

Roles of distance education in the implementation of the right to education in Indonesia: analysis and lessons learnt from the sociological, political and economic points of view

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Abstract

This paper addresses the roles of distance education in the implementation of the right to education, presenting sociological, political and economic analysis and lessons learnt from the specific context of Indonesia. Diversities in geographic, demographic, social cultural and economic conditions of the country provide specific challenges for its distance education practice and the process of social, political and economic transformation to which distance education can contribute.

Keywords:

Distance education, right to education, challenges, social, political and economic transformation.

Introduction

Distance education in Indonesia has been used in formal and non-formal education sectors, at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, to serve adults, teachers in remote areas, women, and people who are economically and socially disadvantaged. Indonesia's 1945 Constitution states that education is the basic right of every citizen, and the country has been challenged to address the need for developing the knowledge, skills and competencies of its human resources in order to be competitive as a nation. Based on the egalitarian values, in which all citizens have equal access, equity, equality of opportunity and participation in education, distance education has reached different groups of people in Indonesia, irrespective of commitments, geographical locations, social and economic status, gender, ethnicity, age and other constraints. Distance education system enhances the government capacity to provide accessible educational system at different levels, improved equity and increased participation in education.

The democratic social ideal that nobody should be denied the opportunity to learn for any reasons has been adopted as one of the foundations of distance education. The roles of politics and government policies have been pivotal in the development of distance education system in Indonesia. Distance education has been used as effective instrument of conveying the political missions of the government, and transforming the citizens into a knowledge-based society. Recent political reform in Indonesia has had effects on distance education practice and increased number of institutions participating in distance education ventures. Distance education system has enabled the transformation of the

higher education system, from elitist participation to mass and eventually universal access to quality education. However, there remains a challenge to strengthen the political will of the government to formulate sound distance education policies and improve awareness and civic participation in educational policy making.

The contribution of distance education as catalyst for social, economic and sustainable development has been undoubted in response to the need for the development of high-calibre human resources. Distance education has been the appropriate answer to this challenge due to its flexibility, its capability to accommodate learners unable to attend the traditional form of education, and its ability to provide quality education for a large number of students. The challenge for Indonesia is to develop good distance education system supported by quality human resources, adequate infrastructure and facilities, strong legal system and sound policies, and wise funding mechanisms in order to meet stakeholders' needs.

It has been a significant challenge for any government to make education available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable. In the availability dimensions, there are two government obligations, representing the right to education as civil and political rights. From the economic point of view, the former is more relevant which refers to the right to education as a social and economic right. This right requires the government to establish educational institutions or fund them, or use a combination of these and other means to ensure that education is available. In the case of Indonesia, which has unique territorial characteristics, this obligation challenges the government to provide affordable education in all of its territory. Establishing a distance education system is a rational answer to the challenge by providing more affordable quality education accessible by students irrespective of geographical locations and other constraints. Good distance education system with systematic and sufficient learning support system can be as effective as other modes of education. A systematic and elaborate learning process is needed to enhance the quality of distance teaching and learning process, which can be accomplished by using various pedagogical approaches, learning materials, resources and appropriate technology.

Historical development of distance education in Indonesia

Distance education in Indonesia has a long history which dates back to the year 1945, when the newly founded Republic of Indonesia declared independence. The founding fathers of the new Republic realised that education is the key element in building an intelligent and competitive nation. The 1945 Constitution of the newly founded Republic clearly states that education is the basic right of every citizen. This forward-looking Constitutional foundation has become an enormous task for Indonesia, an island nation with a very large number of populations, to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies of its human resources.

