

# ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

Few countries as culturally rich, politically pivotal, and naturally beautiful as Indonesia are as often misrepresented in global media and conversation. Stretching 3,400 miles east to west along the equator, Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world and home to more than four hundred ethnic groups and several major world religions. This sprawling Southeast Asian nation is also the world's most populous Muslim-majority country and the third largest democracy. Although in recent years the country has experienced serious challenges with regard to religious harmony, its trillion-dollar economy is booming and its press and public sphere are among the most vibrant in Asia. A land of cultural contrasts, contests, and contradictions, this ever-evolving country is today rising to even greater global prominence, even as it redefines the terms of its national, religious, and civic identity.

The *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Indonesia* offers an overview of the modern making and contemporary dynamics of culture, society, and politics in this powerful Asian nation. It provides a comprehensive survey of key issues in Indonesian politics, economics, religion, and society. It is divided into six sections, organized as follows:

- Cultural Legacies and Political Junctures
- Contemporary Politics and Plurality
- Markets and Economic Cultures
- Muslims and Religious Plurality
- Gender and Sexuality
- Indonesia in an Age of Multiple Globalizations

Bringing together original contributions by leading scholars of Indonesia in law, political science, history, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, and gender studies this *Handbook* provides an up-to-date, interdisciplinary, and academically rigorous exploration of Indonesia. It will be of interest to students, academics, policymakers, and others in search of reliable information on Indonesian politics, economics, religion, and society in an accessible format.

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## 5

# MOVING TOWARD STABILITY

## Development of the Indonesian education system

*Christopher Bjork and Raihani*

Education systems are shaped to fit the contours of a nation's political system, culture, and history. This is true of any location. But in Indonesia, these connections are particularly complex and revealing. The goals of the contemporary system, function of schools within society, roles ascribed to teachers, and the government's approach to education development are all rooted in the past. At each stage of the evolution of the Indonesian education system, government leaders treated the schools as an essential tool for uniting the nation in support of national integration and development. Indonesia's long history of colonial rule complicated that process. As the national leadership changed, schools were required to adjust to shifting expectations about what type of citizens would best serve the country. At many points, it was difficult to judge whether the schools were organized to serve politicians or students (Bjork 2003).

Indonesia's remarkable diversity added another layer of complexity to the process of educating the nation's youth. Supporting the motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) has created great opportunities – as well as challenges – for education planners. Indonesia is composed of 257 million citizens spread across more than 17,000 islands. Although most citizens speak Bahasa Indonesia, approximately 700 regional languages have been documented (Riza 2008). Indonesian schools, public as well as private, are also responsible for teaching religion. And children, of course, come to school with a wide range of social and cognitive needs.

All of these factors have complicated the work of the educators, administrators, civil servants, and politicians charged with overseeing Indonesian schools. The education system has advanced in a series of fits and starts. The first national education system was not established until 1945 but has already experienced a number of major shifts impelled by leaders with competing visions about how schools should be organized. As the succeeding sections of this chapter will illustrate, the Indonesian education system has demonstrated great resilience in the face of some formidable assaults and is moving closer toward stability and quality.

### **Early foundations**

As was the case in many Asian nations, religious teaching represented the first educational options offered to children living in the islands that eventually became Indonesia. Beginning in the fifth century, Buddhist and Hindu scholars regularly visited the archipelago en route to India, a popular site for pilgrimages. Although no formal schools existed at that time, the visiting

scholars provided local citizens with instruction in theology, literature, language, and science (Ricklefs 1981). As a result, the islands developed a reputation as centers of religious study (Djojonegoro 1997). This notion of education grounded in religion continued after the decline of the Hindu-Buddhist period.

Islam first established a foothold in the area in the thirteenth century, when an influx of foreign merchants disseminated their religious beliefs as they traded their wares throughout the region. By the end of the sixteenth century, Islam had become the dominant religion in the archipelago. Indonesia's first system of mass education, the *pesantren*, centered on teaching the language, texts, and doctrine of Islam (Peacock 1973). Life in the *pesantren*, which were located primarily in rural areas, was an all-encompassing experience: pupils boarded at the institutions and spent a portion of each day laboring in the fields, in addition to studying sacred texts. Students in these institutions included future religious leaders, court poets, and members of the ruling class (Lukens-Bull 2001). The *madrasah* (Islamic day schools) were also established to cater to the educational needs of Muslim children (Steenbrink 1994).

