

## Ensuring Service Quality in Education for Indonesia's Sustainable Education

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### Abstract

The improvement of educational service quality to create sustainable education is not solely dependent on creating well-designed plans and regulations. Despite the fact that the central government already composed beneficial education plans, there is no guarantee that local government implements them effectively. Thus, implementation is the most essential part of creating sustainable education, specifically in Indonesia. This article reports on a case study of the service quality implemented in primary, secondary and tertiary level of institutions in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. This qualitative study was conducted by using observations, interviews and reviews of related documents. The researcher worked with the total of fifty informants consisting of ten informants for each level of education; primary, secondary (Junior and Senior High school), tertiary, and another ten from local government staffs, all were chosen based on purposeful sampling method. The researcher collected information related to the implementation of educational service as instructed by the central to local government then to the educational institutions. The study found that good plans and regulations are not sufficient to deliver the interchangeable educational services to the community. The local government is considered unable to provide the standardized service quality in education as promulgated by the central government. The poor economic condition in Tasikmalaya also contributes to the complexity of educational development there. The research results suggest the significant role of the local governments in responding to educational development planning which is initiated by the central government to achieve well-qualified education. Further, capacity building is proposed to be a solution for promoting responsive local governments.

**Key words:** *service quality in education, sustainable education, local government, capacity building.*

### Introduction

Education is a key factor for creating a sustainable economy (ISSC, 2016). Furthermore, good quality of education can decrease the high unemployment rate of a country (Passey & Samways, 2016). Hence, development issues in education are interesting topics that need to be discussed.

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Currently, educational development in Indonesia is unstable. As a developing country, Indonesia has encountered complex and complicated problems in relation to resolving educational issues related the educational quality.

To resolve issues on the quality of education in Indonesia and set standards for minimum educational services, the central government created Government Regulation No. 65/2005 or the *Guidelines for Preparation and Implementation Service Standard*. This regulation evolved into the Minister of Home Affairs Regulation No. 6/2007 or the *Technical Guidelines for Planning and Implementation Service Standard*. For primary education, it has a separate service standard for municipalities through the Minister of Education Regulation No. 15/2010. The regulations are then promulgated to local government to be applied in regional parties and institutions. Some points are subject to change depending on the local context of the community. However, the basic principles of the regulation from the central government are maintained.

As mentioned above, Indonesia's education is decentralized with power and autonomy to regional (local) educational ministries (Soule, 2003). The regional ministries might modify the supplementary content of the regulation and curricula based on the proper consideration upon the needs and urgencies of the educational context and practitioners. The problem comes when the basic standardized principle from the government are eliminated either by chance or intention for certain reasons. This is what happens in Tasikmalaya. The educational service quality in Tasikmalaya is not compatible with the ideal service standards created by the central government. During the decentralization era, the local government of Tasikmalaya executes a number of educational services based on the local capacity. However, they have limitations and boundaries as local developments are still included in the national development corridors. Local developments need to actively respond to implementation processes to create good national development.

At present, Tasikmalaya possess less effective and efficient education programs. Developmental planning from the central government do not receive positive responses from the local government since the education programs from the central government lacked in information on how Tasikmalaya could achieve sustainable education. Moreover, no local regulations on the implementation of suitable service standards, which are in accordance with national education service standards, are available.

Beside what have been mentioned above, social problem also contributes to the Low educational attainment. The fact that Tasikmalaya is the poorest district in West Java lead to the failure of educational development there as the poor economic condition affect the people's capability to afford the cost of obtaining good educational services at schools and universities. Financial matter becomes the most significant barrier. While educated human resources are important to support economic growth (ISSC, 2016), they can also influence social welfare conditions of a community in that low educational attainment is closely connected to.

Drawing upon the problems mentioned above, this study tries to analyze the dimensions of service quality in education for Indonesia's sustainable education. This study also examines the implementation of service quality in education sector for primary, secondary and tertiary level, as well as the responses given by the local government upon the regulations issued by the central government. The factors which affect the implementation of the service quality are also investigated.

### **Literature Review**

Quality is an elusive and indistinct construct which often mistaken as "goodness, luxury, shininess or weight" of something (Andrews, 2017; Crosby & Free, 1979). Garvin (1984) measures quality by counting the incidence of "internal" and "external" domain. Internal refers to the area before the products are released, while external means the opposite. Quality is also related to the consumers' perception and satisfaction of certain products. In educational setting, the consumers are the students and educational practitioners while the products are the educational services in any form. The students' perception upon service quality may vary depending on the context in which they are in, when and how they build the perception. This perception will affect their expectation about the services they may obtain during and after their period of study.

