

Back to School Movement in the Context of Nonformal Education: A Planetary Social Pedagogy Approach

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Abstract

The Indonesian government has implemented a policy regarding the return of Out of School Children. Current educational “back to school” movement initiated by local government in Banten Province is a political strategy for a sustainable future of young people living. The purpose of this study to examine the strategies of local government intervention aimed at reaching Out-of-School Children to improve access to education for OOSC in Banten Province, Indonesia. This study employed a qualitative method comprising both a substantive literature review alongside with primary research with local government representatives, community organisations and educators. The data was analysed using thematic analysis with a planetary social pedagogy approach as a theoretical framework. The result show that the back-to-school campaign is run in a decentralized way, with local governments exercising control over the selection of policies and tactics. The return to school season helps youth realize how interconnected they are with others on a daily basis, which enhances their feeling of purpose and empowerment for a sustainable future.

Keywords: Back to School Movement, Out-of-School Children, Planetary Social Pedagogy, Sustainable Future

INTRODUCTION

School dropouts remain a significant global and national issue, particularly in countries with socio-economic challenges. A school dropout refers to a student who leaves education system before completing the required level of schooling. In Indonesia, the issue of school dropouts remains a significant challenge, particularly among students in primary and secondary education. During the 2022-2023 academic year, there were 76.834 children in Indonesia who were not in school. Of them, 40.623 were enrolled in elementary school, 13.716 in junior high school, 10.091 in senior high school, and 12.404 in vocational high school (Center of Indonesia Education Data and Statistic of Indonesia, 2022). In Banten Province specifically, the dropout rate is equally concerning, with 25,274 students recorded as having left school in 2023. The largest proportion of dropouts occurs at the elementary school level, with 12,778 children leaving school prematurely, followed closely by 12,486 students at the junior high school level. The highest number of dropouts was reported in Tangerang Regency, with 7,361 children dropping out, followed by Lebak Regency and Serang Regency (Banten Pos, 2023). This is influenced by various factors such as economics issues (Gustian *et al.*, 2024), circumstances such as Covid pandemic where students struggle to access online education (Alam & Hoque, 2023), social and cultural factors where girls marry soon after

reaching a certain age (Ranaweera & Silva, 2023) and unaddressed health problem (Talekar, 2023). Dropping out of school has significant impact, both for individual and society, such as crime and drug (Mamani-Benito *et al.*, 2023), reduce quality of human resources (Djulius *et al.*, 2022), and hinder economic growth (Gustian *et al.*, 2024).

The statistics of dropout children underscore the need for targeted educational interventions and support programs, especially in economically disadvantaged and rural areas, to ensure that all children have access to continues education. Indonesia has committed to international goals, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SGD 4), which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. By focusing on both access to education and the quality of education provided, the government hopes to reduce the number of children who remain put of school. Some strategies to reduce the dropout rate are assistance programs include school fees waiver and free books and uniform (Oktaviani & Soesiantoro, 2023), investing in school infrastructures, and school fees assistance program for underprivileged families (Sari & Tanaka, 2019). In the national budget allocation program for education, since 2005, the government of Indonesia has distributed School Operational Assistance (BOS) which the funds are given to students indirectly through school (Kusnandar *et al.*, 2020). In 2014, the government refined the program into the Smart Indonesia Program (PIP) which the fund sent to the students through government-appointed bank (Wardana & Rianto, 2021).

In recent years, global initiatives aimed at promoting lifelong learning have expanded the concept of “back to school” to include various nonformal educational programs. This movement seeks to provide not only academic skills but also life skills, social awareness, and practical knowledge to a diverse group of learners, including adults, youth, and marginalized population (Unesco, 2020). As the world becomes more interconnected and complex, nonformal education plays a critical role in equipping learners with the necessary skills to thrive in their personal and professional lives. In Indonesia, the policy of returning out-of-school children and youth is carried out in decentralized manner, where local government build a strategy for eradicating out-of-school children and young people (Rosmilawati & Mutaqin, 2024). The policy of returning out-of-school to Nonformal education context in Banten province is carried out in through several programs, such as *Aje Kendor Sekolah* movement, in which the Serang City Government identified children and young people who have dropped out of school to return to education through nonformal schooling. Similar to this, Pandeglang Regency established a program *Gerakan Sarerea Lulus Sekolah* (GSLs), Tangerang City also develops a program *Smart Tangerang*, and program *Sekole Maning Lurr*

by Cilegon City. These back-to-school movements represents a multifaceted effort to address the barriers that prevent children and young people from accessing education. Through financial assistance, community engagement, and infrastructure development, these initiatives aim to ensure that every child has the opportunity to complete their education and build a brighter future.

