Distance Education: A Challenge for Higher Education in Indonesia

M. Rosul Asmawi

1Universitas Islam Syekh-Yusuf, Tangerang, Indonesia
Email: mrosul@unis.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of educational program for all through distance learning is expected to match with the condition of Indonesia’s geography, demography, and culture that vary from one place to another. In terms of the implementation of the nine-year basic education compulsion program, Indonesia has carried out various programs, such as Package A (equal to elementary school) and Package B (equal to open junior high school) programs in many parts of provinces in Indonesia. This ‘open junior high school’ model has even been adopted as ‘open Islamic junior high school’ in other provinces. At the level of tertiary education, there is open university, as stated in the Act on National Education System No. 20 of 2003.

INTRODUCTION

There is still a very relevant fact that many people around the world today, especially in the developing countries with many populations, are still illiterate. To address it, in 1987, UNESCO launched the APPEAL campaign, ‘The Asia and Pacific Programme of Education for All’. The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) was then held in 5th – 9th March 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, with a joint UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA, and World Bank initiative. From this, it is clear that the world through its organizations still concerns to the backward society; which is ironically still exists in the era of globalization today.

The important point of the World Declaration on Education for All in Jomtien states that primary education is more important than completing the education itself. Primary education is the foundation of lifelong learning and human development, and...
on that basis, the countries can build systematically the level of further education and training.

The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) states that the scope of primary education includes: (a) early childhood care and education; (b) universalization of basic education; (c) literacy programs; and (d) continuing education and lifelong learning. Indonesia, based on the 1945 Constitution and the Law on National Education System No. 20 of 2003, states that every citizen has the right to education and the government is responsible to provide it. It means that the government is an innovator for the society to improve their education in such a way, so that the level of quality of education in the future will be much better.

The prolonged economic crisis that Indonesia has faced over the past year has caused many families, especially poor families, unable to send their children to school so that the number of dropouts continues to grow every month. Realizing that education is a key factor to improve the quality of human resources and in shaping the future of the nation, the government must continue and prioritize the nine-year compulsory education policy (Indonesian: WajibBelajarPendidikanDasar, or WajarDikdas), which is inspired by the spirit of Jomtien and the mandate of the Act.

The government’s serious commitment to achieve the success of WajarDikdas can be seen from the offering of scholarship programs for economically disadvantaged students through the Social Safety Net program that has been running for several years. This program is held since WajarDikdas serves as the basis for further advanced education. In Indonesia, EFA begins with WajibDikdas and runs in cross-sectoral lifelong learning from pre-service training to in-service. To anticipate the shift of transformation from agricultural-based economy to industrial-based economy, WajibDikdas must be expanded from 6 to 9 years including 3 years of junior high school education, which also strives to maintain the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the high school level, it is known as the Package C program, as well as in higher education, with the open university program.

The appropriate goal of education should not be saving the system, but rather enhancing the lives of many people by providing a higher quality, more effective, faster education at an affordable cost. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26).

METHODS

The principal aim of the research study is to describe and analyze how a distance learning is expected to match with the condition of Indonesia; using a qualitative approach to uncover what has occurred in the field, both factual and hidden.
In this research study, several techniques are used: (a) in depth interview; (b) observation; and (c) documentation. Determining informants is carried out using a snowball technique. The informants were selected based on preliminary information about parties involved and determining a distance learning.

Data analysis used a qualitative method, where collected data in the form of trimmed findings relevant to events or cases according to research focus, was presented in a narrative. Thus, the data presented are descriptive, factual and systematic. The next process is the conclusion drawing, data analysis is conducted in logical explanation, in which both data are qualitative and quantitative (secondary data) provided with complementary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Indonesia’s Real Geographical, Demographical and Cultural Condition

As it is known, Indonesia is the largest archipelagic country in the world that includes 7.5 million km$^2$ of territorial sea with 1.9 million km$^2$, which means that the territorial sea is much wider. Today’s Indonesian population according to the 2003 population census are around 250 million people, inhabiting 700 islands out of 17,000 islands scattered throughout the archipelago. In terms of culture, there are more than 300 local dialects. Through the Youth Pledge of 1928, the Indonesian people declared one language namely Bahasa Indonesia. This condition makes the problem of equity education and training difficult to be implemented in conventional ways or by face-to-face education. With this condition, then distance learning/education is an alternative to educate the nation.

In the early years of independence, only a few people can enjoy formal education let alone who can study in college. It was only in the early seventies that the great efforts were made to improve the educational profile; the results could be seen in the improvement of the six-year compulsory education (WajarDikdas 6 Tahun) from 50% in 1968 to over 95% today. Approximately 65% of primary school graduates continue up to junior high school, the next 3 years. In the year 2003/2004, the government strives for distance education programs for senior high school level, spread across various cities/districts throughout Indonesia.

