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WIDENING ACCESS IS THE END OF STORY? – ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS AND IMPROVING CONTINUATION RATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

(MEMPERLUAS AKSES SEBAGAI JAWABAN – MENJAMIN KESETARAAN AKSES DAN MENINGKATKAN KELANGSUNGAN STUDI PADA PENDIDIKAN TINGGI DI INDONESIA)

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Abstract

In the last two decades, Indonesian higher education system has expanded rapidly in regards to the number of new established institutions and the number of students enrolled in higher education. However, the participation rate within university level is stated as low. In 2016, it only reached 31 percent. It means, although massification has been implemented within higher education system, it is not in line in ensuring equal access to pupils from disadvantaged social groups such as women, lower socio-economic statuses, and students from outer or periphery areas. Rather, it has been evident as a daunting task. Widening participation is not the end of story, since Indonesia should be dealing with another problem which is non-continuation. By performing secondary analysis on several datasets released by World Bank, Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, and Indonesian Statistics Bureau, this paper explores several major findings on accessibility and retention problem of Indonesian higher education.

Keywords: *Accessibility, Higher Education, Continuation Rate, Indonesia*

Abstrak

Dalam dua dekade terakhir, pendidikan tinggi di Indonesia mengalami perkembangan yang luar biasa, terutama dalam jumlah institusi perguruan tinggi. Akan tetapi di sisi lain, angka partisipasi kasar (APK) jenjang Perguruan Tinggi masih rendah. Pada tahun 2016 APK baru mencapai sekitar 31 persen. Artinya, meskipun Indonesia telah sukses melakukan masifikasi pendidikan tinggi, namun belum mampu menjamin akses yang setara bagi penduduk usia pendidikan tinggi, khususnya calon peserta didik yang berasal dari kelompok rentan, miskin, daerah terpencil dan perempuan. Meningkatkan angka partisipasi rupanya bukan solusi akhir, karena perguruan tinggi di Indonesia masih memiliki problem serius terutama terkait dengan keberlanjutan studi. Artikel ini bertujuan melakukan analisis mengenai aksesibilitas dan keberlanjutan di institusi pendidikan tinggi di Indonesia. Data yang digunakan adalah data sekunder yang bersumber dari Bank Dunia, Kementerian Riset, Teknologi dan Pendidikan Tinggi serta Badan Pusat Statistik, artikel ini berupaya menganalisis beberapa temuan penting mengenai aksesibilitas dan permasalahan mengenai tingkat keberlanjutan studi dalam pendidikan tinggi di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *Aksesibilitas, Angka Melanjutkan , Pendidikan Tinggi, Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide higher education (HE) system has been remarkably progressing in the past 30 years, particularly since the end of World War II. As noted by Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2010), there were more than 150.6 million tertiary students in 2001 or increased 53 percent compared to the 1970s. OECD (Organization for Economic Development) predicts the upward trend for at least in the next 20 years (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach et al., 2010; Hill & Wie, 2012). The positive trend of higher participation is also identified as a global phenomenon, because HE massification happens in developing countries as well (Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman, & Vignoles, 2013).

HE in Indonesia has been evidently successful in enlarging its enrolment rates. In 2012, the net enrolment rate sloped upwards from 8.71 per cent (with 816.216 students enrolled in 2005) to 13.28 per cent or 3.4 million students enrolled in various types and stages of HE institutions. The number of HE institutions had been massively growing as well, since there were 3,190 private and public HE institutions in 2012, while there were only 2,079 institutions in 2005 (Directorate General of Higher Education, 2013b; Statistics Indonesia, 2013). Despite its success in HE massification, HE accessibility is still a central issue in education policymaking in Indonesia, and this is vividly evident in several government policies.