Another form of religious education was imported to the islands when Portuguese spice traders gained control of the Maluku Islands during the sixteenth century. Roman Catholic priests often followed those traders and established seminaries to serve their children. Hoping to create strong support for their religion in Southeast Asia, the priests inculcated local residents in Catholicism, as well as reading, writing, and mathematics. Although the influence of the Catholic missionaries was limited to a small section of the archipelago, it had an impact that continues to be felt in those areas today.

The educational landscape in Indonesia changed markedly when the Dutch first appeared on the scene at the end of the sixteenth century. Initially, the Dutch made no provisions for the education of Indonesian children. Although small numbers of youth continued to study in *pesantren* and in schools run by religious missionaries, most Indonesians lacked access to education. Under the Dutch, two social classes developed: peasants, laborers, and servants constituted the lower class; the upper class, or *priyayi*, was composed of white-collar workers and Indonesian civil servants working in support of the colonial administration (Koentjaraningrat 1975). Ethnic Chinese people living in Indonesia were considered aliens and were not included in either group. Separate school systems served the three different groups (Europeans, Indonesians, and ethnic Chinese). A small number of children of the *priyayi* were permitted to attend primary schools that served Dutch families, beginning in 1816 (Peacock 1973). In 1848, a second type of elementary school was founded to train the children of *pribumi* (native Indonesians) to work as clerks in the colonial administration. In addition, in 1851, a group of institutions that aimed to prepare native Indonesians to perform undersupplied technical jobs (such as vaccinator or agricultural development agent) opened their doors. For most families, though, education was regarded as an unattainable luxury.

King's Decree Number 44, enacted in 1893, generated hope that the quantity and quality of education offered to native citizens would improve. This regulation specified two types of schools that would henceforth serve Indonesian children: first-class primary schools (*Eerste Klasse*) for the children of aristocrats and second-class schools (*Tweede Klasse*) for the general population (Djojonegoro 1997). In 1907, a third type of school was founded: the *Volksschool*, or village school, was created as an inexpensive Western-style elementary school for the general population. Unfortunately, all three types of school created in response to King's Decree No. 44 suffered from a lack of funds and qualified teachers. The quality of instruction was of low caliber and dependent on additional financial support from the local communities (van der Veur 1969). The combination of inferior instruction and financial demands placed on parents kept most families from sending their children to school.

The number of schools serving pribumi children did increase under Dutch colonial rule, but investments in education for native children paled in comparison with the resources the Dutch allocated to their own children's schooling. In general, Dutch education for non-Europeans was considered *uitzondering* (the exception) and was organized to train Dutch-speaking workers. Applicants were classified according to parental income, and only the most elite were offered slots. In 1900, for example, the number of Indonesian students enrolled in Dutch elementary schools totaled 1,870, compared with approximately 100,000 in the vernacular schools (van der Veur 1969). At the end of the nineteenth century, school for European children was virtually universal, whereas less than 10% of Pribumi children completed a three-year primary education.

During World War II, the form and focus of education in Indonesia was dictated by yet another foreign power. When the Japanese replaced the Dutch as Indonesia's rulers in 1942, they orchestrated a complete overhaul of the education system. The various systems that had operated under the Dutch were consolidated into a single operation modeled after the Japanese education system. Schools were organized to support the Japanese war effort and the goal of creating a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere." During that period, lessons consisted primarily of physical drills, military training, and indoctrination into Japanese culture. Under Japanese rule, the quality and quantity of instruction declined significantly. Between 1940 and 1945, the primary school population shrank by 30%, and the number of secondary students plummeted by almost 90% (Djojonegoro 1997).