This movement, especially in nonformal education context, ties into the theory of planetary social pedagogy (Salonen *et al.*, 2023) by encouraging holistic approaches to learning that are not confined to academic achievements alone. Instead, the movement emphasizes learning that includes social, environmental, and civic responsibilities (Petrie *et al.*, 2005). The goal is to bring children and young people back into learning environments that prepare them to understand and act on global issues like climate change, inequality, and poverty.

A planetary social pedagogy approach in nonformal education context offers a holistic framework that integrates local and global perspectives on learning. Social pedagogy emphasizes the development of learners as active participants in society, promoting social justice, inclusivity, and empowerment (Petrie *et al.*, 2005). This approach aligns well with nonformal education, where the focus is often on the learner's context and experiences, rather than a rigid curriculum. In a planetary context, social pedagogy expands to include global citizenship, environmental responsibility, and intercultural competence, recognizing that education must address the challenges of globalization and environmental sustainability (Mezirow, 1997). One of the key components of the Back-to-School Movement within nonformal education is its emphasis on accessibility and flexibility. Nonformal education programs are typically designed to meet the needs of learners who cannot access formal education due to geographical, economic, or social barriers (Colclough, 2012). These programs often provide alternative pathways for those who have dropped out of formal education or who need to balance learning with other responsibilities, such as work or family care. Incorporating sustainability into the Back-to-School Movement within nonformal education is crucial in preparing learners to navigate global challenges.

The Back-to-School Movement within nonformal education represents a critical shift toward more inclusive and flexible learning opportunities that are aligned with global challenges. By adopting a planetary social pedagogy approach (Salonen *et al.*, 2023) nonformal education programs can equip learners with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to thrive in an interconnected world. These programs promote not only academic development but also social, emotional, and ethical growth, fostering individuals who are

capable of contributing positively both their local and global communities. This paper examined the strategies of local government intervention aimed at reaching out-of-school children and young people to improve access to education in Banten province, Indonesia. Current educational “back to school” movement initiated by local government is a political strategy for a sustainable future of young people living. Therefore, the aim of this research is to explore the indigenous or local philosophies of back to school movement in Banten province, Indonesia, as well as to examine the role of nonformal education as a way toward a sustainable future for out-of-school children and young people within the framework of the theory of planetary social pedagogy (Salonen *et al.*, 2023). Within this framework, the study will uncover the benefit of back to school movement for children and young people to strengthens their social, emotional, and ethical growth for a sustainable future for their life. The argument behind this study is that back to school movement provide financial support to help dropout children and young people return to school while promoting the idea that education is not just about personal advancement but also contributing to global solutions.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with the aim of examining a deeper understanding of local government intervention strategies in reaching out-of-school children through the implementation of the back to school education movement policy in order to improve access to education in Banten province, in Indonesia. With a review of relevant substantive literature and primary data collection through in-dept interviews with key informants who have direct experience. The selection of informants uses a purposive sampling technique (Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling is a technique used in the selection of informants based on certain considerations. The commonly used consideration is the person who is estimated to understand the most about the data or information needed by the researcher. In this case, the researcher examined the policy of returning to school carried out by each district/city in Banten province. Therefore, the key informants taken by researcher including representatives of local governments, community organizations and educators, diverse and in-depth perspectives are obtained. Thematic data analysis used to identify patterns, themes, and categories that emerge from the data obtained with the planetary social pedagogy approach as theoretical framework. Traditional social pedagogy, which offers a theoretical framework for formal, nonformal, and informal education, is the foundation of planetary social pedagogy (PSP) theory. PSP seeks to unite the three components of the social-ecological worldview—spatial, temporal, and ethical—in order to create a

comprehensive, holistic understanding of the interaction between the individual, society, and the environment (Salonen *et al.*, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indigenous/Local Philosophies of Back to School Movement

The traditional philosophy in Indonesia about working together for positive reciprocity often occurs in various work moments, known as "*Gotong Royong*". This philosophy has played an important role since before Indonesia's independence day. This philosophy is similar with non-formal education spirit and efforts that are also driven by social communities, society, and government are realized because of the important philosophy that is still attached. Many best practices are realized as community-led initiatives where parents, teachers, and government work together to ensure that children attend school. Although these initiatives will vary because community knowledge and motives for engaging in educational work may be very different from government (Bray, 2003). On the other hand, there is a positive collective meaning that reflects a deep sense of responsibility to educate the younger generation and encourage mutual progress. In addition, it forms good character and maintains national identity in the era of globalization (Nasution *et al.*, 2024).