While demand of HE graduates in labour market is fascinatingly growing, the number of HE graduates is not able to fulfil the needs. On the other hand, the number of secondary school leavers is far beyond the places offered by tertiary institutions. For instances in 2012, there were 2,9 million high school graduates, while HE institutions could only accommodate 1,1 million new intakes. This also means that 1,8 million high school graduates were forced to enter labour market, while the number of jobs requiring rudimentary education background dropped dramatically (Anonymous, 2012). Therefore, the competition of getting a place at HE institution is very intense and inequality is accordingly inevitable. The pupils from the underprivileged social groups, such as lower socio-economic background and people living on the mainland or in rural area, suffer the most. Keeping the lower socio-economic pupils in HE is also an interesting challenge because many research findings have shown that pupils from the lower socio-economic background are more prone to dropping out of college—widening access is therefore not the end of story. (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Thomas, 2002; Willcoxson, Cotter, & Joy, 2011). However, in

Indonesia, there has been only a little attention given to retention issues, and this is reflected by only a few data available that record continuation rate.

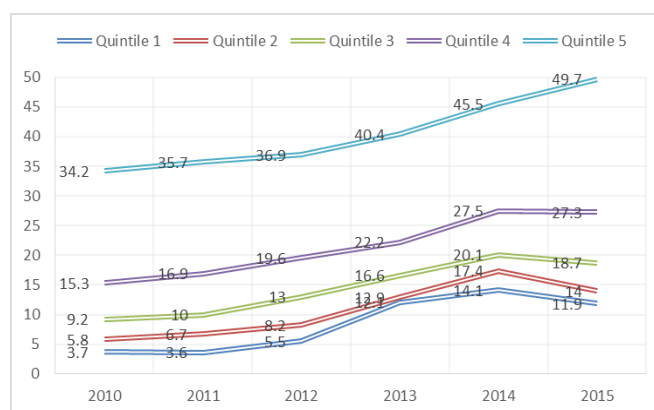
This paper is structured into three parts; the first part goes to the discussion of inequality in accessing HE across social groups—economic status, gender, and geographical area. The exploration of retention issues and review of existing research on continuation is to follow thereafter. At last, concluding remark that sums up core arguments closes the paper.

HOW FAR IS THE INEQUALITY?

The chronicles of HE inequality in Indonesia start with the vast discrepancy of enrolment rate between various economic statuses. As expected, less than 10 per cent of pupils from the lowest economic status (quintile 1, or 20 per cent of the total population) were in HE according to survey data recorded by Indonesian Statistical Bureau during 2010–2012 (Sub Direktorat Statistik Rumah Tangga, 2015).

As shown in Figure 1, empirical evidences of unequal access are crystal clear. Although the rise of school enrolment rate is found in all social class, participation rate of most underprivileged students (quintile 1 and 2) shows a dramatic peak, especially in 2013. Compared to its number in 2010, the number of participation from poorest students (quintile 1) was three times higher in 2015, while in the same year, less disadvantaged students (quintile 2) was almost tripled compared to 2010.

In 2015, the number of participation from the most privileged students (quintile 5) also expanded for around 15 per cent higher than 2010. Middle-class students' participation (quintile 4) also experienced a dramatic growth by almost 12 per cent compared to 2010 (see Figure 1).



Source: Indonesian Statistics Bureau, SUSENAS, 2015

Figure 1. School Enrolment Rate for 19-25 Olds*, Indonesia, 2010-2015

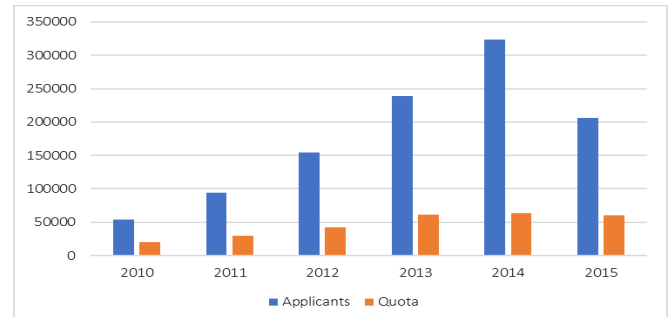
*It is assumed that 19-25 Olds are in post-secondary or tertiary education.

The rising number of participation of middle-class students may be caused by the massive upsurge of the amount of HE institutions. As recorded by Directorate General of Higher Education (2013), in only seven years (2002–2012), 1,098 new private HE institutions were established. However, private institutions are profit-making machines and thus heavily rely their budget on tuition fees which are far beyond the reach of disadvantaged pupils (Fahmi, 2007a; Welch, 2006). On the other hand, the growth of “more affordable” public institutions was very slow, with only 13 new institutions established during the same period (Directorate General of Higher Education, 2013b).