During both the Dutch and Japanese administrations, schooling was organized to support the needs of the occupying powers, not to promote the intellectual development of local children. Religious institutions provided an exception to that pattern, but most schools focused on religious lessons and moral education. Furthermore, the religious schools operated largely in isolation; they did not represent a unified alternative to colonial education. As a result of these factors, when Indonesia gained independence in 1945, the education system that survived was fragmented and unfocused. It also lacked a stable force of experienced teachers.

### **Creating a national education system**

At the conclusion of World War II, Indonesians finally gained the power to form a school system that embodied their own values and aspirations. This presented leaders of the new government with unprecedented opportunities to reshape the education system and increase access to the schools. The first president, Sukarno, and his cadre of assistants regarded education as a key mechanism for breaking down social class barriers and reducing disparities between the rich and poor. In December of 1945, a committee of government officials drafted a plan that outlined the direction of Indonesia's first national education system. The central tenets of that document signaled a rejection of the European system it replaced. Architects of the public school system sought to create institutions that were anti-elitist, anti-discriminatory, and anti-capitalist. Eager to redress the neglect of education of indigenous children under the Dutch and Japanese, Indonesia's first national government made a concerted effort to eliminate the obstacles that previously prevented Indonesian children from enrolling in school. Determined to compensate for the lack of opportunities offered by their former rulers, officials declared that all citizens motivated to study would have access to schooling.

Plans for the new education system did not refer to *pesantren* or *madrasah*. In response to protests held by Muslims in 1946, Sukarno's government established a Ministry of Religion (MOR) to manage Islamic affairs, such as marriage, court cases, mosques, and pilgrimages. The MOR was also given responsibility for overseeing all *pesantren* and *madrasah* (Mujiburrahman 2006). Although the establishment of the MOR was seen as an accommodation of Muslim



interests, the government did not formally consider Islamic education a part of the national education. This dichotomy remained a contentious issue in the country's educational policies and debates.

The freedom to create a new education system virtually from scratch proved to be both liberating and overwhelming. Education planners tried to provide direction to the swarms of newly appointed bureaucrats while they too were navigating unfamiliar pathways. After decades of schooling only for the elite, education was provided to many children whose parents did not enjoy special connections or status. Under Sukarno's leadership, the government made great strides in its goal of providing primary schooling to all Indonesian children. The first public school system was composed of primary schools, lower and upper secondary schools, technical schools, and a number of tertiary institutions. Technical schools, open to primary school graduates, included crafts schools, three types of general technical education institutes, and teacher training schools. Between 1945 and 1950, the number of students attending primary and secondary schools more than doubled, with primary schools experiencing the most dramatic increases.

This influx of new bodies into the schools created strains on a system operating on a shaky foundation. After years of educational neglect, the government was forced to play a serious game of "catch up." Although the government acquired many of the buildings that formerly housed schools operated by the Dutch, the instructional materials left behind by the Europeans were virtually useless to Indonesian educators. Few individuals had any experience managing schools, and only a small number of qualified teachers were available to staff the new institutions. In 1951, it was estimated that 140,000 people would have to be trained as teachers to meet the demand for schooling that was unleashed following independence. In addition, 50,000 active teachers would need to undergo extensive retraining to prepare them to fit into the new system. To overcome this shortage, 500 emergency teacher-training programs were established throughout the country (Djojonegoro 1997).

As he attempted to steer the nation toward stability, President Sukarno was forced to contend with a series of conflicts that divided the population and threatened his own authority. Given their first taste of freedom, Indonesians at all levels of society jockeyed for power and influence. The Sukarno years were plagued by ethnic conflict and outbreaks of regionalism. Political instability and increasingly bleak economic conditions bred criticism of the parliament and the president. Disputes between political parties posed an additional challenge to the nascent government. This instability had important implications for the national education system that was being formed. The effects were most directly felt in two areas: the authority structure used to manage the system and the curriculum. Like all branches of government, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) was organized vertically, with ultimate authority ensconced at the top of the hierarchy. Education officials in Jakarta were entrusted to make the key decisions that guided the development of schools from Aceh to Kalimantan. They established the objectives that all schools in the country would follow, designed a national curriculum, and oversaw the training of educators. The input of classroom teachers was not solicited. In almost all matters of importance, education decisions were made in Jakarta and transmitted to local levels.