The historical origin of distance education in Indonesia has its root in the establishment of correspondence teacher training program in the 1950s in Bandung, West Java, which was then soon followed by the introduction of school broadcasting in, designed for those

ex-service men and women whose education had been disrupted during the War of independence. An extensive development in the use of distance education for teacher training was pioneered by the Department of Education and Culture in 1955 intended for upgrading school teachers (Setijadi, 1987). Further intensive use of distance education started in the 1970s, when the Indonesian government was able economically to finance development in the education sector from the oil-boom revenue. This enabled the Government to fund initiatives involving distance education, such as a pilot project on educational broadcasting and the use of print-based non-traditional instruction for independent study at the primary level. The use of domestic satellite for communication in Indonesia since 1974 has had positive impact on educational development, particularly distance education. In 1978, the Centre for Educational Communication and Technology was established, and five open junior high schools were established in different areas to provide schooling opportunities for those students unable to attend classroom instruction.

The decade of the 1980s was first marked by the development of the rural satellite project for health and education. Then, in 1981, a program for upgrading junior university lecturers was launched using modular instruction for independent study. This was followed by the use of satellites for distance education in Eastern Indonesian universities for training junior university lecturers in 1983. The same year a government policy was set for establishing an open university to accommodate a huge number of high school graduates unable to have access to state conventional universities. The development of distance education, particularly in higher education, culminated shortly after that with the foundation of Universitas Terbuka (UT) in 1984. Distance education has also been used beyond the formal education sector, such as in agricultural extension, family planning education, vocational on-the-job training, and continuing professional education.

The 1990s was the decade of expansion of distance education in Indonesia. The introduction of the nine-year compulsory education beginning in 1994 has had a major impact on the primary school teacher training, which requires a minimum of two-year diploma at the university level. Consequently, in-service primary school teachers have to take two-year additional post-secondary education training by distance education in order to upgrade qualifications. Distance education has been confronted to the challenge of upgrading in-service teachers at a distance, which has been assigned to UT, as it would be impossible to train teachers on-campus, leaving a huge number of primary students without teachers.

The beginning of the 21st century has shown continued progress in distance education with advances in the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Traditional educational institutions are also initiating new ventures in distance education. Innovations are introduced in the use of distance education in secondary education through the establishment of experimental open senior high schools in a number of areas (Ibrahim, 2003). The introduction Law of Teachers and Lecturers in 2005, in which teachers must have university degrees, has consequences on the re-training of in-service teachers at a distance using distance education methods.

The development of distance education in Indonesia is an attempt to meet the national education needs, influenced by current trends worldwide in the use of distance education in various educational sectors. As an archipelago of more than 13,000 islands and limited communication and transportation infrastructure, Indonesia is challenged to improve the quality of its 220 million human resources. Various factors relating to the geography, demography, socio-economy, culture, the availability of technology have stimulated the development of distance education to improve educational access and equality of opportunity. Distance education has been used in formal as well as non-formal education, academic as well as professional education, employed at the primary, secondary as well as tertiary sectors. Distance education in Indonesia has evolved, starting from the use of print-based correspondence material, through multi-media material, to the increased use of ICT in recent times.

In line with the idea that education is the basic right of the citizen, the national education system has been designed to be capable of meeting the needs and provide equal educational opportunity for the citizen. Distance education plays key roles and articulates the concrete effort to establish knowledge-based society as it is envisioned by the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. The use of distance education in various sectors of education indicates its capacity, flexibility and sustainability to meet various needs of the citizens. For the government, distance education is seen as an effective method to improve participation, expand access for citizens living in various parts of the country, and provide quality education efficiently for the citizens of the country. For the students, distance education provides flexible opportunity for those unable to attend the traditional face-to-face educational system.

Realising the significant contribution of distance education to improve the intellectual capacity of the nation, the government and legislators have issued the new Law Number 20/2003 on National Education System. Article 31 of the Law specifically addresses the roles of distance education in the national education system. In the past twenty years, distance education in Indonesia has indicated significant progress in terms of theoretical constructions, best practices, credibility and legal foundations. As the follow up of the Article 31 of the National Education System, the Government and legislators are still working on the Government Regulation in Distance Education. It is then expected that the status of distance education becomes more firmly grounded, public confidence in distance education can be improved, and the interests of the stakeholders can be well protected and effectively met, and eventually the national goals for human resource development can be achieved. The government regulation is expected to address the provision of quality distance education in order to meet stakeholders expectations.