Since 2010, Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture has implemented Bidikmisi Scholarship, which aims to financially help those who have excellent academic records, but unable to pursue HE due to their disadvantaged socio-economic background. Bidikmisi Scholarship is one of the main government policies aimed to encourage poor students to get to HE and minimizing unequal access to HE accordingly (Harijono, 2012). Since it was started in 2010, 88,142 disadvantaged pupils have been receiving Bidikmisi Scholarship—97.8 per cent of whom attending public institutions, while the rest (1.2 per cent) attending private institutions (Sucahyo, 2013). Latest data in 2015 recorded that the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education has funded 276,885 poor pupils through Bidikmisi Scholarship programme (“Peminat dan Daya Tampung Bidikmisi (2010–2015),” 2015). The policy, without doubt, triggered a dramatic rise of poorest pupils’ participations in higher education, especially during 2013–2015 (see Figure 1). It is thus safe to conclude that Bidikmisi Scholarship works successfully in enlarging HE access to underprivileged pupils.

The policy is not without criticism. The number of scholarship given compared to the total school-age population (the population of age-group corresponding to tertiary education) is still far from even. As an illustration, in 2013, the Ministry recruited 61,668 awardees (“Peminat dan Daya Tampung Bidikmisi (2010–2015),” 2015), while the total population of official age for tertiary education alone reached 20 million (World Bank, 2016); therefore, Bidikmisi has contributed far less than one percent to total population. It is also worth to note that relying on giving a scholarship to poor students as a sole policy to combat unequal access to HE may produce disappointment since many of them even fail to manage to graduate from secondary school (Welch, 2006). Nevertheless, the Ministry is committed to gradually enlarging the quota insofar as planning to recruit more awardees in the future (Harijono, 2012; Sucahyo, 2013).

As seen in Figure 2, the number of Bidikmisi applicants were often far more than the accepted awardee. In 2010–2015, around 19–37 per cent of applicants were accepted to be awardees. It implies that Bidikmisi Scholarship is too competitive.



Source: DGHE, 2015

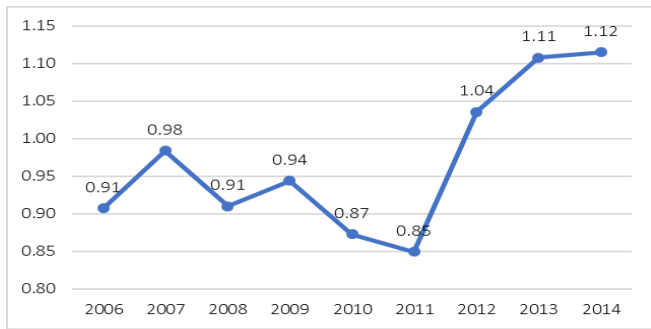
Figure 2. The Number of Bidikmisi Applicants and Quota, 2010-2015

The proportion of awardees attending public and private institutions is also widely criticised, since the gap is too wide. The Ministry seems reluctant to spare scholarship quota proportionately for students enrolled in private institutions due to high fees (Bramantyo, 2013). On the other hand, the competition entering public institutions is highly intense, as the seats offered are very limited. It makes disadvantaged pupils have a slight chance of getting into public institutions.

Research conducted by Macrae and Maguire (2002) and Cabrera and Nasa (2000) argue that disadvantaged pupils solely rely on their school counselor to get information about college entrance or financial aid, because speaking comparatively, their parents are less knowledgeable than middle-income parents. Meanwhile Smyth and Banks (2012) argue that working-class schools and their parents often dampen down their aspirations of pursuing higher level education. Not only having less sources of information, low-income students also could barely afford to pay preparation class for college entrance national examination, which is very common among middle-upper class students to enjoy. Notwithstanding all the hindrance of getting into public institutions, most Bidikmisi Scholarship awardees who are attending public HE institutions are reported performing very well academically (Harijono, 2012).