Another manifestation of the political turmoil plaguing Indonesia was the strong connections drawn between education and nation building. Treating the school system as an important vehicle for integrating a nation noted for its ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity, government leaders mandated that Bahasa Indonesia be used as the language of instruction in all public schools. Schools were charged with not only inculcating academic skills but also with molding upright citizens.

The massive, unwieldy growth of the education system under President Sukarno paralleled conditions in most sectors of government. Sukarno was more adept at delivering inspiring

speeches than at managing government employees. During his tenure, inflation rose at a dangerous rate and unemployment skyrocketed. The president's strategy for reducing unemployment and widening his base of support was to expand the bureaucracy. By 1965, there was a "widespread feeling in Indonesia that the political system could not last as it was for very much longer" (Crouch 1978: 21). When Sukarno was forced out of power in September of that year, the nation was in a state of economic, political, and social chaos.

### **Charting a new course**

The New Order government that replaced Sukarno's Guided Democracy in 1966 was intent on creating stability and uniting a fragmented populace. Soeharto, the new president, quickly mounted a campaign to bolster the authority of the state. Public employees were required to pledge "monoloyalty" to the state and to abstain from joining political organizations. Individuals who refused to acquiesce to such pressure were penalized heavily (Mackie and MacIntyre 1994). One consequence of that overhaul of the government was that civil servants – including teachers – became "transmitters" of directives from their superiors, rather than representatives of communities (Emmerson 1978).

The Soeharto administration set out to create a modern national culture with which all Indonesians could identify. The schools played an essential role in achieving that goal. Kipp observes that during the New Order, the schools became a "powerful means to forge nationalistic loyalties and identities over ethnic, religious, and class divisions" (Kipp 1993: 73). Regarding schools as critical links to national integration, government officials went to great lengths to ensure that members of school communities recognized their identities as Indonesians and respected their obligations to the central government. Behavioral guidelines for teachers and other civil servants became increasingly prescriptive and penalties for non-compliance more severe. Under Soeharto, the government gradually tightened the leash that connected schools to the center. Lacking confidence in the abilities of new teachers, the MOEC attempted to make the schools as "teacher proof" as possible (Shaeffer 1990). New Order leaders framed education as a means of developing a body of citizens who would support the nation, rather than as an opportunity for individuals to acquire skills and knowledge that would reap them rewards.

Convincing citizens with tenuous connections to the central government to conform to New Order plans for change presented a formidable challenge to national leaders. One tool utilized to secure the allegiance of the polity was legislation that aimed to bolster national unity. For example, an Anti-Subversion Law, which carried a maximum penalty of death, made it illegal to commit any acts that "distort, undermine, or deviate from" the principles outlined in Pancasila, the national ideology. The adoption of such policies succeeded in stifling critical voices and encouraging citizens to self-censor their behavior. The government also steadily narrowed the limits of politically acceptable cultural expression in attempt to foster support for the "national culture" it was attempting to develop (Bowen 1994).

Pressure placed on government employees to demonstrate allegiance to the national government further increased in 1971, when Presidential Decision No. 2 established the Corps of Civil Servants of the Indonesian Republic (Korpri) at every level of government (Emmerson 1978). Korpri's guiding objectives stressed discipline, loyalty, and devotion to one's official duties. Even the teachers' union, *Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia* (PGRI), was utilized to monitor the actions of educators. Formed in 1945, the union was originally created as an umbrella organization to foster teacher unity and professionalism. However, in 1994, the government specified that PGRI was required to "defend and apply Pancasila and the Constitution of 1945 according to the essence of the New Order . . . [and] act as a means of attaining national goals for raising

the standard of living” (GOI 1994, chapter IV, section 4). As this language illustrates, under the New Order administration, the PGRI became a mechanism for monitoring teachers rather than a forum through which they could express their opinions and concerns. Teachers may have been expected to act as leaders in the schools, but their autonomy was undercut by rules and regulations designed to minimize the chances that any government employee would undercut national unity.