Through this philosophy, a sense of local ownership is fostered for the achievement of educational success, creating a collaborative model as a center for learning and community support. This philosophy has developed into a strategy for an inclusive and sustainable education system. Through the Movement based on this philosophy, society will achieve a positive and wise level of quality in decision making. Also increasing awareness for sustainable life and planet earth amidst the issues of climate change and global warming caused by the lack of wisdom in decision making. For that there are several Movements that are connected and have strong principles in empowering the power of the philosophy of "*Gotong Royong*" and the principle of improving the quality of life.

The Principle of Local Collectivity

The back to school initiative has developed in several areas of Banten Province with the philosophy of the indigenous Indonesian people "*Gotong Royong*". Where the government collaborates with related parties. In various problem solving, the government has made many partnerships to fill the gaps in functions that cannot be done by them. Including the back to school mission in each city implementing collaboration, although the initiative does not always come from the government. There is evidence obtained regarding the practice of the *Aje Kendor* program in Serang City which began when USAID facilitated a discussion on the 12-year compulsory education program in Serang City. Initially, USAID ERAT began

advocacy with the Regional Government, especially the education authorities in the region. Then the idea of collaborative data collection emerged in all sub-districts regarding the latest data on Out-of-School Children, where valid data by name and address was needed. The USAID ERAT collaboration was formed through a special working group for *Aje Kendor* Schools formed by the local government. This working group actively collaborates with the Serang City Education Office, sub-districts, and schools to collect and verify data on Out-of-School Children (OOSC). The data then becomes the basis for strategic programs to return children to formal and non-formal schools.

Then in the *Aje Kendor Sekolah* program in Serang City and the "*Sekole Maning Lurr*" program in Cilegon City, it connects partnerships in the private sector such as the National Zakat Agency (BAZNAS) and the government-owned bank, Bank Jabar Banten (BJB). This signifies the third collaboration, namely triple helix, which is facilitated by the Non-Governmental Organization, namely USAID ERAT to connect the government and the private sector. Similar to the *Aje Kendor Sekolah* program, in Pandeglang Regency there is the "*Sarerea Lulus Sakola*" program. The program collaborates up to the level of the Citizens' Association in each region, where they function as information providers to parents to send their children to school. Another collaboration that was carried out was with other programs in the Pandeglang Regency government, involving another program, namely "*Jalan Kabupaten Mantap Betul/JAKAMANTUL*" where in this program the government provides decent road access so that children can go to school. Although the program was widely criticized by the community, because its achievement was not optimal.

Principles of Improving Quality of Life

The movement initiated to return children to school plays an important role in creating a society with a decent quality of life. Education is believed to strengthen the economy and the readiness of society in facing the uncertainty of change. A society with higher education will be resilient in facing various situations. In addition, quantitatively the government has an interest in increasing the Human Development Index, for that the government that realizes that the problem of School Dropouts still exists in their area is unlikely to achieve acceleration in increasing the Human Development Index. Programs that have been held such as *Aje Kendor Sekola*, *Gerakan Sakola Sarerea*, *Sekola Maning Lur* have the same principle to improve the quality of education and then improve the quality of life. Where each of these programs is held using the same approach such as socio-economic, communities, and people to move together on the intended mission.

Becoming a Planetary Citizenship

In the 21st century, education has expanded beyond traditional classrooms to embrace the global challenges that shape our world. With the rise of planetary social pedagogy, there is a growing recognition that education must prepare learners not only for local citizenship but also for planetary citizenship. Planetary citizenship refers to a sense of identity and responsibility that transcends national borders, recognizing the interconnectedness of human societies and the natural environment. It emphasizes a holistic understanding of the world, where actions at a local level have global consequences. Planetary citizens are aware of issues like climate change, inequality and social justice, and they strive to contribute positively to the world through their action (Morin, 2011). For students in nonformal education, this concept can be fostered through curriculum design that integrates global themes and encourages critical thinking about their role in the broader global community.

The back to school movement for dropout students offers a pathway for reintegration into education system while promoting the development of global responsibility within planetary citizenship framework. This movement emphasizes not only academic recovery but also the cultivation of a mindset that encourage students to recognize their interconnectedness with global issue. The framework of planetary citizenship seeks to instill values such as environmental stewardship, intercultural competence, and social engagement. For dropout students, returning to education within this framework means not only catching up academically but also developing the skills and values necessary to be responsible citizens of the world. In Indonesia, for example, the Program Indonesia Pintar (PIP) and Keluarga Harapan Program (PKH) have been instrumental in re-enrolling dropout students into educational systems. These programs provide financial support to help students return to school while promoting the idea that education is not just about personal advancement but about contributing to global solution. Through these initiatives, students learn the importance of sustainability, inclusivity, and equity, which are central to the concept of planetary citizenship. The goal of planetary citizenship education is to highlight specific attitudes and ideals. The goal is to cultivate and preserve an empathetic attitude that transcends one's immediate environment. Practically speaking, teaching and learning in nonformal education could incorporate education for planetary citizenship by presenting particular interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary themes that connect local, national, and international trends and problems to the planetary level.

