare, especially with regard to education. The ongoing efforts to promote child scavengers' welfare in the scavenger community at the Sumur Batu dump site are fascinating and are the object of this research. The question is whether the presence of PKBM/CLC actually helps improve the welfare of children in the scavenger community, especially with regard to the fulfillment of their educational needs.

The objective of this research is to describe and analyse whether the presence of PKBM/CLC actually helps improve the welfare of children in the scavenger community, especially with regard to the fulfillment of their educational needs.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative method with a descriptive approach in that it attempted to explain and describe the efforts toward fulfillment of child welfare through CLC. The location of the study was the region around the Sumur Batu dump site at Sumur Batu, Bantar Gebang, Bekasi, West Java. Data were collected through in-depth interviews first with principals and teachers at the CLC, an informal school located in the community of scavengers, and later with child scavengers and their parents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Here, we report our fieldwork findings about the fulfillment of child scavengers' educational welfare, incorporating the scavengers' educational problems, the efforts undertaken at the CLC, the CLC's goals with regard to the educational needs of child scavengers and the changes that are

seen in child scavengers after they receive some education at the CLC.

Child Scavengers' Education Problems

The fulfillment of child scavengers' education in Sumur Batu Bantar Gebang Bekasi is obstructed by various problems. Many children are not attending school or have dropped out of school due to the economic conditions of their families, which motivate child scavengers to work either scavenging garbage or at home. The mindset of most scavengers is of a material and financial nature; this is evident from observing the many parents who encourage their children to scavenge garbage to earn money, as garbage scavenging is thought to be an easy way to earn money. Another problem is due to the economic conditions and backgrounds of parents, which influence their parenting and their attitudes toward education. Various problems can affect a child's education for academic and social/emotional or developmental reasons.

The majority of child scavengers are from families who lack local identity cards. As local teacher Mrs. Ty put it, many children are "dropping out of school… because most of them have no identity, [so] they can't have education in formal school" (Personal Communication, March 1, 2017). There are also children whose parents had been married before, then had divorced before marrying again; there are even some children whose parents are not officially married, which profoundly affects the child, as conveyed by Mr. Hk: "Most children here are settled foreigners who do not have ID cards because they were lost; there are also some whose parents have not got a marriage certificate; their marriage was not through civil records, so the children here are affected by many factors related to their parents, many of whom married divorced partners" (Personal communication, March 1, 2017). This is one reason why many scavengers cannot go to public schools, and why many children drop out of school.

Another problem that causes child scavengers to quit school is the condition of the family. To meet their daily needs, whole scavenger families have to go to the dumpsite to collect garbage that can be sold. Conditions of poverty make child scavengers want to help their parents earn money and ultimately to leave school in order to do this, as revealed by Mr. Fr: "there is also [the desire to] help their parents; they say [they feel] sorry for [their] parents and want to help. This usually happens among children who are already teenagers" (Personal communication, March 1, 2017)

Efforts Toward Fulfillment of Educational Needs

Efforts toward fulfillment of child scavengers' educational needs come from citizen awareness and concern for these children's rights, as they are just as entitled to education as any other children are. As stated previously, the majority of child scavengers cannot attend formal school because their parents do not have a local identity, but failure to pursue education can

also be due to the background and present conditions of a scavenger family.

To fulfill the child scavengers' educational needs, there are several activities undertaken at CLC. Some of these activities are undertaken to call attention to the synergy between teachers, children, and parents. First, some of the daily activities at school focus on the practice of daily worship. These activities are aimed at religious growth and the improvement of the children's characters. Every day a morning pledge is read and each child's worship on the previous day is evaluated; after this, learning activities are conducted in the classroom. For preschool classes, there are grades 1–3 learning activities until half past eleven; for grades 4, 5, and 6 and Paket B, learning activities go until noon, followed by dzuhur praying and school dismissal. For class C, school starts at 1 pm and is only in session on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday. This is reflected in the following excerpt: "The activities generate synergy between parents, teachers and children by holding regular meetings with parents and teachers in schools on how to control our children's activities at home. Every morning there is an activity to check whether the five daily prayers were completed, though students usually say that they were completed; if the prayers were not completed, it is likely that the learning activities were also not completed. This occurs about 40 percent of the time" (Personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Objectives Related to Fulfilling Educational Needs

The objectives related to fulfilling the educational needs of child scavengers at CLC are different from those at a more typical school. CLC, being located in a scavenger area and thus serving primarily scavenger children, places more emphasis on character and behavior improvement, worship, and cognitive or academic development. We observed that the current goals at PKBM consist of social/emotional developmental milestones such as character improvement, worship and moral improvement, increased self-confidence, increased motivation to learn, improved insight, and finally better education for scavengers and a lower dropout rate.