In terms of service quality, there are three characteristics of services that must be noticed well for a full understanding, they are: intangibility, heterogeneity, and inseparability. The first is that services need to be intangible because they are not objects but performances (Lovelock, 1981). Therefore, the specifications are often hardly to determine. Most services cannot be calculated, measured, inventoried, tested and verified initially to ensure the quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). Because of these criteria, the authorities may get difficulties in understanding how

consumers or users (the students and educational practitioners) perceive the services and how they can evaluate the service quality.

The second criterion is heterogeneity. Services are heterogeneous in that they vary from the producer (maker) to producer, user to user, and day to day (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The central government may create the standardized formula of educational service, but when it comes to the local authorities, adaptation and adjustment may be different. The user (students and the educational practitioners) may also receive and respond differently. Day to day implementation is also possible to change based on the related situation and context. Not to mention other possible factor that might affect the change such as the dynamic social environment and also unexpected occurrences. The consistency of the service quality is difficult to assure (Booms & Bitner, 1981) because what the producer/maker intend to deliver might be different from what the consumer/user receives.

Thirdly, production and consumption of many services are inseparable (Upah, 1980). Consequently, the quality of services is not organized solely in the manufacturing process by the central government. The inseparability also takes place during the service delivery when the local authorities present it to the educational institution then from educational practitioners (teachers) to the students by interaction. The service producers (central and local authorities) may also have less control upon the services quality where the consumer participation is intense. For example, in a teaching activity in class, a teacher is delivering the material to the students based on the curriculum and syllabus from the government. For particular reason, the teacher offers the students to suggest any material and learning activities which are related to their needs. The teacher then varies the teaching material and makes adjustment based on his/her students. The students' input, the material content and how it should be delivered based on their needs analysis becomes critical to the quality of service performed by the teacher. It can be concluded that the service quality control may take place from the initial until the end process.

Much research has been conducted on service quality in education. The first is a research by Hill (1995). In his research, Frances M. Hill discusses the aspects of service quality theory in the context of UK higher education (HE). Hill focuses on the role of students as the primary consumers of HE services, a relatively recent conceptualization in this country, and its implications for the management of service quality in higher education organizations (HEOs) (Hill, 1995). The findings of his study may not be generalized to the student population as a whole because of its

limited scope. However, it highlights the need for HEOs to gather information on student expectations during their time at a university and at the start of their schooling and even before. The results suggest that to manage student expectations from enrolment to graduation and align them as closely as possible with what can be delivered through quality service, student evaluation processes or upward appraisal need to be more detailed, comprehensive, and multi-focused. Hill also acknowledges the need for further research to investigate the matters stated above (Hill, 1995). Wright & O'Neill (2002) investigate the conceptualization and measurement of service quality within the HE sector in Western Australia. The results in their study reveal the significance of core service quality dimensions to students and demonstrate the usefulness and relative simplicity of disconfirmation models for evaluating the service quality constructs in the context of HE (Wright & O'Neill, 2002). Other notable research is by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), who studied the factors that determine the characteristics of services quality; Caruana and Wantara (2008), who studied the factors of customer satisfaction; and Armstrong, Adam, Denize, and Kotler (2014), who proposed that the users value drives the effective marketing strategy.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This research employed qualitative case study methods (Merriam, 2009) to examine the implementation of service quality in educational setting in Tasikmalaya Regency, West Java Indonesia. This method is chosen due to its function to describe, examine, assess, and assist information (Dey, 2003; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013; Ruhl, 2004; Seidman, 2013). The information gathered is needed as the basis to analyze the phenomenon took place. The research was deployed by providing a case study aimed at investigating the implementation of educational service quality in Tasikmalaya, West Java. The reason of choosing this model is because case study research studies a phenomenon in its real-world context (Yin, 2009). Case study research has a functional and legitimate role in conducting evaluations. Further, Yin (2009) mentions that case study portion viewed as complementary and providing explanatory information.

As a case-study research, it should rely on various sources of evidence, with the data needed. In this research, six sources of documentation evidence used; archive archives, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artifacts. This researcher conducted the study by

observations, interviews and reviews of related documents. The total of fifty informants consisting of ten informants for each level of education; primary, secondary (Junior and Senior High school), tertiary, and another ten from local government staffs, all were chosen based on purposeful sampling method. Observation was carried out at the education institutions from primary to tertiary level covering all activities related to educational services. In-depth interview was conducted with the local governmental policy makers and educational practitioners including teachers and stakeholders, and especially the students as direct consumers of the services.