The introduction of the nine-year compulsory education program (WajarDikdas 9 Tahun) in 1994 was to anticipate the challenges of globalization. Rapid industrial growth, tight competition in economic life, and rapidly changing needs which are controlled by the rapid development of science and technology is a feature of globalization. For Indonesia, globalization has resulted in a shift in transformation from an agriculture-based economy into an industrial-based economy that requires human resources to better adapt to rapid and dynamic change. This condition is a reality, where the world of education can always reach various layers of society, including geographic and demographic conditions.

Approximately 13,1 million children were targeted for nine-year basic education program in 2004, but due to the limited capacity of the conventional system, 2,25 million of them must be accommodated through the open junior high school (distance learning system). Education for All through distance learning is expected to address geographical conditions faced by many places around the country. Geographical conditions such as inaccessible mountain lands, remoteness and alienation of places where many people live, and the lack of conventional education systems to meet educational needs make distance learning an effective solution for reaching the
unreachable places, although it is also important to note that the distance learning system also has its own problems, such as the delivery of education modules and information problem.

Some considerations on effective methodological use in various education and training are demonstrated by the open junior high school (SLTP Terbuka), due to its ability to:

a. Optimize the use of a limited number of human and non-human resources;
b. Overcome the geographic, economic and cultural constraints;
c. Provide equality, access, and quality for disadvantaged students;
d. Provide learning flexibility;
e. Address the limitations of classrooms and teachers;
f. Serve the students with different social and characteristics;
g. Operate at a fraction of the cost of conventional (regular) schooling systems;
h. Produce graduates with standard achievements that can be compared with regular school graduates;
i. Develop active and independent learning habits; and
j. Familiarize the concept that learning can happen anywhere.

(Sadimandan Rahardjo, 1997).

The last two things mentioned above are a critical component of lifelong learning. Distance education is education whose learners are separated from the educators and their learning are using various learning resources through communication technology, information and other media (Act No. 20 of 2003, Article 1). Distance education serves to provide educational services to community groups who can not attend the face-to-face or regular education (Act No. 20 of 2003, Article 31 Paragraph 2).

In relation to the future paradigm, Reidar Roll, the Vice-President of ICDE, stated in the opening before the International Symposium on the Future Vision on Distance Learning in Bali in 1997, that the future paradigm with the global trend is a multi-media marketing direction. The strength of the direction of globalization will bring about changes in education and training. New pedagogy and learning methods are needed. There will be a change of skill structure and knowledge to support continuous and lifelong learning to prepare industrial workers. The development of human and economic resources will be a major concern for developing countries. Education policies should be applied to erode poverty towards balanced economic growth. The high technology that growing today is expected to respond to educational challenges that are still uneven and can be utilized in reality. In relation to this, distance and open learning will take an important role in promoting education equity (Rol, 1998).

**Education For All (EFA) Status In Indonesia Today**

The Directorate General of Out-of-School Learning, Ministry of Education and Culture, since 1987, has been an active participant in the UNESCO’s APPEAL program, which is characterized by lifelong learning. A growing appreciation of distance learning effectiveness in Indonesia using a combination of printed materials, media, practical training and tutorials support the nine-year compulsory education (WajarDikdas 9 Tahun), which was launched in May 1994.

The nine-year compulsory education program has been implemented both through formal and non-formal education. Through a formal approach, the WajarDikdas
program is implemented at the level of primary and junior high school education. The target is children ages 6 to 15. While the non-formal approach is implemented using Package A and B.

There are two strategies to be taken for the implementation of Package A program, those are the regular program for people aged 10 and 44 years old which is expected to eliminate totally the illiteracy until 2004, and the literacy programs for people aged 45 and below to motivate them to learn. The society organizes Package A participants in group learning to master a series of 100 textbooks. The package contains practical knowledge of the various subjects that have been designed in accordance with the teaching program (FauziadanYuhetty, 1998).

The targets of Package A's equivalency learning program are elementary school-aged children who learn to gain equalization. The program aims to help them obtain a primary school diploma. For those who complete and graduate the Package A program may proceed to Package B program or move to high school program. Package B is meant for secondary school education that provides both general education and skills training for students who unable to attend regular junior high school due to misfortune or drop out of school (SadimandanRahardjo, 997).

