

# THE MEANING OF SCHOOL FROM DROPOUT'S VIEW POINT (A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY)

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## Abstract

Student dropouts are complex problems in Indonesia. Some of the dropouts living in rural areas have migrated to the large cities. It contributes to the child labor growth which is already one of the major problems in Indonesia. Knowledge about the meaning of school from their perspective could be helpful for policy and programs related to dropout prevention. The purpose of this research was to explore the meaning of school according to the dropouts and the barriers of getting back to schools. This study was a phenomenological study involving 5 adolescents who have dropped out from schools. In collecting the data, we conducted open-ended interviews. Triangulation and reflection of researchers being used to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity of the data. The results show 4 themes regarding the meaning of school emerged from the data. These are to make more friends, to please parents, to get the diploma, and a place to study. We also found 3 themes about the barriers to get back to school such as feeling ashamed, having no friends, and having already jobs. The forms of educational systems that encourage schools and teachers to pay attention to group activities, friendship in schools and job schedule seemed to be in line with the findings about condition of school dropouts in this study.

**Keywords:** student dropouts, meaning of school, phenomenological study

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## 1. Introduction

School dropouts were still a problem of Indonesian education. According to UNICEF & UIS data (2011) there were 3.79 million dropout children in Indonesia, and this was the largest number in Southeast Asian countries. Utomo, Reimondos, Utomo, McDonald, & Hull (2014) mentioned that the main cause of dropping out of school was economic reasons. Although elementary and junior high schools had been free, but parents still had to pay for transport, uniforms and reading instruments. In addition to economic reasons, geographical and socio-cultural conditions also cause many children to drop out of school.

The existence of school dropouts in Indonesia were a serious problem that must be addressed by the government. In Government Regulation No. 47 of 2008 state that compulsory education was a minimum education program that must be followed by citizens on the responsibility of government and local government.

Many Children, who drop out, were looking for job in big cities. The work gained, according to their educational capacity and skills, was a menial job. Based on data from SUSENAS (Patunru & Kusumaningrum, 2013) the highest

central working place of children under 18's was the city of Jakarta, followed by other cities in East Java, West Java, Central Java and Banten. BPS & ILO data (2009) says there were 3.6 million children under the age of 18 who become workers.

The number of native dropouts in Yogyakarta city may said to be very small. Yogya city's BPS data shows that there were only 0.01% of school dropouts at 2013. But as explained above, urban areas including Yogya city became the destination of school dropouts from the surrounding area to work. Some of the rough work they do such as peddler and shopkeeper.

The remain high number of dropouts in Indonesia required holistic solutions, not only physical treatment such as providing free schools and packaged programs. Dewi, Zukhri, Dunia, & Erg (2014) found that some causes of drop out among them were parental factors, child's interest and culture. A qualitative approach studies were required for Solutions of these factors.

Itsaini's (2015) qualitative study about the causes of Junior High School dropouts in Yogya City found that the internal causes of the students drop-out were due to laziness, weak academic ability and the economic condition of the parents.

Demartoto's research (2008) in Surakarta found that insufficient program to solve the problem of dropouts was due to the ineffective communication of the organizers to the parents or the children.

Man is a conscious being, in which every behavior was strongly influenced by meaning and values. A person who was hungry can be survive to not eat even though there were plenty of food in front of him while fasting, because there was something more valuable to him than eating. Therefore, other things can be extracted to solve the problem of dropouts are about the school meaning for dropouts, as well as the reasons why they do not want to returned to school. These reasons can sometimes be known directly but are often hidden in their innermost views and thoughts. Qualitative research is very useful.

## 2. Method

The epistemological base for this study was constructionism. The nature of knowledge according to constructionism perspective is that the meanings of human reality are not discovered, but are constructed by human beings (Crotty, 1998). The construction of meaning required active engagement in the real world. The process of meaning construction, from this perspective, always involves intentionality and consciousness (Crotty, 1998).