Social/emotional development objectives are the preferred achievements in education at CLC. This is because of the child scavengers' conditions, which result in behavioral problems being a greater concern than cognitive and academic development. In the aspect of social/emotional development, common goals are improvement of character, increased respect for the elderly, awareness of courteous behavior, and ability to speak politely. It is also hoped that every program or activity undertaken will improve their worship and religious knowledge, as this can be the basis for them to choose right over wrong deeds. These ideas were expressed by two teachers as follows: "For the child scavengers' education, the first priority is character and the second is academics, because we are now focused on character, as academically

they are far behind the standard. Some are more advanced than others, but these are rare" (Personal communication, March 1, 2017); furthermore, "every program or agenda that we propose is aimed at three achievements: worship, that is, the desire to pray and the ability to review whether their morals are the same as those of their teachers and parents, knowing how to say greetings, and knowing how to talk and get along" (Personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Furthermore, child scavengers are encouraged to be more confident, as they are still able to learn regardless of their conditions, and can even continue their education until higher education. They also encouraged to attend school regularly, be confident, and socialize well with others when outside the scavenger environment. These ideas were summarized as follows: "The first goal is for the children to keep learning and to have dreams, so that the child scavengers will continue to learn and progress to better schools, so that they can have a future and can proceed with their development and not be embarrassed, and so that ambitious goals can help them learn and have an education; they also need to mingle with others and to be confident" (Personal communication, March 1, 2017).

In terms of their cognitive/academic development, child scavengers are expected to acquire the basic skills of reading and writing and an open-minded approach to the outside world. Child scavengers can become more confident as they gain more knowledge, as expressed by an interview subject: "The third academic priority is that they know the latest science. They also need to know that they are social beings and that life at Sumur Batu is not the only kind of life. At this point, they will begin to grow confident as they realize their similarity to other children in formal education. They may have born into a disadvantaged situation but they have a lot of ability. The main thing is that they develop insight and also more confidence" (Personal communication, March 1, 2017).

The importance of CLC's objectives with regard to the cognitive and academic development aspects of child scavengers cannot be overemphasized, because the cognitive and academic ability of the average child scavenger is limited due to their lack of stimulation in the pre-school years. Some children have above-average ability, however, because they have perseverance in learning. It is expected that an education at CLC can enable a child to continue to higher schooling, so that they can improve their living standards by getting access to opportunities other than scavenging.

Changes in Child Scavengers Related to the Fulfillment of their Educational Needs

Educational attainment for scavengers leads to improved development after learning at CLC. As mentioned above, educational attainment at CLC is aimed at emotional/social development such as character and behavior. Cognitive-academic development follows, and eventually change is achieved when child scavengers who have succeeded in pursuing higher education return to their

former environment and become agents of change.

The first changes seen are typically related to social and emotional development, which is of primary concern at CLC. These include changes in character as revealed by the behavior of children who previously spoke and behaved roughly; the frequency of fights diminishes, and their way of speaking to the teachers improves, as reported by an informant: "Changes in child scavengers include more prayer, better character, and better ways of speaking to the same teachers" (Personal communication, March 1, 2017). One of the child scavengers who attended PKBM reported that he had often felt angry before, but he no longer liked to be angry: "I used to like being angry, but after being here, this went away" (Personal communication, March 1, 2017). From this, it is seen that there is an achievement in accordance with the main target of education at CLC, that is, improvements in social/emotional development, and especially character.

Other changes seen in child scavengers after they have participated in CLC include becoming more confident, daring to perform, and not feeling inferior because of their condition. The children receive encouragement from their teachers in order to boost their confidence; for example, a teacher might point out that a student was formerly "not confident [and is] now confident, or formerly could not read the Qur'an [and] now can say 'Alhamdulillah', or used to be shy [and is] now so confident, and can move forward and look forward" (Personal communication, March 1, 2017). Greater confidence gives a child more motivation to attend higher school, as reported by Mrs. Ty: "Who surely is now more educated, has the motivation to have goals, has the motivation to continue [to] higher school" (Personal communication, March 1, 2017).

As for social and emotional development, which is the main target at CLC, child scavengers can show changes, although there are still students present who have not yet started to show these changes. This is because these improvements in child scavengers cannot be achieved through school-based efforts alone, but must also be influenced by parents, family, and the residential environment where children spend a lot of time.

With regard to academic/cognitive development, child scavengers are at a low level and cannot be compared with children in general. Child scavengers in primary school are expected only to be able to read and write and to have the desire for further study, as the following interview reveals: "from an academic [standpoint, they] can read and can memorize, but basically we're grateful they still want to learn" (Personal communication, March 1, 2017). The academic goals for the child scavengers who attend school at CLC consist of improved ability to read, write, study, and continue studying. This shows that the cognitive-academic development aspect of education is not a priority here because education must be adapted to the child scavengers' condition.

One of the objectives related to the fulfillment of education in child scavengers is the production of agents of change from among the child scavengers themselves. Young people who grew up in the scavenging community are more aware and better understand the conditions that exist in the environment and what will be faced. When they are educated to a college level, they can return to motivate the next generation of child scavengers and their parents that education is very important and beneficial for a better life outside the world of rubbish. One example of this is what happened to Mn, who now often provides motivation to scavengers who are in school or who have not attended school: "Now, Alhamdulillah, I can help provide motivation and understanding of the importance of school" (Personal communication, March 1, 2017). Mn now also teaches scavengers who cannot go to CLC near their homes.

