

DELIVERING HIGH QUALITY BASIC EDUCATION SERVICES

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This policy brief is the result of an activity entitled “Economic Policymaking in Indonesia” which is jointly conducted by Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). This activity is a contribution from research community that is expected to assist the government in formulating more effective economic policies in the future. In this activity, CSIS and ERIA invited 16 economists with specific fields of expertise from some leading research institutions to conduct in-depth discussions on seven strategic issues facing Indonesian economy (infrastructure development, competitiveness, investment climate, food policy, services sector policy, fiscal policy, and social protection policy), which is then summarized into policy briefs covering each of the topics.

Dissemination of the findings and recommendations produced by this activity is conducted through several channels. First, this activity has made efforts to engage the relevant government officials through some Focus Group Discussions (FGD), the publication of High Level Policy Notes, and hearings with some strategic policymakers with regard to each of the strategic issues mentioned above. Secondly, this activity also conducts widespread public disseminations through Public Seminars on each of the strategic issues, along with publications of the Policy Briefs and supporting multimedia that can be accessed online through www.paradigmaekonomi.org.

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KEY MESSAGES

- *Teachers hold the key to improving education quality in Indonesia*
- *To increase their performance, teachers must be provided with positive pressure to focus on student learning*
 - *A pilot study in Central Java and Yogyakarta finds that the community can be equipped to provide such positive pressure*
- *The potential role of community depends on the specific context and capacity of the community, thus more research is needed to identify appropriate ways in which the community can positively influence education service delivery*

INTRODUCTION

After more than a decade of reforming its education system and significantly increasing public investment in the sector, Indonesia has achieved impressive gains. Tobias et al (2014) list notable achievements, which include universal primary school attainment, significantly higher continuation rate from primary to junior secondary schools, and a narrowing attainment gap between socioeconomic status and by sex. Based on the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) scores, Indonesia has significantly improved its reading performance between 2000 and 2012.

However, challenges remain. Despite investing nearly 4 percent of GDP in the sector and doubling teacher salaries (Al-Samarrai and Cerdan-Infantes, 2013), and the previously mentioned gains notwithstanding, Indonesia remains one of the weakest performers in international assessments of student achievement. Mathematics and science performance have not significantly improved since 2000. There is little evidence that mathematics and science ability gaps between the poor and the rich, and urban and rural students have significantly narrowed in the past 15 years (Tobias et al, 2014). In addition, secondary school enrollment rates are still very low in the eastern part of the country.

Teachers hold the key to improving the quality of education. Conceptually, there are three channels through which teachers affect the quality of education: (i) content knowledge; (ii) pedagogical knowledge, and; (iii) motivation. Content knowledge is mainly determined by the teacher's formal education. Required qualifications usually depend on a teacher's teaching subject and the level of education that s/he teaches at. If s/he meets the required formal educational qualification, then presumably s/he has sufficient content knowledge. Indeed, World Bank (2016) finds that teacher subject matter knowledge accounts for half of the variation in student learning outcomes at the primary level.

The second channel is pedagogical knowledge, which pertains to how much a teacher is able to assess her students' level of learning and knows the appropriate teaching methods such that students can successfully learn. Much of a teacher's pedagogical knowledge is acquired during pre-service teacher training, with updating through attending training events throughout

the teacher's career.

The third aspect is motivation. Put simply, motivation is what makes a teacher put in the amount of effort to implement her content and pedagogical knowledge in the classroom. A highly motivated teacher will teach according to her best knowledge. In contrast, an unmotivated teacher, regardless of her content and pedagogical knowledge, will not perform. Therefore, motivation is the ingredient that turns the knowledge into practice, which eventually determines the amount of learning that students acquire.

Recent education policies have targeted all three aspects. The policy that requires a teacher to hold at least a four-year bachelor's degree is clearly an attempt to ensure adequate content knowledge. The teacher certification program usually requires that teachers undergo further training on pedagogical knowledge before they can receive certification. Afterwards, the certification program attempts to increase motivation by providing a significant allowance, which effectively doubles teacher salaries. For teachers in remote areas, an additional allowance is provided.

Unfortunately, these policies are found to be ineffective. World Bank (2016) finds that the impact of requiring teachers to have a bachelor's degree on student learning is very small. In a recent report, de Ree et al (2016) find that while doubling the pay of certified teachers indeed appears to improve the teacher's financial security, the policy has no measurable impact on student learning outcomes.

The purpose of this policy brief is to use economic concepts to explain the discouraging results in the previous paragraph, and to put forward ideas that can sufficiently motivate teachers to improve their student learning. The next section provides a short summary of teacher incentives. The third section discusses the results of a pilot study in Central Java that appears to have successfully improved teacher motivation. The final section provides some caveats.

TEACHER MOTIVATION: AN ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

Individual decision-making theory in economics states that individuals are utility maximizing, and they make decisions based on their preferences and constraints. In other words, subject to a certain set of constraints, an individual will behave in a way that maximizes her utility provided by her set of preferences. Another way to look at it is through the cost minimization lens. Subject to achieving a certain level of utility, an individual will try to minimize the cost of achieving that level.