In addition to the above two approaches, the Government of Indonesia is also developing a continuing education program, which is intended to provide adult students who wish to gain knowledge or gain skills. The program is presented through a variety of subject matter, training and internships offered by community-based education (out-of-school education). The community-based education has proven to be effective for training that requires skills to be distributed to organized learning groups in remote villages and for that the Community Learning Center (CLC) should provide access to easy learning resources. CLC as a method of learning can provide great benefits for students, who due to their busyness working and helping parents, can provide lessons that they did not get during their absences.

This functional skill program requires the development of flexibility in terms of time and place. Skills selection for training should be tailored to market demands; natural resources and local potential; and the opportunity to get an existing job. These efforts should be made to cover a wider society, especially those living far from the city, due to geography and demographic and cultural factors. CLC will be effective, if this education leads to skill training to get a job. Lack of staff, funds, facilities and time makes this lifelong learning education initiative difficult to realize; when relying only on conventional systems. In a developing country like Indonesia, this situation is further compounded by obstacles such as socio-economic, geographic, and scattered populations. That is why open education/distance learning using communication technology is badly needed in order to seek equal distribution of education in order to educate the nation.

The Government of Indonesia has been aware of such thinking, and since 1991, has developed skills training programs such as agriculture, haircut, mechanics/automotive, handicrafts, bamboo crafts, etc. and in collaboration with Indonesian Education Television (Indonesian: TelevisiPendidikan Indonesia, or TPI), a private television station to broadcast the program to so that the intended target can be achieved, even though it takes a long time and a sustainable process.

Currently the Ministry of National Education is preparing an educational TV program that is broadcasted directly by PT Media Citra Indostar through the DBS Cakrawarta non-paid channel and educational radio program that is broadcast via Star
Asia Satellite (World Space Company), which in reality is not widely known by the public.

Open Junior High School

Beginning as a pilot project in 1978, the open junior high school was intended to anticipate the 1980 primary school graduate outburst as a result of the President's Instruction on Elementary School Project, the elementary school construction project through Presidential Instruction. The targets of this school are 13-18 year olds who are unable to attend school due to socio-economic and geographic problems. The open junior high school is part of the formal education system that uses the same curriculum and criteria with regular junior high schools. However, unlike regular schools, the open junior high school applies different treatments to the learning process i.e. a distance learning and self-learning methodology, where learners can study at home and the learning time is 4 to 5 times a week (2-3 hours on average a day).

Currently, there are 3,773 locations with 225,021 junior high school students spread across 27 provinces; including East Timor while still being part of the Republic of Indonesia. According to the plan, the open junior high school program was expected to be able to absorb 2,250,000 children or adolescents aged 13-18 years, and in 2000 there were more than 13,000 open junior high schools built, so that in 2004 the misfortune students because of certain condition and certain reason would enter the schools. Open junior high schools today are still there, although public interest is much less. At the central level, the implementation of the open junior high school is conducted by a combined technical team, each forming a special Task Force, namely:

1. Development Task Force based in Pustekkom, responsible for the development and production of master learning materials;

At the provincial level, the management of open junior high school is run by a Provincial Team responsible for logistics, monitoring and distribution infrastructure. Open junior high schools primarily use structured distance learning media, such as modules (printed), audio cassettes and other related learning materials. Primarily they are self-study materials for small study groups supervised by a tutor.

Unlike regular school students who have 27 hours of face-to-face time per week on a 4.5 hour daily basis, 6 days a week, open junior high school students are self-taught 4 to 5 times a week (2-3 hours on average per day) at the Learning Place (LP). However, open junior high school students are also required to attend 4 hours face-to-face time with the tutor, a school teacher at the Mother School once or twice a week. Members of study groups at the LP organize their learning schedule with the tutor. The time spent in face-to-face meetings depends on their own (SadimandanRahardjo, 997).

The Adoption of Open Junior High School Model With Other Systems

Continuing the success of open junior high schools that implement distance learning in terms of the delivery system, Madrasah Tsanawiyah, Islamic junior high schools, since 1995, has adopted the concepts and principles relating to the students of PondokPesantren (Islamic boarding school). PondokPesantren is a community initiative under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Traditionally, PondokPesantren only teaches Islamic knowledges. By participating in the delivery
system adopted by open junior high schools, *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* are now also required to teach general subjects such as Physics, Mathematics, English, Geography, etc. Since 1995, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has established open *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* in 12 provinces.

The status of Islamic education in the national education system in Indonesia according to Act No. 20 of 2003 is stated in Article 30 Paragraph 1 to 4. *Pondok Pesantren* is basically a formal education that has more value when compared with regular education, considering in addition to teaching general subjects; it also has a good religious material tradition (Soedijarto, 1997)

**Distance Learning In Higher Education**

In addition to the programs at junior and high school level, now the government has opened a distance learning at higher education level, through the Open University (OU). The purpose of distance learning is to provide opportunities for people in remote areas of the country, who due to geographic, demographic and cultural constraints; unable to get a higher education. With the Open University (OU) program, learners can learn independently with the modules they receive with and without help from the tutorials (Fauziadan Yuhetty, 1998).