The study used phenomenological approach, which assumes that reality was the construction of human consciousness. It means that experiences in human beings will produced certain meanings because of his consciousness. The data collected by in-depth interview technique to five drop outs who work in Yogyakarta city. The selection of five participants was done by purposive technique and snow ball. Their age was between 16 to 18 years old. School dropout they experienced was more than a year on the grounds of having sufficiently experienced as a school dropout identity, according to the phenomenon that became the focus of the study. Phenomenological methodologists suggest considering how a phenomenon is experienced at the level of "immediate experience," during the participants experience the phenomenon in a deep engagement (Langdrige, 2007)

Interview protocol was semi-structured, which reason it can obtain advice from other researcher before using and still possible to adjust according to conditions during the interview took place. Interview time adjusted to the condition of participants who were always

busy on their job. Interviews were conducted in their free time between 30 minutes to an hour. Data collection was done throughout two month starting from February until March 2017. Besides interview also used participant observation and photo elicitation technique as complementary.

Data analysis technique is based on Creswell's (2007) explanation about important and meaningful search statements for constructing textural and structural descriptions. Three important steps to make it happen were to arrange transcripts from interviews, observation and photo elicitation, read them entirely, coding and composing themes. The second step was the preparation of textural and structural descriptions. The final step was the synthesis of the textural-structural description.

Triangulation and reflection of researchers being used to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity of the data. Triangulation applied between participants and data collection techniques. Reflections of researchers are recorded consistently in the form of journals, each stage of data retrieval and analysis.

## 3. Results

The results of the researched on dropout students who work in Yogya city showed that the meaning of school for them includes four themes: to make more friends, to please parents, to obtain diploma and as a place to study. While the barriers to go back to school include three themes: feel ashamed, have no friends and already work.

### A. Meaning of School from dropout view point

#### 1. Made More Friends

The most consistent theme about meaning of schools appears in the data was as a place where they have many playmates. The most memorable thing and always remembered or missed by all the participants was their friends during school. Some documents on their facebook account confirming friendship was very meaningful for them. The most painful thing they felt in early phase of out from school was the breakup from their relationship with friends at school. Statements about the experience were "*tidak bisa main-main lagi bareng mereka,*" or "*pingin aja, temen-temen kan bareng, bermain, belajar.*"

This theme not only arise in the initial question about the meaning of the school, but also on other questions like the most memorable experience in school and was there a desire to go back to school. The period of school dropouts, before and after work was also much influenced

by friendship. The phases of their lives will pass well if they have many friends.

## 2. To Please Parents

The second theme of school meaning that also often arises was schooling as an activity that will please their parents. Meaning of schooling as something that will please their parents especially they experience after dropping out of school. One reason they want to work after dropping out was to please parents who feel embarrassed when they were not in school. Statements about it, "*orang tua senang kalau kita kerja, tapi sebenarnya lebih senang lagi kalau sekolah*" and "*orang tua susah mas kalau aku nggak sekolah, nggak kerja juga, mau jadi apa kataya.*"

The initial motive of the school process was generally asked by parents. School become a liability caused by the demand of parents. Children in this study did not explained their future when discussing school periods. Internally driven by the desire to have many friends, externally driven by the demand of parents.

## 3. To Get the Diploma

Meaning of the school appears in some participants was as a place to obtain the diploma. Not every participant expresses this meaning. It expressed by participants who want to get job in factory that requires the diploma. Participants not expressed it were those who want to continue self-employment. Statements that showed this theme for example, "*Pentingnya sekolah itu, kan karena ada ijazah. Kan gampang kerja, misalnya kerja di pabrik.*"

For children who intended to continue work independently, the diploma become unimportant. Even one of the participant admitted losing his certificate. It showed that the diploma was less meaningful for him. But other participants argue that the diploma was very important, especially to get a decent job.

## 4. Place to Study

The meaning of school as a place to study, both science, religion and attitude, expressed by all participants. But this statement only appears to the question of what was done in school. This statements did not reappear when discussing the importance of school or what most memorable thing in school.