The heavy emphasis on nation building signaled to teachers that their primary role was to support national goals for the country articulated by leaders in Jakarta. Educators were valued for their ability to loyally follow directives, not their capacity for independent thought. The state stressed teachers’ loyalty to the nation above that to their profession. One effect of that emphasis is that teachers did not establish an identity for themselves separate from that applied to all civil servants or a distinct set of professional standards. Following a pattern that Ghazali et al. describe in their study of civil servants, teachers tended to conduct tasks explicitly assigned to them but were careful not to exceed established standards or behave in any way that set them apart from their peers (Ghazali et al. 1986).

The New Order government went to great lengths to ensure that educators supported its plans for social and economic development. The instructor’s role as civil servant was emphasized over that of educator, and her opportunities to shape school policy and practice were limited. In co-opting the civil service corps, the government reduced threats to its authority but also undermined the influence of educators. Aware of the potential costs to be paid for displaying resistance to ideas passed down from Jakarta, teachers learned that their wisest course of action was to unquestioningly follow directives from their superiors. Educators came to define their professional responsibilities quite narrowly: to faithfully disseminate a set of ideas formulated in the capital (Bjork 2005, 2013).

Understandably, school employees tended to focus their energies on activities separate from their obligations as government employees. Many had part-time jobs that they took quite seriously. That was partially due to market pressures operating beyond the borders of schools. The income that teachers generated from their extra jobs often depended on the time and effort they invested in that work; government salaries, on the other hand, were primarily based on years of service and levels of education. Family, church, and neighborhood-based activities were also highly valued by government employees. In their neighborhoods and mosques, instructors enjoyed levels of influence that were rarely equaled in the workplace, where they were located toward the bottom of the authority hierarchy. This has had important, though often unrecognized, implications for education reform in Indonesia.

### **Recent efforts to reform schools**

The expansion of the school system that took place during the New Order years was remarkable.

As Table 5.1 indicates, the number of students, teachers, and schools all grew dramatically. In addition, education attainment levels and literacy rates steadily increased. Between 1980 and 1990, the literacy rate for citizens aged 15 and older climbed from 67% to 82% and exceeded 90% by 2004 (Unesco Institute for Statistics 2016). However, although the MOEC succeeded in its mission to improve access to the nation’s schools, the quality of instruction continued to worry education officials and international consultants. According to a World Bank report, the need to improve the quality of basic education became “a preoccupation for the Government and a central objective of its education policy” (World Bank 1989: i). Recognizing that “teacher quality appears to be the most strategic path to improving primary educational quality” (Suryadi 1992: 81), the MOEC declared its commitment to enhancing the quality of pre-service teacher

Table 5.1 Growth of Total Students and Teachers

	<i>Primary Students</i>	<i>Primary Schools</i>	<i>Primary Teachers</i>
<b>1945</b>	2,523,410	15,069	336,287
<b>1960</b>	8,955,098	37,673	230,838
<b>1975</b>	12,132,667	62,373	1,054,983
<b>1990</b>			
	Lower Secondary Students	Lower Secondary Schools	Lower Secondary Teachers
<b>1945</b>	98,365	322	4,577
<b>1960</b>	670,481	6,312	42,541
<b>1975</b>	1,900,154	7,843	117,584
<b>1990</b>	5,686,118	20,605	409,739

Source: Djojonegoro 1997

education and facilitated a massive re-training of mid-career instructors. The goal of these efforts was to provide teachers with a firmer foundation of subject-based knowledge and to encourage them to shift from transmission-oriented approaches to more student-centered instructional approaches.

Political instability complicated this project. In the late 1990s, after decades of domination by the executive branch, non-governmental organizations, college students, and reformist religious groups pressed for political reform and an end to corruption, collusion, and nepotism (Hefner 2001; Usman 2001). The Asian economic crisis of 1998 heightened that pressure. Widespread civil unrest culminated in the resignation of President Soeharto in May of 1998. This change in leadership sparked hope among Indonesians that an era of increased popular participation, pluralism, and individual freedom was on the way.

