

Cultural Influences on Teluk Awur Community Perceptions of Education

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Abstract. Jepara regency, statistically speaking, is one of area with a low poverty rate. This is considered to be due to the lack of opportunities for education. However, it is often argued the other way around, that the difficulty of education is due to poverty. As one of the regions in Jepara, Teluk Awur also shows a tendency to make this argument in relation to education and poverty. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the perceptions of the people of Teluk Awur on the importance of education. As a qualitative study, the research will attempt to describe the perceptions of the people of Teluk Awur and look at the factors that influence these perceptions. In this case, the research will try to see the interaction between culture and society in building the perception of the importance of education for the people of Teluk Awur.

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1 Introduction

Jepara Regency is closely associated with the term 'carving' to its people. From this point, Jepara is seen as a region that is capable of creating a carving industry: quality carving production and producers itself. Therefore, it is common for Jepara district to be referred to as the largest furniture-producing industrial sector in Indonesia that is recognized nationally and internationally [1]. As a result of this, there is a general view that the people of Jepara, especially young people, prefer to become carving workers because of the promising income. Thus, young people start learning carving at a young age and choose not to continue their education.

As one of the areas in Jepara, Tahunan sub-district, with Teluk Awur village in it, is indicated as one of the centers of small industry in carving [2]. In such a society, focused on developing a business, some people perceive education variously. In the beginning, the stigma attached to education was that it cost a lot of money for a family. However, over time, this perception has changed with another perception in the community.

In the context of the Jepara region, the poverty rate is significantly influenced by population and education [3]. From such findings, the position of education becomes very important in influencing the poverty rate of a region. However, this awareness of the importance of education is not fully shared by the community, especially the people of Jepara.

Beside, as one of the areas that has local potential, the people of Teluk Awur village also have problems in perceiving education. Local potential itself is understood as the natural, cultural, and human resources of a region that have special characteristics based on the geographical, climatic, and natural conditions of the region that should be developed [4]. In this case, the non-human local potential of Teluk Awur village will surely be maximized when the quality of its human resources increases through education. However, this perspective is not fully embraced by the people of Teluk Awur itself.

2 Research Methods

This research is a qualitative research with a perspective which assumes that knowledge is constructed through communication and interaction [5]. Hence, data collection was conducted by using observation, interviews, and literature review. This data collection was carried out as part of qualitative research that takes data from direct participation in the social

activities of the community under study—in this case, the people of Teluk Awur. The data that was collected by interviewing key informants and note-taking techniques was later described and analyzed in order to see the perceptions of the people in Teluk Awur on the importance of community education participation.

3 Result and Discussion

The general perspective upon this research is based on the idea that a family with a child in it would prefer to entrust the child to a furniture business owner to learn carving so that they can later open a business and earn some income. Moreover, the idea also implies that a family will try to get their children to earn income immediately by working rather than going to school, which costs money. Therefore, the long-held view among the people of Jepara, presumably during the heyday of the carving business, needs to be reviewed in the context of the development of the non-carving industry in Jepara.

In their development, regardless of the number, the perception of society in Jepara on the importance of educational participation by school-age people has resulted in two views: considered important and non-important. Essentially, these perceptions are influenced by both internal and external factors that influence each other with the common goal that people's participation in higher education (high school and college) is an attempt to get a job as an end result. This shows that the community perceives school participation as necessary for self-improvement before entering the professional world..

From the perspective of the people in Teluk Awur, education, which in this case is school, is seen not as an aim but as a medium. As in, education is an instrument that can be used to later find a job using the knowledge or degree obtained through educational institutions.

However, this perception is not the only one. The other perception considers participation in education as unimportant and a wasted time and effort. This perception arises in the view of people who prefer to enter as workers in a company or industry rather than going to school. To these people, school is seen as a waste of time because it does not earn any income. In other words, school is a stage that delays people from earning money. Although there are differences in perceptions regarding the importance of school participation, the basis of their perspectives basically

shares the same view that the important point for the young people of Teluk Awur is the certainty of earning income through a job.