The case study took place over 6 months during 2017-2018 school year, as the investigators interviewed the informants (principals, lecturers, teachers, administrators, students, and local government staffs), observed the services in school and classroom, and examined documents (e.g.: Minimum Service Standard (SPM) documents, school documents such as teachers presence list, school improvement plan, local government accountability report, and others) to better understand the acceptability, responses, and implementation of educational service.

### **Sample**

The samples (informants) of this research were 40 informants consist of teachers from primary to secondary schools and lecturers of higher education. Another 10 informants were school principals, administrators and local government staff. The informants were chosen based on purposeful sampling method where participants (informants) were selected based on the criteria of the research problem. This research examined the service quality in educational setting from primary to higher education level. Therefore, the informants chosen were teachers, lecturers, principals, administrators, and local government staffs who were either directly or indirectly contribute to the implementation of the educational services.

### **Data source**

The researcher conducted 50 individual interviews with teachers (40 teachers from four level: primary, secondary (junior and senior high school), and higher education), administrators, and local government staffs. These teachers and administrators were directly involved in the implementation of schools program. The researcher initially interviewed each of these professional (principal, administrators and local governments staffs) once (a total of 10 interviews) and then conducted follow-up interviews with the teachers from primary to secondary level and lecturers.

Prior to the second interviews which were conducted with 40 teachers and lecturers, the researcher observed classroom activities of 10 teachers and lecturers chosen with purposeful-sampling method. How the teachers and lecturers deliver the materials and its adjustment with the students were observed. These observations lasted from 60 to 90 minutes and were documented using field notes. These purpose of these observations was to document the instructional delivery and to provide information that will be used to formulate questions for the next interview.

The interview lasted approximately 27 minutes each in median, from 15 min to 30 min. McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd (2014) states that median length of interview is reported to measure the tendency better as two interviews lasted longer than other. Each of the interviews was recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conducted as open-ended questions regarding factors that contribute to the successfulness and failure of the implementation of the educational service. The reception and responses as well as adjustments of the Regulations were also asked. Social barrier such as the level of financial ability was also become the question subject whether it gave impact to the educational attainment or not.

### **Data analysis**

Transcripts of the interviews and field notes from the observations were collected and analyzed to discover emerging issues by using four steps. First, after the data from interviews and observations obtained, the researcher broke away or grouped the data to identify important points that can be employed to determine possible themes that arise (Beirne-Smith, Ittenbach, & Patton, 2002). Second, after all interviews and observations completed, the researcher examined the data to provide different perspective and develop “imaginative variation” (Beirne-Smith et al., 2002) about the themes. Third, the researcher developed a set of themes and presented it to a group of teachers and lecturers and the principal for feedback and check. Finally, the researcher used this feedback to formulate the final set of themes that come from this investigation.

### **Findings**

The result showed that policy on primary education, which was authored by the central government, was not positively received by the local governments in the region. It is evidenced by the lack of specific regulations on primary education as most implemented in Tasikmalaya.

Moreover, no reports for service standards in primary education are available. However, as mentioned previously, the central government has created some standards for service quality in education for local governments. The findings show that no active responses from the local government to central government regulations are available. Without reports, assessments of service standards from the local government to the community cannot be conducted. Based on the results obtained during the fieldwork, the lack of responsiveness of local governments to regulations from the central government is caused by the lack of capacity development at the local government level.

From the documents review, it is found that the budget allocations for educational development in Tasikmalaya from 2012 to 2015 have increased. In 2012, the budget allocation for educational development was 480,339,384.951 rupiahs, which increased to 540,212,378,864 rupiahs in 2013. From 2014 to 2015, the local government allocated 648,959,363,203 rupiahs. It can be seen that the budget allocated increased every year. Based on the data, the local government was trying to support educational activities and show an active response for creating sustainable education in Tasikmalaya. However, when we looked deeper into the reports, it is found that 89% of the budget allocation went to the salaries of civil servants in charge of education and 11% were allocated for educational development.