Sociological, social and cultural aspects

The design, development and provision of distance education system is based on the theories of autonomous and independent study, theories of interaction and communication, and the theory of industrialisation (Sewart, Keegan & Holmberg, 1988). These classical theories of distance education have been widely referred to during the past few decades, and until today they remain relevant as underlying principles of

distance education practice, and these have been further supported and strengthened by more recent theories (Anderson, 2003; Garrison, 2003; Gibson, 2003; Sammons, 2003).

Theories of autonomy and independence lay the basic foundation of distance education practice. Independent study is an effort to organise instruction so that greater freedom in learning is possible for learners. It enables learners to carry out learning tasks and responsibilities on their own pacing and patterns, provide learners with opportunities to continue learning in their own environments, and develop learners the capacity to carry on self-directed learning (Wedemeyer, 1971). In fact, Wedemeyer (1971) has argued that the philosophy underlying independent study emphasises a democratic social ideal that nobody should be denied the opportunity to learn for any reasons related to such things as geographical isolation, social status, and other constraints.

Politics and government policies have played instrumental roles in the development of distance education. Distance education systems have been created by governments with different priorities, policies and political objectives. Governments have opted for distance education system as a viable response to the challenges of increasing participation and expanding access to formal education. Politics and government policies have been crucial in the development of distance education system, blended with a desire to develop a more egalitarian philosophy of independent study, and improving access to education.

Gender issues relating to social and cultural factors in access and participation to education. Although gender cannot be a constraint in any educational participation, there are issues relating to accessibility and relatively lower participation rates among women. This constraint particularly applies to the traditional face-to-face mode of education. Some of the constraints in educational participation commonly experienced by women relate to factors such as the followings.

First, women have multiple social and cultural roles in the Indonesian societies, and perhaps in other cultures. Women generally have the traditional and natural roles as housewives, nurturers for the children, and many of them breadwinners for the family. These leave women with little time for opportunities in higher education. There are cultural values attached to women to serve in many social roles in the community, which limit women to access and participation in higher education.

Second, there may also be greater financial constraints among women which limit access and participation in higher education. For women in some societies, priorities become lower when it comes to funding higher education studies, because the family will have to allocate and use financial resources wisely for other family expenditures.

Third, geographical distance is a major constraint for many educational participants, and particularly for women. Participation in the face-to-face mode of higher education, taking leave from professional occupation as well household responsibilities for some period of time can be serious obstacle for many women in the existing cultural values and circumstances in Indonesia.

Fourth, there are cultural values that dictate the social roles of women which may limit opportunities for women to participate in further and higher education. This can be attributed to the cultural values that women in some societies have roles limited to the domestic functions in the family. In some cultures, women are culturally obliged to get married at a relatively younger age. In some cultures with patrilineal values, males have domination over women in various sectors of life.

Fifth, women may have opportunities to pursue higher education. However, the lack of support from the family may prevent them from actually participating in higher education studies. These are some cases of limitations of higher education participation for women. Distance education serves as a catalyst to provide greater opportunities for participation in higher education.

Distance education as instrument for enhancing higher education participation for women. To eliminate constraints to the participation of women in the face-to-face mode of higher education, distance education is seen as a concrete solution to improved participation, access and equity for women in attending higher education. The distance mode of education offers greater flexibility for women in congruence with cultural values in that they do not have to leave family and social cultural obligations.

Distance education offers more economical opportunity costs for people with social and economic disadvantages, because of its flexible approach to learning and teaching on the parts of the students. Distance students can save costs because they do not have to travel to campus to attend classes on a regular scheduled basis, nor live on campus, nor leave their current professional commitments, although they will have to pay for tuition fees and expenses for the purchase of learning materials. This relatively much lower cost of distance education on the parts of the students compared to the face-to-face mode of education should improve participation and expand greater opportunities for those socially and economically less advantaged groups of the society, particularly women to have access to quality higher education at affordable costs.