In the field of education, the end of the New Order created upheaval but also generated hope that significant changes would be enacted in the schools. After the change in leadership, it appeared that educators would enjoy greater freedom and influence than was true under Soeharto. In 1999, the legislature enacted two laws (Laws 22 and 25 of 1999) that broadened the scope of the government's commitment to decentralization. MOEC officials capitalized on these policies and endorsed a number of initiatives designed to augment the authority of teachers and local education stakeholders. This push for more local control of schools was supported by revisions of the curriculum (such as the addition of local content to the national curriculum), the creation of school committees (which included parent and community representatives), and a general push for more engaging learning activities (Bjork 2013). All of these strategies were employed with the goal of raising standards and levels of achievement in the schools.

Through Law No. 14/2005, the government attempted to improve teachers' qualifications, welfare, and effectiveness (Raihani and Sumintono 2010). This law expanded the prerequisites for teacher certification. It required candidates for certification to provide concrete evidence of their commitment to the profession and to improving their instructional practice. Research that analyzes the effects of the law offers an ambiguous picture. One positive consequence is that teaching has become a more attractive career choice for many citizens, due primarily to substantial increases in the salaries earned by individuals who meet the certification requirements. The impact of Law 14 on teaching quality, on the other hand, has been mixed. Researchers who have studied educators' responses to the legislation indicate that entrenched attitudes and practices are difficult to alter. Abdullah, for instance, documented great variation in the recruitment,

pre-service training, and supervision provided to teachers as they worked toward certification (Abdullah 2015).

Another strategy utilized in attempts to raise educational standards was School-Based Management (SBM). After the collapse of the New Order, the government introduced several initiatives that sought to give local citizens greater input into school decision making and, by extension, to raise learning standards (Parker and Raihani 2011). In 2004, a new competency-based curriculum (known as KBK) was piloted in several schools. KBK encouraged teachers to focus on student capacities and to use more active pedagogical approaches as they introduced concepts. Government leaders believed that these changes would augment student achievement and make Indonesia more competitive globally. KBK, later known as KTSP (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan), became a tool to raise learning standards. The new curriculum also cast teachers as facilitators of student learning, encouraging them to tailor the curriculum to fit the unique interests and capacities of their students (Yamin 2007).

This push for more local autonomy over curriculum and instruction was significant. After decades of tightly controlling all major decisions related to education, the MOEC was delegating unprecedented authority to school employees. Following the new curriculum, however, required educators to change their receptive cultural mind-sets and develop the skills and competencies required to respond to such constructivist teaching requirements. To facilitate this shift in the role of the instructor, two teacher support programs were initiated: KKG (Kerukunan Keluarga Guru), at the primary level, and MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran), at the secondary level. Both KKG and MGMP encouraged educators to share their experiences and expertise with one another. These forums provided an ongoing form of professional development for teachers that allowed them to focus on their most immediate concerns.

The government also revised the national examination (*Ujian Nasional*, or UN) in an attempt to ensure that all Indonesian students would meet national competency standards. In the past, the national examination had created extreme anxiety among parents. This sometimes led them to resort to activities such as asking teachers to hold special preparation sessions for the UN, holding communal prayers for entire school communities before test sessions, and, most seriously, attempting to manipulate examination results. Responding to such criticism, the government eliminated the UN as a determinant of high school graduation; instead, UN scores were used only as a source of information for educational improvement.

In 2013, the government introduced yet another new national curriculum, which it labeled Kurikulum 2013 (K13). The MOEC proclaimed its ongoing commitment to producing school graduates who were globally competitive – but also grounded in strong Indonesian values. To support this objective, K13 emphasized students' core competencies, spiritual growth, knowledge, and skills (Machali 2014). Some observers asserted that K13 represented a form of character education, although it was not clear exactly what those values were or how they would be taught. Guidelines for the new curriculum merely stated that teachers should explicitly refer to values or character in their syllabi and lesson plans. Educators were expected to faithfully adhere to the new curricular guidelines, which reduced their autonomy in the classroom. Widespread resistance to K13, however, led the former minister of education, Anies Baswedan, to suspend implementation of K13 until all schools, teachers, and other education stakeholders were fully prepared to enact the curriculum according to plan. In the meantime, he instructed them to revert to the KTSP curriculum.