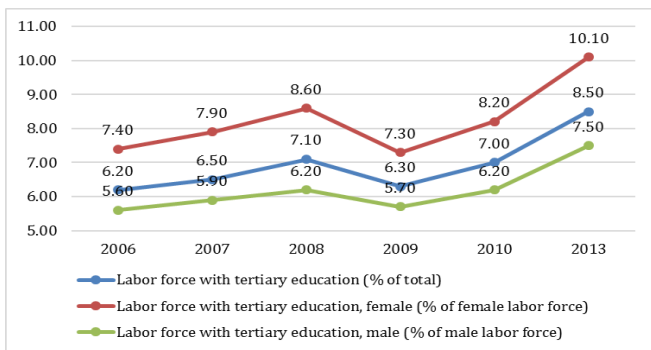
As seen in Figure 3, gender parity index for gross enrolment rate shows rather negative trends. It means HE became more slightly inaccessible for women, especially in 2006–2011, yet started to show a massive upsurge in 2012. Relatively high gender parity also supports a large body of work mentioned that parents has become less discriminative towards girls in regards to encouraging them getting on to higher education

(Wicaksono & Friawan, 2011). However, along with the Ministry's policy to enlarge the quota for more than 12,000 Bidikmisi awardees in 2012, the number of women enrolled in higher education surpassed men. Additionally, progressive modern parents tend to hold a positive outlook on gender and education, so that they think men and women should have equal opportunity to HE. The findings also support other research argued that women have higher returns to tertiary education (Deolalikar, 1993), which also is linked to data presented in Figure 4.



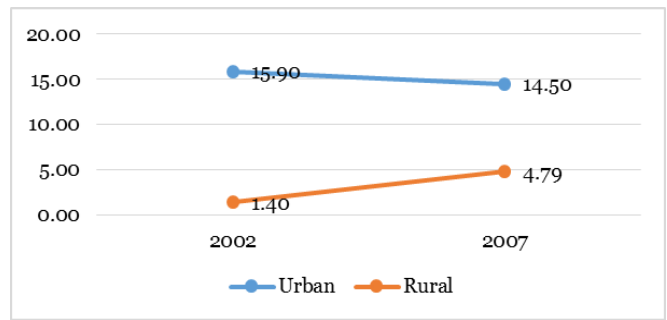
Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, World Bank Databank, 2016
Figure 3. Gender Parity Index for Gross Enrolment Ratio*, Indonesia, 2006–2014
 *Gender parity index for gross enrolment ratio is calculated by dividing the number of women by men enrolled at tertiary level in public and private institutions.

Another interesting finding, female higher education graduates are more employable instead of men, as shown in Figure 4. Figure 4 shows surprising empirical evidences that percentage of women entering labour market with tertiary education surpassed otherwise.



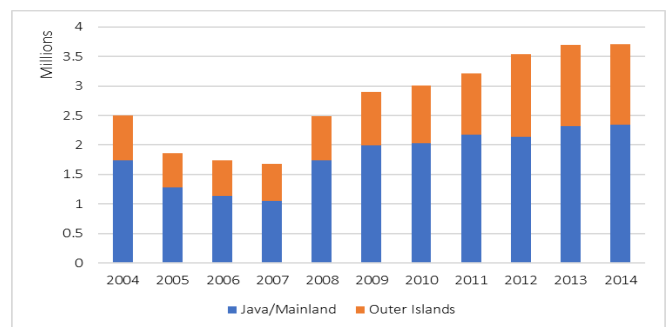
Source: International Labour Organization (ILO), World Bank Databank, 2016
Figure 4. Labour Force with Tertiary Education, Indonesia, 2006-2013

In regards to geographical divergence of enrolment rates, in 5 years, Indonesia had been only able to lift participation of rural pupils, even though it seemed trivial, while otherwise had inconspicuously dropped. Supporting Figure 5, Hill and Wie (2012) reveal that only 15 per cent pupils enrolled in HE in 2007 were rural students. Rural-urban gap in accessing higher education are explained by several factors; (1) limited access to sources of information. Young people living in rural area are less likely to enjoy an easy access of



Source: Demographic and Health Survey, World Bank Databank, 2013
Figure 5. Rural and Urban Gross Enrolment Rate (Post-Secondary), Indonesia, 2002 & 2007