DISCUSSION

Any attempt to improve child scavenger welfare, including their educational welfare, must consider the unique conditions and problems facing child scavengers. Through our fieldwork on the educational needs of child scavengers in the scavengers' community at the Sumur Batu dump site in Bantar Gebang, we found that the main problem affecting child scavengers' education is the large number of children who are not attending school or who have dropped out of school. There are various reasons why so many scavengers are not attending school or dropping out, related to the conditions of their families as well as the environment in which they live.

Around the world, children living in poverty encounter problems that are a barrier to their learning (Mcloyd et al., 2009; Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010). These problems can come from within the family as well as from the environment; indeed, the characteristics of a child's environment can affect the child profoundly, especially with regard to his education (Connell & Halpern-Felsher, 1997).

The problems coming from within the family that we identified in our fieldwork include the absence of an official identity, such as birth certificates for the children and identity cards; in the absence of an official identity, scavenger children cannot access the free education that is offered in nearby public schools. Other family problems arise from having divorced parents or single parents. This affects the status and care of the child, as shown by Santrock (2010), because single mothers and parents in difficult economic conditions are more likely to experience stress and less likely to get support. This can certainly have an impact on child development.

The problems originating in the environment include the fact that the community is mostly made up of nomads from outside the Bekasi area. Most also do not have a local identity card. Because of their status and conditions, scavengers are often marginalized and receive no attention from the local people, which means that the scavenger community is isolated. This is in line with previous descriptions of isolated

communities including that of Bowes and Hayes (1999).

Our fieldwork findings confirmed that the basic needs of children such as education and health must be met if they are to achieve a good quality of life (Djoke et al., 2010; Kirst-Asman, 2007). Education is an important tool that can change a child's condition to one of prosperity. Education is also a way to foster child development (Lehman & Smeeding, 1997). The overarching theme of all the CLC's goals is to promote the human development of the scavengers through informal education in the scavengers' community.

CLC exists in the community of scavengers because it was originally intended specifically for child scavengers. However, as it has grown it has also received children from poor families in the surrounding areas who are not scavengers but are in some way unable to attend public schools. CLC cannot truly be considered a community school as defined by Rose (2006) and Agosto (1999), that is, as having grown from and for the community and involving the local community. Although CLC is located within the scavenger community, its funding and support comes from foundations and individuals outside the dump site area who care about child scavengers' education, and furthermore almost the entire teaching staff comes from outside the Sumur Batu area. In practice, however, it is similar to a community school as it aims to develop education, invite family involvement, and provide comprehensive services. In addition, CLC provides education only 3 days per week as an adaptation to the child scavengers' ongoing need to work; this is similar to the steps taken by community schools to embrace the habits and conditions that exist in a particular community.

CLC shares another characteristic of community schools as described by Jones and Stoodley (1999) in that it strives to promote positive values. The community school approach aims to increase students' awareness and to create a school environment that supports each student's character growth. The positive values that are promoted at CLC include religious (worship) growth and the improvement of character.

As for cognitive/academic development, our fieldwork revealed that the child scavengers are expected to learn the basic skills of reading and writing and to acquire an open-minded perspective on the outside world. Aspects of cognitive and academic development are not overly emphasized in child scavengers because their cognitive and academic abilities are typically compromised. As Arnold and Doctoroff (2003) and Duncan et al. (1998) had noted, children living in economically disadvantaged conditions often had poor educational attainment, and poverty in children could eliminate opportunities for high educational attainment. As the economic conditions, family backgrounds and environment of child scavengers has limited their potential for prior educational achievement, the changes that the school aims to promote are primarily focused on social/emotional growth.

In spite of CLC's efforts, not many child scavengers have successfully pursued a university-level education to date. The children who have achieved this have come from the same conditions as most child scavengers, but have nevertheless managed to achieve good results in school; of course, this is also influenced by various sources of support outside the school, especially parents and extended family. Under these conditions, child scavengers can perform well in school. One study found that high-income aspirations among low-income parents were associated with positive educational outcomes at a young age; this is confirmed by the association between children with poor economic backgrounds yet high achievement in school and parents who attempt to provide the kind of living conditions and support that will enable success in school.

CONCLUSIONS

Efforts toward child scavenger welfare, and specifically those related to their educational needs, must start by considering the unique problems and conditions faced by child scavengers. At PKBM/CLC, the main objectives are social/emotional growth followed by academic/cognitive development, based on an understanding of these children's needs. Efforts at PKBM prioritize social/emotional change, that is, improvement of character, rather than academic/cognitive development. These efforts have resulted in improvements in the child scavengers' character, basic skills such as reading and writing, and insight. One of the main goals of CLC is to enable the rise of former child scavengers as agents of change who return to the scavenger community to invite other child scavengers to pursue an education.

It can be concluded that, through careful observation and adjustments by the staff, the efforts toward child scavengers' educational welfare at CLC are in tune with the particular conditions and needs of scavengers. One remaining weakness of CLC's operations, however, is its inability to appeal to child scavengers who are more interested in garbage scavenging to earn quick money than in going to school.

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