In distance education interaction and communication is conducted by various means, face-to-face as well as mediated. Distance students can interact and communicate with each other and with tutors and supervisors using media, such as internet, telephone, fax, postal correspondence, and other means of communications, or they can also do it face-to-face. They learn independently and autonomously from the self-instructional learning materials, print-based as well as non-print-based, according to their own individual pace.

Distance education as catalyst for improving the quality life of women. Statistics of the Department of National Republic of Indonesia 2003/2004 indicate that there are 3,796,717 higher education students in Indonesia, 51% (1,936,456) of which are women. However, attrition rates among women are still fairly high. According to the 2003/2004 statistics, the ratio for men versus women with university degrees and diplomas in Indonesia per 100 people is 2.51:1.51.

For Indonesia, Universitas Terbuka (UT), the national open university, has been established on the egalitarian values to provide greater equal opportunities for working adults, in-service teachers as well as high school graduates to attend university education. Improved access to higher education should eventually be able to improve the skills, competencies, professional competitiveness, and eventually the quality of life among women.

There are ways to improve participation of women through distance higher education as follows. First, academic programs are developed to accommodate the interests of women which will benefit the society at large, such as programs in child psychology, women studies, health sciences, foreign languages, business management and communication. Second, effort needs to be strengthened to encourage participation of women, and improve support system that facilitates the learning process for women in attending higher education at a distance. Third, an important strategy to empower women in higher education participation is through the provision of scholarship and other form of financial support; this can be done through partnership with the local governments and other interested agencies and institutions. Fourth, it is important to build good image and awareness of the community about the capacity of distance education to develop skills and competencies and improve the quality of human resources. There are lessons learnt that distance students, particularly female students, can be successful in higher education with good family support, favourable social and emotional circumstances, access to learning resources and facilities, flexible learning strategies, good collegial support, and the availability of guidance and counselling services that help support the distance learning process.

Economic potential benefits, constraints and management implications

Technological foundations and economic factors have been contributing major role to the development of distance education. Modern distance education system has been founded following significant technological revolution, particularly in the field of mass communication media, and then recently advances in ICT. Involving extensive initial investment and the potential benefit for large-scale production of learning or knowledge commodities for mass consumption, technological innovation has made distance education system, particularly open universities operable in many different countries. Distance education system has become attractive model for developing countries, particularly those with large populations. In many countries, and particularly for Indonesia, sound economic reasons have led the development of distance education and open university system, which use traditional, modern as well as new technologies for interaction and communication with students.

Ideas about economies of scale are closely intertwined with ideas of mass production (Peters, 1983) and enterprise management (Balderston, 1975). There is significant potential benefit for distance education system, particularly open universities, as mass producers and publishers of learning materials. For Indonesia, the UT has become one of those and perhaps even the largest producer and publisher of knowledge in the form of university textbooks for various subjects and academic disciplines in the country. There

is no other publisher or producer of university textbooks in such a very large scale and volumes as the UT has done.

Distance education can be closely related to sustainable development, which is a fundamental issue for many countries. Sustainable development is maintaining development over time (Elliot, 1999). There has been growing concern of our societies with sustainable development, the term introduced during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. The Summit produced the Rio Declaration which recommends sustainable development as a strategy to be adopted by the United Nations member countries. An important agenda of sustainable development is poverty alleviation, improved access to quality life, sustained environment, and human development through improved provision of access to education. Sustainable development emphasises the importance of developing the knowledge, skills and competencies of the human resources, instead of the availability of natural resources, as catalyst for economic and social development.