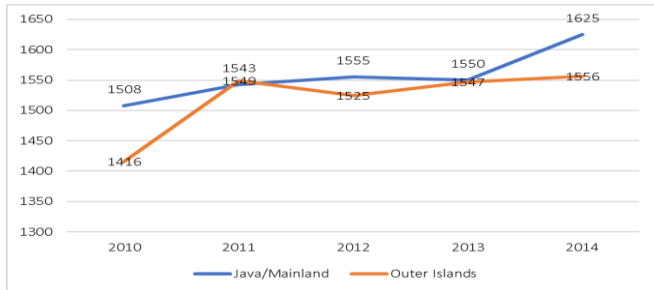
information from various sources, unlike urban students; (2) poverty. Poverty is very powerful in determining HE participation in rural area rather than urban and this is supported by World Bank (2013) records which stated that the number of people living below poverty line were twice more in rural area than urban area in 2011 and 2012. Meanwhile, numerous previous research have confirmed a strong relationship between poverty and education participations (Cabrera & Nasa, 2000; Hayton & Paczuska, 2002); (3) strong centralised tradition whereby all decision making are made in Jakarta, hindered outer islands to catch up their underdevelopment. After Soeharto stepping down in 1998, decentralisation demand was very forceful, giving greater chance to outer islands pupils to enjoy high quality HE. Policies regarding decentralisation and autonomy issues in Indonesian HE, nevertheless, did not quite come off and even turned up very problematic (Fahmi, 2007b; Koning & Maassen, 2012). The trend shows that the gap between Java and outer islands became less wide, as shown in Figure 6 and 7.



Source: DGHE, 2015
Figure 6. The Number of Pupils Enrolled in Tertiary Education across Regions in Indonesia, 2004-2014

Figure 6 and 7 reflect several indications; firstly, centralised ambience of Indonesian HE was very clear, but in 2011, the outer islands HE institution outnumbered Java—indicating a positive sign that centralisation of access to HE institution have been starting to fade. Secondly, while HE institutions seemed to be more expanded in outer islands (and thus the gap has been less wide), the number of students did not follow the pattern. The growth of students in outer

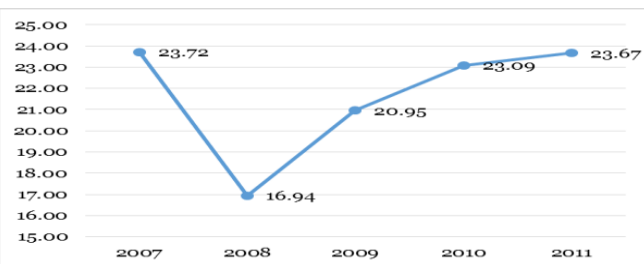
islands seemed very trivial, as even though it showed a substantial improvement in 7 years, in Java HE student population had been growing even more rapidly. The gap, therefore, remained steady and confirmed year-long disparities between regions. It alarmed the government that they have a very serious issue to deal with.



Source: DGHE, 2015

Figure 7. The Number of Higher Education Institutions across Regions in Indonesia, 2010-2014

Reacting to this issue, Directorate General of Higher Education of Indonesia (DGHE) attempts to develop HE infrastructures in outer islands by accelerating the number of established HE institutions in outer islands insofar as sending highly qualified academic staff to work in outer islands HE institutions. Starting since 2011, DGHE has been recruiting thousands of best university graduates all over Indonesia to be educated abroad under Unggulan Scholarship scheme. As the part of the agreement, Unggulan Scholarship awardees should come back to Indonesia and be willing to become teaching staff in various HE institutions, mainly in outer islands (Directorate General of Higher Education, 2013a). As a long-term strategy, DGHE moves in responding region disparities is commendable, so that it is hopefully able to develop HE institutions in outer islands.



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, World Bank Databank, 2013

Figure 8. Public Expenditure* per Pupil as a per cent of GDP per capita, Indonesia, 2007-2011

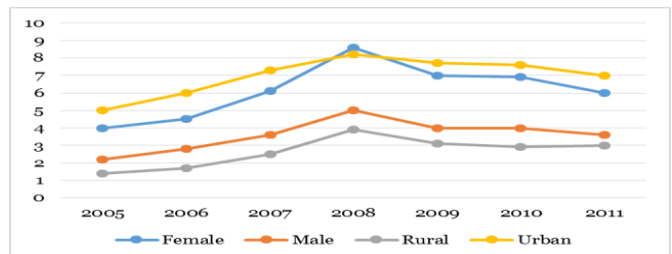
*Public spending includes government spending on educational institutions (both private and public), education administration as well as subsidies for private entities (students/households and other private entities).