In some cities and districts in Indonesia, face-to-face tutorials are given by lecturers who have been prepared; the schedules are adjusted to the conditions of the students. In fact, this distance learning program, not only reach people in remote areas, but also those in urban areas or in offices. What interests them the most; including the office employee, is a OU graduate earned the recognition and equalization of career jobs.

However, it is also important to note that to complete the undergraduate program is relatively time-consuming, when compared with the same level on the regular program. The average time required to complete the study ranges from 5 to 7 years; some people even need more than that. The interesting thing to get into the OU is the relatively affordable cost of education. The fundamental issue of these OU graduates is the relative average graduate quality under graduates of regular programs; especially regarding the mastery of theoretical analysis and innovation. (Act No. 20 of 2003 on National Education System).

This distance learning, set out in Act No. 20 of 2003 on National Education System, Article 31 Paragraphs 1 to 4; which can be organized on all paths, levels, and types of education.

**Problems as Challenge**

In addition to hope and success, the contribution of distance and open learning in helping to complete the nine-year compulsory education; including distance learning in higher education program in Indonesia is not free from obstacles. From the technical aspects there are several important things, those are:

1. Management issue for tutors, who are mostly elementary school teachers and have no experience at all in distance learning methodology.
2. Production problem for developers of self-study materials because the number of people who can develop and produce such materials are still limited.
3. The problem of distribution of learning materials, this problem arises because of geographical conditions where the range of postal services is still limited. This usually results in delays in the delivery of learning materials.
4. In terms of higher education, the availability of tutorials is still a constraint; including concerning the culture of the people who always take shortcuts to get the passing score; thereby directly affecting the quality of the graduates (Sadiman, 1996).

From non technical aspects, the constraints are as follows.
1. Early marriage habits occur among school-aged children to impede schooling;
2. Lack of public awareness about the importance of distance learning causes parents and communities hesitate to send their children to open schools/universities.
3. With the proliferation of undergraduate programs and facilities provided to students; today’s public interest to get into distance learning is decreasing.

All of that are the causes of all the problems. If these remains unsolved, it is feared that distance learning will be difficult to implement. One solution that can be done is to socialize the methodology through campaigns such as providing explanations, launching the socialization of materials, providing student services, and increasing the access to learning resources. The decline of the community to follow the distance learning was seen at the end of 2003, considering the quality of graduates, especially from undergraduate degree was considered very inadequate; including the refusal to accept at the masters level from OU graduates. This condition is a reality, that the level of progress and ease of entry on the regular program causes the paradigm of society shifted toward a more effective, including quality assurance graduates that can be absorbed in agencies and institutions. However, in some parts of the country, distance learning is still an appropriate alternative to increase knowledge insight as much as possible for the people and the nation of Indonesia.

**Evaluation**

Distance learning in Indonesia is designed to meet the requirements of community targets with learning materials for self-employed students. This is appropriate for environments where students have the opportunity and support to make their choices by referring to their own specific learning needs. With this study, some of the benefits can be drawn as follows:
1. That the education system in a country as large as Indonesia should be flexible to cover different geographical and socio-economic conditions.
2. In order for the work system to be more efficient, it must have a competent management team.
3. Due to the complexity in system development, from academic to administrative, the implementation of the program must be efficient and effective.
4. Coordination of development, production, and distribution of materials; staff development and training; the existence of a learning center; counseling and assistance for students; test and evaluation; organizing files and administration in general at the centers and areas that require the full attention of the management team.
5. Program evaluation is seen as important, but rarely done seriously. Program evaluation will not occur if it is not developed in program activities and has a clear allocation of financing. Evaluation will be more successful if done by an independent body.
CONCLUSION

Considering the above description, this study provides insight to the public at large, that distance learning is an alternative to educate the nation. Here are some conclusions, among others, distance learning provides alternative in developing knowledge and skills through the provision of education and training services for communities in areas where finances, teachers, facilities and infrastructures are scarce. The implementation of distance learning in developing countries may differ depending on local conditions, but it has one thing in common: the provision of wider, more accessible, and flexible service opportunities for learning for those who are unable to attend regular schools.

The involvement of those concerned with distance learning and the mobilization of the existence of natural resources and capabilities will be a solid foundation for distance learning as the basic framework of lifelong learning in an educational context for all in the next millennium. With all the limitations available, distance learning is a promising alternative in educating the nation through various levels of education, especially those concerning aspects of geography, demography and culture.

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