An important statement, which has been adopted as the credo of sustainable development is "*We have not inherited the Earth from our parents, but we have borrowed it from our children*". As a strategy, the core issues and necessary conditions for sustainable development includes population and development, food security, species and ecosystems, energy, industry and addressing the urban challenge (WCED, 1987). Sustainable development is the challenge of both the developing and the developed country. The goals of sustainable development focus on three major areas, i.e., economic progress, social progress, and ecological balance.

In terms of the development of human resources, the United Nations balance sheet of human development indicates the following progress. Between 1960 and 1991, net enrolment at the primary level increased by nearly two-thirds, from 48% to 77%. In 2002, primary school enrolments worldwide rose from 80% in 1990 to 84% in 1998. According to the 2002 Human Development Report, 51 countries, with 41% of the world's people, have achieved or are on track to achieve universal primary enrolment. In the mean time, 90 countries, with more than 60% of the world's people, have achieved or are on track to achieve gender equality in primary education by 2015, and more than 80 countries in secondary education (Elliot, 1999, UNDP, 2002).

However, the human development balance sheet still indicates deprivation. In 1996, millions of children were still out of school – 130 million at the primary level, and 275 million at the secondary level. In 2002, 113 million school-age children are not in school, 97% of them in developing countries. The 2002 Human Development Report indicates that 93 countries, with 39% of the world's people, do not have data on trends in primary enrolments. 60% of children not in primary school worldwide are girls. Of the world's estimated 854 million illiterate adults, 544 million are women (Elliot, 1999, UNDP, 2002).

The UNDP has set the Millennium Development Goals on the following criteria, i.e., (1) Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, (2) Achievement of universal primary

education, (3) Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, (4) Reduction of child mortality, and (5) Ensuring environmental sustainability. These UNDP goals and measures should be able to help us in locating the position of our respective countries, based on the above criteria. Distance education should have the key role in responding to the challenge of establishing sustainable human development.

From “Right to Education” to “Right to Quality Education”

Education is a key of successful transformation of developing countries into more equitable nation (World Bank, 2006). This was clearly articulated under the declaration of human rights and further detailed by the succeeding International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This covenant is expected to fight massive social inequality that was the legacy of colonial system (Otto, 1998) and to promote liberation to the entire community (Lev, 1985). Under this covenant, the signatory state has to promote compulsory basic education and to widen access to secondary and tertiary education.

These programs have escalated the educational attainment at the primary and secondary levels and significantly reduced the illiteracy rate in most developing countries including Indonesia (World Bank, 1997). However the quality of state (public) education is inadequate as the state expenditure for education was very limited (World Bank, 2000). For example in Indonesia, in 2001 the government only spent about 1.4% of GNP for education and slightly changed in present time (UNDP, 2001). This inadequate state expenditure reflected the failure of educational policy to maintain sustainable human development.

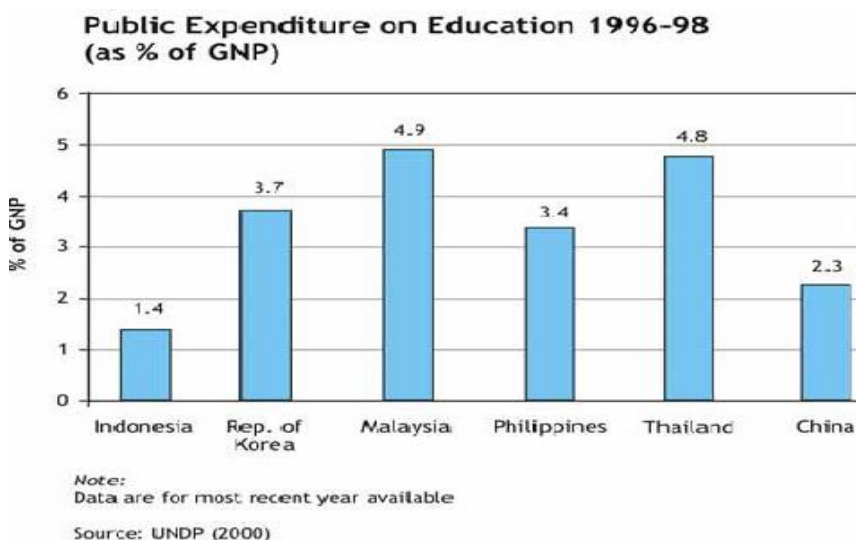
The Indonesian educational system mostly benefited to a few number of people who have privileges to “quality education” and causes wide disparity between urban and rural areas and between public and private education institutions. Thus, the social inequality remains and the social segregation between “the have” and “the poor” is even widespread (World Bank, 2000). In general, the quality of human resources remains low (BAPPENAS, 2001). The state also failed to liberate the general community as only the elites benefited to quality education and inevitably to better working opportunity (World Bank, 2006). An urgent need is required to reconceptualise the foundation of educational system from which that are based on the existing concept of “the right to education” into the new concept of “the right to quality education” in order to secure equal opportunity of the entire community to quality education.