Concerns about uneven access in higher education are a major policy dilemma in most countries worldwide, including in developed countries. Untangling the roots of accessibility problem is a daunting task, because financial aspect is not the only factor that hinder pupils from underprivileged groups getting on their education

to the higher level (Chen, 2011; Welch, 2006). Others factors such as social factor (parental encouragement and peer group pressure), students' aspiration of their future, ability to meet minimum entrance qualification (Hayton & Paczuska, 2002), post-school planning, interest in particular subject (Cabrera & Nasa, 2000), students' agency and institutional (school) habitus (Smyth & Banks, 2012) have been proved influential in shaping young people's decision of getting in or not into higher education.

STUDENT RETENTION; IS IT LESS CRUCIAL THAN WIDENING ACCESS?

Non-completion has gained a serious attention in developed countries, such as in United States and United Kingdom. As an illustration, in the US alone, around one-fifth to one-quarter students drop out at the end of their freshmen year and more than half of 4-year undergraduate programme students complete their studies in 5 years (Chen, 2011). Similarly in the UK, exchequer reported that they have to spare around £91 million in order to reduce economic and social wastage caused by non-completion (Christie, Munro, & Fisher, 2004). Non-completion can damage institutions' reputations as well as causing massive wastage to the government and HE institutions budget. In the context of Indonesian HE, according to World Bank (2013), public spending on tertiary education is at least one-fifth of the total GDP in 2011 (see Figure 9).



Source: Center of Economics and Development Studies, Universitas Padjadjaran, 2013

Figure 9. Higher Education Dropout Rate in Indonesia*, 2005-2011

*We treated this data as an estimation, since there was no metadata available in the source, thus the methodology used in getting the numbers is unknown.

According to the Figure 9, the trend of public spending was positive, albeit an exceptional slump in 2008 due to oil price boom, which was decided by the government in mere months before the academic year started. Suppose that non-completion rate in Indonesia reaches one percent of the total HE students population, it can be imagined how much public spending goes into waste.

Regrettably, there has been lack of attention given to this issue in Indonesia and it is shown by unreliable data that straightforwardly represent non-completion condition in Indonesia. Therefore, it is worth noting

that our vindication about non-completion problem in Indonesia in this paper is a mere illustration, so it barely reflects to the actual condition.

Table 1. HE New Intakes and Graduates in Indonesia*, 2008-2014

Year of Entrance	New Intakes	Graduates	Year of Graduate
2008	741060	738260	2012
2009	1090417	807319	2013
2010	1089365	804924	2014

*Including post-secondary non-tertiary (Diploma, etc.) programme and tertiary programme.

Source: DGHE, 2015

Table 1 above gives a first glance of non-completion problem in Indonesia, by comparing the number of new intakes in three batches (2008, 2009 and 2010) and the number of graduates in the next 4 years after the intake (assuming that the new intakes were supposed to complete their studies in 4-year period). As seen above, there was indeed discrepancy between the number of intakes and the graduates. However, the numbers presented are imprecise in reflecting non-completion due to several reasons; (1) these numbers include post-secondary, non-tertiary and post-graduate programme which require various length of study. Four-year undergraduate students, however, are vast majorities with around 70–80 per cent (predicted) of total numbers given above; (2) if incongruity between the number of intakes and graduates is present, it does not necessarily mean non-completion. There are other possibilities exist, such as students who take more than 4 years to complete their degree, are transferred to other HE institutions, or depart from HE institutions, but start over their first-year elsewhere.

The only legitimate data in regards to dropout rates was provided by DGHE (Pusat Data dan Informasi Ilmu Pengetahuan Teknologi dan Pendidikan Tinggi, 2015) in 2015, which report that the number of dropout students were 286,728 or 4.69 per cent of HE students population. It therefore implies that retention problem need serious attention from the government.