Underpinning Community Perceptions of Education Participation

Ideologically, community perceptions that support participation in education are formed in communities that have an awareness of the importance that education can offer. Those viewpoints, however, are still not fully shared by the people of Teluk Awur. Some people in Teluk Awur, in this case parents, who think they have the responsibility to send their children to school before they are employed and independent from their parents, are one of the factors forming the community's perception towards the importance of education.

Additionally, the development of several industries, such as garments, in Jepara has forced a change in the way the people of Teluk Awur perceive education. While a carving business or working as an engraver does not require certain administrative requirements involving educational institutions, the manufacturing industry is certainly a different case. The requirements for workers who can be accepted in an industrial enterprise need to include a degree that was obtained through the educational process. As a job-oriented community, this encourages people in Teluk Awur to participate in higher education.

On the other hand, the existence of university buildings belonging to Diponegoro University in Teluk Awur has also contributed to building up the community's expectations of the higher education experience. From the community's point of view, the development of the university's building is expected to increase the participation of the community along with the expectation that there will be certain offerings for the people of Teluk Awur who would like to study there. As the issue of the cost continues to be a concern, the community is expecting that there will be scholarships or special allocations for the people of Teluk Awur who want to study there. This implies that the willingness of the people in Teluk Awur to be able to receive higher education forms the support for the community's perception towards educational participation in a good way.

Apart from this, another interesting factor that drives the perception of the people in Teluk Awur towards educational participation involves the construct of general perception by the people who participate in education. In other words, there is an assumption that people who can

afford to attend college are financially capable. This view of being financially capable is closely related to the prestige or self-esteem possessed by the community because it is considered important. Therefore, someone who can afford to attend college will affect the family's prestige because they will be considered to have above-average financial capabilities. While this may seem like an unusual perspective on education, it is one of the factors that gives a positive picture of a community's participation in education

Barriers: Cultural and Material Factors

The young people in Teluk Awur village are basically interested in achieving the highest level of education possible—at least completing senior high school—and even attending university within or outside Jepara. This motivation is generally possessed by young people, but is constrained by several factors that affect their perceptions of educational participation. Two main factors that suppress people's perceptions about the importance of education were: material and cultural factors.

Material factors, according to the community, are the main obstacle in forming a positive perception of education. Financial inability leads many young people to drop out of school or not continuing their education up to Senior High School, and prefer to work instead. Some perceive that working is only temporary while they save money to continue their education. However, people who have experienced earning income are more likely to no longer feel the need to continue their education.

Cultural factors, in fact, are closely related to material factors. According to an explanation, the people of Jepara are labeled as a consumptive society with a high level of prestige. This made the community not hesitate to lend money to fulfill their lifestyle [6]. A person's lifestyle then affects behavior, preferences, activities, interests, and opinions regarding self-image in reflecting their social status [7]. This type of lifestyle—becoming a cultural factor—then shapes people's selves to not consider education as important because going to school will inhibit them from earning income or money to fulfill their needs for a lifestyle, beyond their capability, which is flashy or tries to be exclusive. For example, school-age children from poor families strive to have a decent vehicle or clothes as a way to increase their self-esteem. This is a common phenomenon among the people of Jepara and even Teluk Awur. In this

view, to accommodate their lifestyle, young people of school age prefer to work to fulfill the needs of their lifestyle demands.

3 Conclusion

Generally speaking, the perception of the people in Teluk Awur about the importance of higher education—high school or college—is quite positive. This cannot be separated from several factors that require public awareness of the existence of educational institutions. Apart from ideologically delivering knowledge, educational institutions, pragmatically, provide one of the administrative requirements that is also needed by prospective workers in the professional world in the form of a degree's certificate.

Moreover, cultural factors such as lifestyle demands also influence people's perceptions of the importance of educational participation. This factor both encourages and inhibits depending on the community's acceptance response upon it. This may encourage people and favorably construct people's perceptions of education when higher education is seen to increase the personal prestige of the community concerned. On the other hand, it inhibits people's positive perceptions of education when it is perceived that going to school hinders the process of fulfilling their lifestyle needs as schooling may delay a person from earning an income, which is the only way to fulfill their lifestyle demands.

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