One of the key aspects of planetary citizenship is the development of global responsibility, the understanding that individual actions have a significant impact on the

world (Engler & Hunt, 2020). Developing global responsibility among returning students in nonformal education context has become a crucial objective. As students transition back into academic environments, instilling a sense of global responsibility helps them not succeed academically but also become conscientious global citizens. As returning students reintegrate into academic settings, particularly those who have experienced failing from previous school, they might have cultural competence and empathy as they experience academic challenges. Teachers in nonformal education setting may develop pedagogical approach that promote empathy include storytelling, case students, cross-cultural exchanges. Research has shown that when students are exposed to personal stories of individual affected by cross-cultural issues, such as ethnicity conflicts or victims of natural disasters, they are more likely to develop a sense of responsibility towards addressing educational challenges (Batson *et al.*, 1997). Based on a social-ecological paradigm that stresses how individuals, communities, economies, and societies are intertwined in the environment, the planetary approach blurs the line between humans and nonhumans (Folke *et al.*, 2016). The goal of planetary social pedagogy is to help people build a comprehensive, profound experience of their relationships with both nonhuman entities and other people. Planetary social pedagogy helps students develop a systemic understanding and experience of reality, allowing them to combine cultural revolution with personal growth in a planetary context.

Expanding a Learning Society through Nonformal Education

While the current educational “back to school” movement stresses economic growth, it is insufficient as a political strategy for a sustainable future. Learning is also necessary. A society that is learning depends on its people’s values, beliefs, and worldviews changing. The fundamental element of the transition to sustainability is the learner’s awareness of our daily emotional, physical, and mental connections to one another and to nature. People’s sense of significance and their need for agency in creating a sustainable future are strengthened when they have a sense of belonging and inclusion in the world.

Nonformal education as a form of education outside the formal system, has a crucial role in the development of the learning community. The concept of a learning society refers to community where each individual has a lifelong learning spirit, adapts to change, and is actively involved in the process of self-development and its environment (West & Williams, 2017). Nonformal education, with its flexibility and high relevance to the needs of society, is an effective means to achieve these goals. This approach is particularly important in context where formal education may be inaccessible or inadequate, thus encouraging inclusivity and equality in education. This inclusivity is important for building a learning community that

values diverse perspectives and experiences, which ultimately enriches the educational experience for all. A learning society is a society that prioritizes continuing education and personal development, thus allowing individuals to adapt to changing circumstances and make meaningful contributions to their communities. According to Field (2006), a learning society is characterized by its commitment to lifelong learning, which includes formal, nonformal, and informal educational experiences. Societies like this foster critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, which are essential skills for navigating the complexities of sustainability.

The back-to-school education movement policy launched by the local government in Banten province, Indonesia has the same goal, namely to increase the interest and participations of the community, especially children and teenagers who have dropped out of school. The movement does have great potential in encouraging economic progress and sustainable development. However, the focus solely on quantitative aspects such as school participation rates often ignores the dimensions of teaching quality and behavior change needed to build a learning community. This movement needs to be balanced with more holistic efforts to change people's values, beliefs, and worldviews, to create a learning community that can contribute to building a sustainable future. The educational approach must go beyond the cognitive aspect alone, by integrating emotional, social, and environmental dimensions. Thus, a learning community can be created that has a deep awareness of relationship between humans and nature and has the capacity to actively contribute to building a sustainable future.

In addition, the flexibility inherent in nonformal education allows for the adaptation of learning experiences to meet the specific needs of different populations. Kominarets *et al* (2022), emphasized that non-formal and informal education can provide timely learning outcomes that are responsive to students' interests and activities, thereby increasing engagement and effectiveness. Meaningful learning experiences are key to fostering awareness of the importance of sustainable development. According to Biasutti and Frate (2016), education must be able to arouse students' emotions so that they are encouraged to be actively involved in environmental conservation efforts. Thus, education can be an effective instrument in encouraging social change. The sustainable development of a learning community requires a strong emotional and cognitive connection between individuals and their environment and community. In line with the concept of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), as defined by Sinakou *et al.* (2019), the main goal of education is to foster citizens who not only have knowledge, but also have the motivation and skills to live

sustainably. An effective learning process must actively involve learners in a variety of experiences that foster a deep understanding of the interconnectivity of social, economic, and environmental systems. The development of a learning community through non-formal education is an effective multidimensional approach in overcoming educational disparities, facilitating lifelong learning, and encouraging the growth of society as a whole. Thus, non-formal education plays a crucial role in creating an inclusive and empowering learning environment.