The learning content described by the participants did not directly mention the name of any particular subject. They explained that school was a place where teachers taught so many things therefore students become smart. Things were taught include general knowledge, stories of the prophets, discipline and counting. The impact of learning for them was made children in school generally smarter and good-

natured than children who were not in school. They even told that children who were not in school were used to lazing around and fighting parents.

## B. Barriers to Get Back to School

### 1. Feel Ashamed

The most consistent theme of the barrier to get back to school in this study was being ashamed. The causes of out from school such as moving home too often, economic reason, running away from home or failed to pass the class gave them embarrassed feeling to go back to school. The embarrassment they experienced was in the presence of new friends at school and their neighbors.

The embarrassed feeling they often said refer to a barrier to back to school was not explained in depth. They mentioned that the shame they also experienced when the first time to work, but eventually disappeared by time. Shame was portrayed as an uncomfortable condition and a tendency to avoid meeting others. Discomfort as a student who once gone out of school make them feel uncomfortable and finally choose to delay or even not go back to school.

### 2. Having No Friends

The next theme about barrier to return to school because they have no friends in the new class to be entered. The absence of friends makes them feel alienated and ultimately embarrassed. As explained before, the world of friendship was a very meaningful experience for these children, either during school or when dropping out and after work. Statements about this theme for example, "*Pernah dibilangin mau lanjut apa nggak, gitu. Aku bilang nggak, malu. Mau pindah ke situ, ke Dasem. Tapi aku nggak mau, malu.*"

The embarrassment to go back to school will be disappear if they found new friends. But the experience of participant who tried to go back to school, it was difficult to get new friends. It caused them finally become uncomfortable and did not want to go to school anymore. They feel unfamiliar when trying to get back to school, even though there were nice teacher but did not have friends completely dispelled the spirit to continue school.

### 3. Having Already Job

The last barrier to go back to school was because already have a job. Job has been quite pleasant for parents after dropping out of school. In addition, because they have their own money, no need to asked to their parents. Some are already convinced to continue working and not going to school, but some still want to rethink to continue schooling (ie through a packaged

program). If later they can go to school while working, they will return to school.

The children who dropout of school in this study came from outside areas of the Yogya city. These geographical conditions made it very difficult for them to go back to school if they still want to work. That's caused they should delay desired to going back to school. They also said in working they learn many things directly, so it's actually similar with school.

#### **4. Discussion**

Children are our next generation or future of the nation, therefore their existence was considered very valuable. Quality of children's development determine how the quality of the nation in the future. Children themselves according to Law Number 13 Year 2003 are male or female under the age of 18 years. From the social aspect, child was an individual who not yet autonom and really still need protection, from other responsible people like their parents and teachers.

School dropouts, viewed from several perspectives of the function of education will make children experiencing some consequences in their life. The first perspective, and perhaps the most prominent in the industrial world, was to prepare children with skills so they can be part of the industrial workplace. As explained by Goodlad (1984) the existence of industry changed the demands of society to school, one of them to prepare children to play a role in industrial world or work in general. From this perspective children who drop out will experience obstacles to enter the workplace. As a result, when they have grown up and married, the chances of their children experiencing an educational problem will be even greater.

Studies showed how the financial condition and family profession affect education and then children drop out and look for work. Dewi et al. (2014) in their research suggest that the main cause of drop outs is the economic factor. Ambarwati's (2010) study of school dropouts and work showed that they finally decided to no longer continue their schooling.

The second perspective was education as a space to develop the child's personal as a whole person. Thinkers like Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers view children as human beings with basic needs and potentials to develop (Sularto, 2016). Indonesian education figure, Ki Hadjar Dewantara, in accordance with this second perspective, states that education must be tailored to the nature of the child, not through coercion (Tilaar, 2002). Based on this perspective,

children who drop out of school will inhibit their development to actually develop into a fully person with their intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual potential. At the end it will cause many problems when the children get in to society.

Kelly's dissertation research (2012) was an example of how dropouts are influenced by external factors (family and friends) and internal (prior learning experience) factors. Dropouts will experience inhibition of various potentials, in the study focused on the potential literacy (intellectual).