Let us apply the concept to the teacher certification program. The two major aspects of the program are: (i) certification is permanent. A teacher cannot lose her certified status, and; (ii) certification is based on academic qualifications. Civil servants with a bachelor's degree and full-time private school teachers with a bachelor's degree are automatically become certified. Senior teachers (Rank IV, older than 50 and had more than 20 years of experience) are exempt from the bachelor's degree requirement, and as such are immediately certified. It is also important to consider what is not considered in the certification program. These include a teacher's practice (preparation, classroom teaching, assessment) and student learning outcomes. With these policy characteristics, economic perspective tells us that it is actually little wonder that the policy has had no effects on student learning outcomes.

In summary, in order to understand low education quality in Indonesia,

economic way of thinking implies that we have to consider the constraints and incentives that a teacher faces.

Bjork (2005) find that teachers are not judged by how much their students learn, but by how much they can appease the school principal and the local education office. Moreover, during Suharto's New Order regime, teachers were part of the state apparatus, whose main duty was to ensure students learn the concepts of Indonesia as a nation. A recent study by Rosser (2015) echoes the Bjork's findings. The study finds that, "teachers have been incorporated into patronage and political networks the logic of which has been to position them as clients, vote mobilisers, and agents of political control and rather than agents of education and equity." And, the study finds that the reforms since 1998 have not been sufficient to improve this condition.

Therefore, the system needs to be reoriented such that a teacher is incentivized to ensure that her or his students are able to learn and improve their skills. One strand of evidence from a pilot in Central Java and other countries shows that community involvement may be an effective way to motivate teachers. The next section discusses this potentially effective practice in detail.

MOTIVATING TEACHERS THROUGH STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

As the main stakeholders of education services, parents and community leaders have a strong interest to see that their children actually learn something in school. The community, with sufficient facilitation, can therefore actively contribute to improving service delivery through changing the incentive structure faced by teachers and principals.

In Indonesia, community participation in education is formally recognized. Indeed, the regulations stipulate that, "community shall take part in the quality improvement of educational services, which include planning, monitoring, and evaluation of educational programs (Bandur and Gamage, 2014)." The specific form of community participation is through the school committee, which consists of the principal, teacher representatives, and community representatives. The members are also supposed to be chosen through an open election.

Although the concept of community participation in education originated from the 1950 (Bandur and Gamage, 2014), it has traditionally been weak. Pradhan et al (2014) finds that the primary function of the community has been to provide funds, which were then largely handed over to the school principal. Given the nature of schools described by Bjork (2005) above, there is very little accountability in the use of these funds.

Between 2007 and 2010, researchers from a number of universities in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture conducted a pilot activity to strengthen school committees. The pilot covered 520 public primary schools in six districts in Central Java and Yogyakarta (Pradhan et al, 2014).

Two sets of school committee strengthening interventions were tested. The first set of intervention was more traditional forms of strengthening: block grant and training. School committees were provided a significant block grant and facilitation to coach the members on what the grant can be used for and monitor the use of the grant. In addition, they were provided a two-day training on planning, budgeting and how to support education quality.

The second set of intervention was a novel institutional reform aimed at

improving the social capital of the school committee, specifically by strengthening its trustworthiness and relationship with community. The interventions consisted of facilitating a democratic election of school committee members and linking school committees to the village council by facilitating joint planning meetings.

The findings were illuminating. The more traditional type of school committee strengthening did not have any significant impact on teachers, school-based management, community inputs on education, or learning outcomes. In contrast, the novel type of strengthening significantly increased community inputs on education and teacher work hours. In addition, school principals expressed higher satisfaction with the school committee and community participation. As a result, student learning outcomes significantly improved.

The pilot shows that there is potential for the community to play an important role to motivate teachers and school principals such that educational quality improves. In addition, this can be cultivated using an existing structure for community participation: the school committee. It appears that increasing the trustworthiness and reputation of the school committee in the eyes of the community is the key to providing the legitimacy that a school committee needs in order to function according to its design.

However, it is important to note the context in which the pilot was undertaken. It was implemented in an area that is relatively advanced in terms of infrastructure, socioeconomic standards, and education level of the community. The schools that participated in the pilot have adequate infrastructure and teaching facilities, and the teachers met minimum education requirements. It remains to be seen whether the same results can be achieved in poorer or more remote areas of Indonesia. More research is needed to determine the kind of community participation that is appropriate in communities with different capacity from the pilot.

Regardless of the specific forms of community participation, the important principal to keep in mind is one that is called “positive pressure”. Introduced by Fullan (2010), the concept that relies on: focused urgency, partnership and peers, data transparency, non-punitive accountability, and synergy. It is important to avoid negative pressure, which will result in low morale, teaching to the test, and unscrupulous behavior – many of which are presently observed among teachers throughout the country. All potential interventions to improve teacher motivation should be considered based on these criteria.

CLOSING

The education sector in Indonesia faces many challenges. This brief only touches upon one issue: teacher motivation, and puts forward one recommendation: rely on communities to apply positive pressure to schools, such that teachers are motivated to improve their students’ learning.

There are many other issues that the brief does not touch upon, but are widely known by policymakers. These include the low school enrollment rates in Eastern Indonesia (Tobias et al, 2014); curriculum; the need for in-service teachers to upgrade their pedagogical and subject knowledge skills; corruption issues (Suryadarma, 2012); politicization of the teaching corps (Bjork, 2005); and the importance of pre-service training quality. I hope that through this policy brief, policymakers and stakeholders realize that a re-examination of these issues through an economic perspective may provide novel policy ideas to improve the quality of education in Indonesia.

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