At the local level, the Tasikmalaya government formulated local education regulations, such as Tasikmalaya Local Regulation No. 4/2007. As per local regulations, no standard of service quality in education for primary or secondary education was found. This finding shows that the local government has not prioritized service quality in education. Furthermore, the local government has no active response to central government plans and regulations for educational development. Therefore, as the poorest region in West Java, the Tasikmalaya local government was unable to provide good service quality in education for its communities (Muslim, 2015)

Other finding is that the Minimum Service Standard (*Standar Pelayanan Minimal (SPM)*) of primary education as a reference for the implementation of educational services issued by relevant ministries, such as the central government, have not been integrated into education planning and budgeting in the region. In Government Regulation (PP) Number 2 Year 2018 concerning Minimum Service Standard (SPM), it is stated that SPM for education covers the Autonomous Region or also called the Region, namely the provincial education SPM and the district / city

education SPM. For Basic Service (Pelayanan Dasar (PD)) in education, SPM in Province level consists of secondary education and special education. The type of PD in educational SPM Province consists of secondary and special education. And the type of PD in district / city educational SPM consists of early childhood education, basic education, and equality education.

### **Discussion, Conclusion, and Implications**

In the era of government decentralization in Indonesia, every level of government has different roles in development. The central government has no authority to directly implement development plans because the authority is given to the local governments. Hence, local governments have an important role in the development process as the implementers. In Indonesia, the role of the central government in developing plans needs to be specified by local regulations. Basically, local regulations and plans cannot go against central government regulations and plans; they must support it. In some cases, the central government has the role of controlling and making general plans for development. Here, the implementation of the development depends on the local governments. The finding that showed that there was lack of receive and response from the local government caused by insufficient capacity development at the local government level can be solved by composing regulations which adjust to the scope and authoritative limitations of the local government. Capacity building for local governments to obtain well-qualified public services can also become alternate solution (Milen, 2004) in Ratnasari, Jenivia Dwi Makmur, Mochamad Ribawanto, 2013). Capacity building is seen as assistance to local organizations especially by providing funding and equipment, increasing financial accountability and strengthening technical skills(Milèn & Organization, 2001). Based on a study conducted by Wang, Hawkins, Lebrede, & Berman (2012), capacity building is a useful conceptual focus for understanding sustainability implementation.

It is mentioned in the finding that the budget for educational development increased every year. However, it is allocated more on the civil servants salaries of around 89%. As per central government regulations, local governments have to allocate a minimum of 20% from their budgets for educational development, excluding the salaries of civil servants in charge of education. This shows that the Tasikmalaya local government was not able to implement educational development as per central government regulations. Consequently, communities were unable to receive good

service quality in education. In this case, the local government needs to change its budget allocation models to provide good service quality (Milen, 2004) in Ratnasari, Jenivia Dwi Makmur, Mochamad Ribawanto, 2013) in education to different communities.

The recent conditions of educational development in Tasikmalaya show that its gross enrollment ratio (GER) has reached 114.07% for primary schools (SD/MI) and 103.12% for secondary schools (SMP/MTs). Meanwhile, the net enrollment ratio (NER) has reached 99.47% for elementary schools (SD/MI) and 94.23% for junior high schools (SMP/MTs). According to the data on the educational accessibility indicators, Tasikmalaya has managed to achieve the *Wajar Dikdas 9-Year Program (Wajib Belajar)* as proclaimed by the central government (Hildayani, Sugianto, Tarigan, & Handayani, 2014; Khoeriyah & Nurmandi, 2016; Miller, 2018; Rahmatina, Sumarmo, & Johar, 2014; Rizaluddin, 2017; Ulfatin, Mukhadis, & Imron, 2010; Wajdi et al., 2018).

Tasikmalaya also created a board of education as an independent institution that aims to increase service quality in education at the municipal level. They conducted surveys at 50 primary public schools and four secondary public schools in 2014 to evaluate the achievements of primary education services, which are referred to in the Ministry of Education Regulation No. 23/2013. The results revealed that among the 25 indicators of service standards, the average service standard achievement is 93.055. Unachieved indicators include quantity of students in class, availability of teachers, quantity of teachers in school, supervision and training for school inspectors, availability of laboratory equipment, availability of books in libraries, class supervisors, and implementation of school-based management. These factors should have been accomplished since they contribute to the quality assurance; a significant role of supervision (Archibong, 2012; Ayeni & Adelabu, 2012; Swai & Ndidde, 2006; Wanzare, 2012), teachers' education (Early et al., 2007; MAKOPA, 2011; Swai & Ndidde, 2006) and motivation (Akuoko, Dwumah, & Baba, 2012; Kagema, 2018; Kratt, 2018; Swai & Ndidde, 2006), classroom quality (Early et al., 2007; Swai & Ndidde, 2006), service quality (Grover, Cheon, & Teng, 1996; Swai & Ndidde, 2006; Wantara, 2008), adequate infrastructure (Goktas, Yildirim, & Yildirim, 2009), there is regular and effective horizontal and vertical communication and school administration has the ability to utilize school funds and other materials effectively (Swai & Ndidde, 2006).