Figure 9 depicts clearer picture of dropout problem in Indonesia. As seen above, female was more likely to dropout than men, while urban students were less likely to withdraw their study compared to otherwise. The dropout rate reached the peak in 2008 and it might be related to the massive rise of oil price in the same year. Having looked at all data available, it is safe to conclude that non-retention problem in Indonesia does exist, but it is very hard to assess how serious the problem as well as its impact due to lack of available data.

Retention problem essentially is strongly affected by the interplay between pupils' personal background and their interactions with the institutions, as Willcoxson et al. (2011) argue. Departure from HE institutions would not happen if students managed to integrate themselves into HE institutions' academic and social system (Chen, 2011; Macrae & Maguire, 2002). Lack of financial support often to be mentioned as the ultimate cause of early departure, but this is often not the case, because poor post-school planning is proven to be more essential than financial matters. This is supported by the fact that most college dropouts in the US are freshmen, simply because they feel that they had chosen the wrong course (Chen, 2011).

Underprivileged students are more exposed to the risk of dropout, because they are less likely to get information of course choice and financial aid available, while these factors are very prominent in making good post-school planning. Underprivileged students are mostly the first generation in their families who include post-secondary education as their future aspiration. Therefore, information regarding what should they prepare before getting on to the university is completely unavailable in their family.

During their life in university, low-income students also have very limited sources to keep them going on—lack of parental support and financial aid compared to otherwise (Chen, 2011; Christie et al., 2004). In Indonesia, despite getting full financial aid from the government, Bidikmisi awardees often have to deal with a massive delay in scholarship disbursement, while they solely rely on the scholarship to fund their studies (Kustiasih & Kurniawan, 2013). Widening access to poor pupils is therefore crucial, but providing them with necessary support prior to getting in to university and during their academic life in university should not be forgotten.

Structuring post-secondary school system is also very vital to counteract early departure in HE. Research conducted by Smyth and Banks (2012) has shown that the interplay between individual and familial habitus, school or institutional habitus, and pupils' agency brings about better explanation regarding transition to HE rather than solely grasping social class differentiation.

CONCLUSION

As criticised by Hill and Wie (2012, p.231) Indonesia is “an educational latecomer and laggard” due to colonial neglect and poor economic performance in the first two decades after independence. However,

Indonesia is now catching up and showing positive trends in accelerating HE quantitative expansion. First things first, opening more HE institutions all over the country, especially in outer islands is indeed very crucial to meet the massively growing demands as well as narrowing region gaps. In addition, some aspects that are open for further state intervention, such as direct appropriateness to HE institutions, tuition fees, financial aid to pupils, and preparation (academic and other necessary preparation) during secondary school also need a proper attention (Perna & Titus, 2004).

Nevertheless, Indonesian government has paid too much attention to widen HE access, while other equally important matters have not been really taken care of. Most importantly, improving education quality needs to be appropriately considered. Indonesian higher education graduates are often criticized as not being ready to face a real work setting insofar as lecturers' low-qualification. Indonesian government, responding to these problems, starts to widen opportunities for HE lecturers' to pursue their higher degree abroad with the hope to raise the number of international publications (Directorate General of Higher Education, 2013a). Scholarship programme, both from national budget and various foreign funds, has been massively growing since 2009 and is a quite well-received policy. Preparing students to be ready to face real work setting has been taken seriously by the government. In 2011, the government passed a law that orchestrate the interplay between work and education sector, namely Indonesian Qualification Framework (IQF). IQF aims to equalise and to integrate formal education with work training or work experience. IQF is now starting to be widely used as a criterion in work competence formulation ("Penyelarasan Pendidikan dengan Dunia Kerja : Pencarian," 2014).

Even though Indonesian HE has been massively expanded, ensuring equal access for underprivileged students is taken partially by Indonesian government, as most policies mainly concern on financial matters. Therefore, Indonesian government only sets up a policy on giving financial help to poor pupils, but has not been concerned on making sure that those poor pupils are resourceful to finish their degree. Lack of attention has been given to structuring secondary school system that supports the transition to higher education, while it does not only encourage secondary school leavers to progress their studies to higher level, but also help them to prevent them from withdrawing their studies.

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