Lower self-concept cause by the previous poor learning will turn out to be more severe in inhibiting literacy of children when dropping out.

The third perspective was education serves to foster awareness and strength for human to change themselves and the environment. Brazil Freedom critical education leader, Paulo Freire, states that education should foster participatory awareness and not treat students like empty bottles that ready to be filled with the competencies or skills desired by educators (Tilaar, 2005). Freire does not obligate education to take place in schools only, in fact he opposes educational practices in schools that precluded the awareness and creativity of children. Based on this perspective, school dropouts can not be directly deemed to be failed. Conditions that cause the child to drop out of school and how the life process happened after that determined how the impact of the drop out of school experienced. In many cases we found successful people who were the ones drop out of school.

The critical perspective of education becomes the foundation, especially to explore how the conditions owned by students who experience social oppression and marginalization. For example, West's (2013) study of the poor outcomes of black children in the United States, especially because the children feel disconnected from teachers and educational processes.

In this study the main perspective was the second perspective of education that serves to guide the child to grow and develop into a fully human person. Although schools have weaknesses, but long history of schools in Indonesia ranging from the birth of many national independent heroes to become one of the main national development motor was the foundational reason of optimism about the great power of schools to build the child's personality. It should be emphasized that schools were not the only educational institutions for children. This was consistent with Tilaar's (2005) view that education in childhood was largely determined

by the family, when switching to adolescence will be more determined by the community (including school and peers), whereas to adulthood education should be taken place independently determined by the person itself.

Parents and teachers become central figures in the process of childhood education of early age. But along with the development and expansion of the child's relationship will emerged a new world that influenced their lifestyle, namely the world of peers. Sigelman & Rider (2009) mentions that children from 2 to 12 years of age will experienced shift in interaction, from interaction with parents to interaction with peers. In addition boys did more interaction in groups compared with girls.

Tendency to interact with peers creates a strong desire to be accepted into the group, this also occurs in the interaction of students in the classroom or school. Dopplinger's research (2014) showed that acceptance of friendships in the classroom was selected by students' perceptions of their peers, and it was also influenced by the teacher. Peer support at school based on Kiefer, Alley, & Ellerbrock (2015) had an impact on motivation, involvement and ownership of the school. Such support can be academic or emotional, and have unique implication for each child.

Findings in this study indicated a link between the meaning of the school and the barrier of drop-out children to return to school. The main meaning of school was as medium of socialization, with their peers. As explained by Sigelman & Rider (2009) that from preschool age children have undergone a shift in social interaction, from home to peers. Similarly, the results of research Kiefer et al. (2015) which showed that friendship in school affects the motivation and sense of belonging to the school. The meaning of friendship is what seems to create the feelings of ashamed and also lack of enthusiasm (when separated from old friends) to returned to school.

The second meaning of the school for drop outs in this study was the activity that pleased their parents. Children experienced the transition of social interaction from home to peers. That was, although there was a strong influence of peers, but identity as part of the family was not disappeared. Barrier that already work made them not go back to school caused by the meaning of the school to pleased parents. Jobs that also pleased parents seemed to replace the role of school.

Based on these meanings and barriers, education for dropouts, especially for those who have worked, should be differed with the

education of children who were still in school. Job that also have important meaning for their life should get attention. The concept of informal education that treated learners as partners in learning, as well as accommodating their various living conditions (in this case work), become one of the educational character suitable for dropout children. Milligan, Littlejohn, & Margaryan (2014) mentioned that very important aspect of informal education based on the world of work were self-regulatory capacity, and effectively utilizing technology.

Friendship in school is one of hidden education. Schools and teachers may provide support for the creation of a friendship process among students. Brighi, Mazzanti, Guarini, & Sansavini (2015) in their research explained that the role of teachers primarily was to create conditions that allowed each student to get benefit positively from their interactions with friends. The forms of educational systems that encourage schools and teachers to pay attention to group activities and friendship in schools seemed to be in line with the findings about condition of school dropouts in this study.

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