Service quality is a comparison of how a service is delivered to recipients' expectations. The perception of service can be used for evaluating service quality and observing gaps (Lewis & Booms, 1983; Parasuraman et al., 1985). Education is a service, whereas schools are educational

service systems. Educational services deliver the values that are beneficial for service recipients and focuses on people rather than products (Davies, Qiu, & Davies, 2014).

The principal tasks of a service provider are to identify relevant attributes, process them into specifications through which services can be designed and developed, and generate measures by which compliance to specifications can be continually assessed (Cassidy, Barthelme, Schimmel, & Rodriguez, 1994). As the people in charge of educational services, local governments are responsible for identifying resources and relevant needs related to educational services and determining measurements for assessing the quality of educational services.

Service quality in education is usually related to measuring and forming methods and perceptions of service quality and its implication for service recipients (Li, Gan, & Jia, 2017). Local governments need to measure and form methods to maintain good service quality (Grover et al., 1996) for education as they implement regulations from the central government and focus on intensifying education in their regions.

Communities, as service recipients, expect to receive good service from their local governments, and their needs must be considered to create good service quality in education. A good and sustainable educational service depends on a variety of factors, including what local governments offer to meet the expectations of the communities, how services are delivered, and how the government utilizes available resources (Davies et al., 2014). These factors show how far local governments have fulfilled their duty as implementers of educational services in a region as a form of decentralization implementation

According to the *Annual Report of Tasikmalaya Municipality*, published in 2014, the GER and NER are the only micro indicators used to measure achievements. As stated in the third mission, “increase accessibility and education quality and community health level to produce good quality and competitive human resources.” The mission aims to increase accessibility and quality of education, but no indicators are related to the implementation of quality education.

Some scholars argue that the role of the central government has no direct impact on educational development at the local level (Shanahan & Jones, 2007). In Indonesia, Law No. 22/1999 and the more recent Law No. 32/2004 state that all education affairs are decentralized in the local level. Hence, local governments have the authority to lead the educational development of their region. In this case, the central government can only create standards for service quality in education to

be implemented by the local governments. Therefore, the success or failure of its implementation depends solely on the local governments.

Active responses of local governments can be created by capacity building at local levels. Local governments have to implement standards for service quality in education, which is regulated by the Ministry of Home Affairs Regulation No. 6/2007. In the case of Tasikmalaya, the local government could not achieve the standards set by the central government mainly because of the local government's incapacity to deliver standard educational services. In the decentralization era, local governments have the authority to deliver some services to different communities. Furthermore, local governments have to provide high-quality services for the region (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2007).

Responsive local governments are needed for creating sustainable development. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, educational development is one of the sustainable development goals that should be achieved (Leiserowitz, Kates, & Parris, 2005). Capacity building for local governments is a must for increasing responsiveness. Some scholars believe that although capacity building is a complex issue, it can help local governments become more responsive to the central government's actions. Furthermore, it could affect the implementation of development programs. Capacity building is the process of building individual, group, or organizational capacity (Ratnasari, 2013) by building abilities, potentials, and opportunities. Furthermore, it assists organizations in responding to environmental changes more easily. Organizations change as they respond to environmental changes. In the case of Tasikmalaya, its local government needs to undergo capacity building to respond to the central government's plans and regulations for educational development. Without an active response, the effective implementation of educational development cannot be achieved.

Capacity building is designed to build an organization's strength. It will increase an organization's capabilities for decision-making, improve its human resources, and consequently create an efficient and effective organization. Organizations have their basic functions, and capacity building can help organizations perform those functions better. Some scholars believe that capacity building is one of the strategies that organizations use to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and government responsiveness (Keban, n.d.; Pribadi & Keban, 2009). Furthermore, in this case, capacity building may aid in making local governments as responsive organizations.

### Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, the service quality in education in Indonesia, particularly in Tasikmalaya, is still weak and underdeveloped. This paper concludes that active responses from local government implementers are needed in creating sustainable education. The central government has given excellent plans and regulations for supporting good service quality in education, but local governments still need to play a big role. Furthermore, local governments have a direct impact on the creation of sustainable education at the local level. Capacity building is the answer for creating more responsive local governments. In decentralized Indonesia, the central government has the authority to control development, but not to implement them. In this case, the central government's role is to create standards for service quality in education. However, implementing those standards is the local governments' job.

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