With a large number of population, disperse location of community across more than seventeen thousand islands and wide disparity of human and education resources between urban and rural areas, Indonesia faces substantial challenges to achieve “quality education for all.” Based on experiences, distance education system has proven as a viable method to widen access to education but the learning resources and infrastructures are still limited across Indonesia (UT, 2005). To pursue quality distance education system, it is required to reform both structurally and institutionally the existing system. This reform requires the changes in educational policy at the macro level, such as

increase of state budget, adequate planning and budgeting and accountable policy implementation and the empowerment of education-related infrastructures to guarantee better school governance at the micro level (McAuslan, 2003).

Increase of state budget and better planning and budgeting. During the first and second phases of development in 1960s' and 1970's, Indonesia assisted by International donors focused on transforming its economic infrastructures. The transformation was managed under highly centralised state to impose changes in rural areas (trickle down effect) (Booth, 1998). In the meantime, it was also expected to stimulate development in other sectors (Goodpaster, 2003). The result was overwhelmingly misleading, such as lack of (local) political justification due to the presence of totalitarian regime, the accumulation of capital to limited number of people (World Bank, 2006), wide economic disparity, massive corruption (Transparency International, 2003) and eminent poverty. The economic based development model failed to promote social transformation and sustainable development as state expenditure to education was very limited and fragmented.

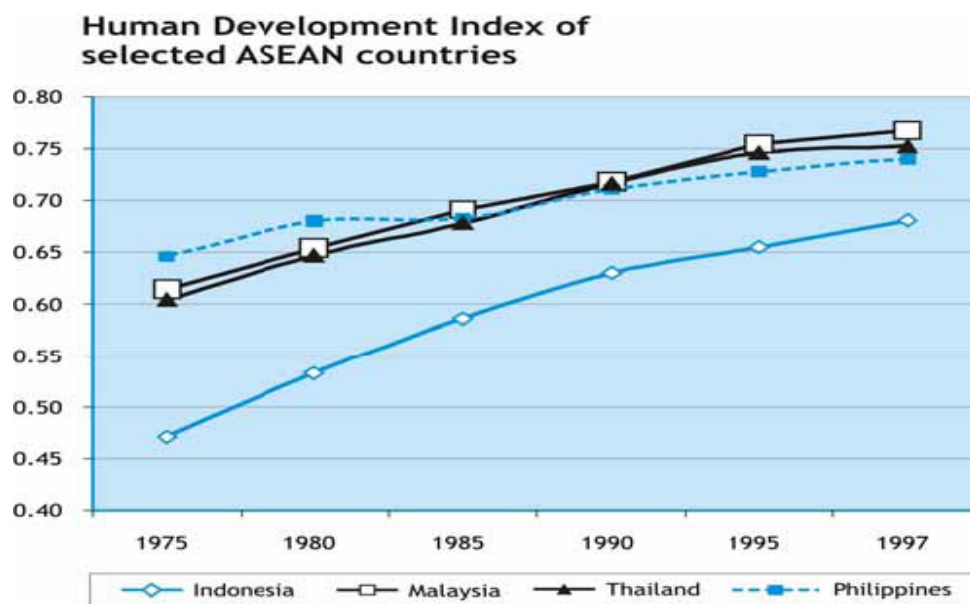
The third model of development in 1980 –1990's attempted to fix the failures of previous model promoting bottom up model, privatisation, market system and mass education. These were however governed by limited governance capacity resulted in manipulation of development incentives by bureaucratic elites (Goodpaster, 1999). State has failed to place educational reform as a priority for development until present time. Compared to other major Asian countries, Indonesian expenditure to education is the lowest amount as seen in the following figure.