The success of the transition to a sustainable future depends heavily on the quality of education we offer. The 'Back to School' movement should evolve into a broader movement, which not only focuses on the economic aspect, but also on the development of a learner community that has an awareness of interconnectedness with the environment and others. By integrating different forms of education, we can create a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable society. The success of the "Back to School" movement depends on its ability to create a supportive and collaborative learning environment that empowers individuals to actively engage in their education and contribute to a sustainable future.

A sense of belonging is a fundamental foundation in shaping a sustainability-oriented learning society. In accordance with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, ownership is an intrinsic factor that encourages individual motivation and well-being. When individuals feel they have a strong bond with their community and environment, they tend to be actively involved in environmental conservation efforts. The sense of belonging fostered through non-formal education encourages the active participation of individuals in efforts to achieve sustainability. Driving back to school education movement thus plays a crucial role in building people's capacity to face global challenges and shape a better future.

Nonformal Education as A Way Toward a Sustainable Future

An existential threat to civilization has been produced by planetary issues, which also cast doubt on the prevalent modern dogma of progress, which is based on economic expansion, rising consumerism, and technological optimism. However, it is highly improbable that environmental deterioration and economic growth as measured by GDP will ever completely decouple from one another, therefore economic and technical advancement alone cannot provide answers to these global challenges (Hickel & Kallis, 2020). The rethinking of human life in its relationship to nature has become imperative because human life is intertwined with planetary systems. Through education that has an important role in realizing a sustainable future by fostering awareness, critical thinking, and awareness of environmental, economic, and social challenges (Taimur & Sattar, 2019). As the world works on critical

issues such as climate change, resource scarcity, global warming, and social inequality, education is here to strengthen every individual and society to find alternatives to get out of these issues. In the process, education can bridge human awareness regarding the environmental impacts caused by human activities themselves.

Practically, education can provide knowledge and skills to each individual to create innovations with green-economic principles to face unique future challenges. Ultimately, education becomes a powerful tool for building a more sustainable future, where the environment, economy, and society can develop harmoniously for the sustainability of future generations. Thus, in non-formal education that is held, it is important to combine practical projects to improve skills related to concern for the planet (Baena-Morales & Fröberg, 2023).

Education is believed to be a powerful influence on global efforts to build a more sustainable future. Education can empower individuals and communities to take a path that ensures the world remains livable and prosperous for future generations. Including non-formal education, emphasizing learning in unlimited environmental areas. Where non-formal education is present in an inclusive version to provide classrooms to underprivileged, geographically, and physically limited communities. Nonformal education such as equality provides them with opportunities to live and compete with external challenges, maintaining sustainability with knowledge. This condition is also based on the criticism that is present in formal education that needs to change students for the needs of global challenges (Scott, 2015).

Non-formal education activities in local areas often present local wisdom as a method and source of learning. So that it can instill sustainable values, such as an understanding of natural resource management, environmentally friendly agricultural practices, and the development of sustainable entrepreneurial skills. Non-formal education also encourages active community involvement in creating local solutions to global challenges such as climate change and food security, strengthening the capacity of individuals to contribute to improving sustainable communities. Non-formal education curriculum allows for design to lead to sustainable goals, science education can survive in a practical non-formal education climate. Scientists believe that by designing a science-based education curriculum will increase awareness of saving the earth (Hodson, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Developing global responsibility among returning students is essential for preparing returning students to navigate and address the complex challenges of the 21st century. The back to school movements through nonformal education represents unique intersection of

educational reform and global social responsibility. This approach expands the traditional understanding of schooling by incorporating nonformal education systems and aligning them with planetary social pedagogy, a framework that seeks to address global issues through holistic and community oriented educational practices. In this back to school movement, nonformal education becomes a key vehicle to re-engage marginalized populations who have dropped out of formal school system by leveraging the flexibility and community focus. Through the framework a planetary social pedagogy approach means promoting education that is relevant but globally aware. This movement can empower individuals and communities to address the complex challenges facing our world. It offers a pathway to not only academic success but also personal fulfillment and social responsibility, making it a vital components of global efforts to creat ea more just, equitable, and sustainable future for all.

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