With limited state expenditure, the priority of educational policy merely focused on scaling up the educational attainment but it denied the improvement of quality of education. This has fostered government to develop mass education system capable of handling a large number of students. This seems parallel to the establishment of open and distance education system in Indonesia to widen access to education for remote community. This program appears to fail promoting continual improvement of education

system resulting in wide discrepancies of educational infrastructures between urban and rural areas and between Java island and out of Java areas. Public education was therefore doubtful to produce quality graduates. The quality education has still been a privilege for limited number of people.

In general, the quality of human resources remains low. Compared to other neighbouring countries, Indonesia's human development is the lowest number during the twenty-year period as seen in the following graph.



Source: ADB (2000)

The limited state expenditure and inadequate educational policy have resulted in low quality of human resources.

The current decentralisation program on education has provided opportunities to reform local educational policy but only a few towns and districts are capable of using this opportunity due to limited capacity (McCarthy, 2004). Decentralisation itself would not necessarily cause to better educational policy at local level without improvement of local capacity. In line with decentralisation, the increases of state budget for education may guarantee better access to quality education for entire community but it needs to be followed by increasing public participation to education for better planning, budgeting and controlling.

Improving Quality of Distance Education. Concerning wide geographic condition and disparity of learning resources through out Indonesia, the establishment of distance education has substantially overcome barriers to access education. Distance education has proven effectively reaching remote students and students who are unable to attend conventional education (UNESCO, 2002). The increased student attainment in primary education shows progressing result of educational reform but the tertiary student attainment is still limited. Distance education system is still a promising strategy to

elevate secondary and tertiary student attainment but it requires comprehensive and adequate planning and budgeting to guarantee continual improvement of learning resources and its delivery system. Current distance education policy is still fragmented and utilise conventional strategy. This policy is outdated and overlooked the exiting potentials to achieve better quality of distance education system (Eaton, 2001). Distance education policy needs to integrate relevant institutions' interest, to develop strategic alliance among supporting institutions and to create collaborative networks promoting consortium of degree-granting institutions.

Despite the fast-growing distance education practices both domestic and international in Indonesia, the existing regulation seems far behind the existing practices. This has created a gap that may hinder the development of quality distance education. (Eaton, 2001) argued that self-regulatory mechanism may promote better governance and quality assurance of distance education practices. The development of distance education consortia is therefore a basic requirement for promoting collaborative network. This however needs to be followed by the reliable accreditation system to secure quality assurance of distance education system. These twin strategies may be a priority for establishing the foundation of the quality of distance education system.

In summary, the limited state budget and inadequate educational policy has led the disparity of access to quality education. These may reflect the state failure to place education as a priority of development which cause to persistence of social and economic inequality and injustice. Educational policy needs to promote "the quality education for all" to transform the developing countries into more equitable nations. In this respect distance education system may provide a great opportunity to promote "quality education for all" but it requires both institutional and structural reforms to maximise the existing potentials.

Conclusion

In conclusion, distance education has key roles in the implementation of the right to education in Indonesia. Its flexibility, openness, egalitarian values, and accessibility has enabled effective implementation of lifelong learning and gradual achievement of a knowledge-based society. Distance education has the capability to provide quality educational services affordable by its clientele, coming from the disadvantaged groups of the society.

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