Response to K13 highlights the challenges that have confronted the MOEC as it attempted to raise learning standards in Indonesian schools. Almost every major education reform policy adopted in the post-New Order years fell short of expectations. Some of the setbacks that occurred were linked to administrative missteps: reform plans were sometimes introduced

hastily, before the people and institutions responsible for implementing them fully understood what they were being asked to do. Another obstacle that undermined reform was local resistance (both overt and concealed) to change. The disjointed process of redesigning the curriculum underlined the complexity of altering the attitudes and behaviors of a cadre of teachers who had been socialized to conform to behavioral expectations established over decades. Facilitating changes in classroom interactions proved much more difficult than expanding access to schooling.

One positive outcome of curriculum reform initiatives introduced in the new millennium involved the curricular unification between public schools and madrasah. The Education Law of 2003 facilitated this integration of Islamic and general education. This legislation specified that religious and public institutions should follow the same core curriculum (although madrasah would offer several additional religious subjects). Through this integration, the government aspired to symbolically unite all school graduates as citizens of Indonesia, equally prepared to contribute to national development and unity. Although some managerial and communication problems accompanied this process, unification of the MOEC and MOR promoted equality between the two institutions.

### **Salient issues and challenges**

The shadow of colonialism cast a pall across the Indonesian archipelago for centuries. Dominated by foreign powers with scant interest in enlightening native citizens, Indonesians were forced to make do with limited educational options. Some citizens learned to read and write in local neighborhood schools or pesantren. The most fortunate gained acceptance to Dutch schools and, upon graduation, obtained employment supporting the colonial administration. Under colonial rule, however, the majority of Indonesians did not have access to any formal education. Lacking the skills necessary to improve their income or social status, their futures were often inextricably tied to agriculture.

In the years after independence, the government facilitated a considerable expansion of the school system. A fragmented collection of institutions was consolidated into a unified entity, and new schools were established across the archipelago. The percentage of citizens who attended school and acquired basic numeracy and literacy skills soared. Schools focused on equipping pupils with basic literacy and numeracy skills and on teaching them to act as good citizens.

Once those goals were achieved, the MOEC shifted its focus to more complex challenges. The Indonesian government sought to keep children in school longer and to provide them with a broader, more stimulating form of education. Efforts to alter curriculum and instruction, however, proved more difficult than expanding access to schools. Education officials discovered that modifying behavior was more challenging than constructing new buildings. Though a multitude of circumstances presented challenges to the MOEC as it attempted to raise learning standards, three factors have presented particularly formidable barriers to change.

#### **1) Geography**

One factor that has posed ongoing challenges to educational reform in Indonesia is the geographical diversity and the great distances that separate the nation's islands. The MOEC is responsible for overseeing approximately 140,000 primary, 40,000 junior secondary, and 26,000 high schools. Disseminating policy guidelines to schools spread out across more than 17,000 islands (approximately 6,000 of which are inhabited) requires exceptional organization and focus; monitoring the implementation of those initiatives is even more arduous. Traveling from

Jakarta to outer islands can take several days. The distances that separate the MOEC from its sub-national units are more than physical. Ideas are often revised, distorted, or ignored as they are passed from one level or office to the next. As a result, officials stationed in Jakarta often lack a concrete sense of how school employees are responding to policy directives. This loose coupling reduces the stress experienced by education officials – responding to a crisis is not necessary if one is not aware the crisis exists – but can also undermine the process of school reform.

## **2) *Social diversity***

Although statistics compiled by the MOEC highlight significant reductions in illiteracy and dropout rates over the past 50 years, those figures frequently mask disparities in educational quality between urban, rural, and remote areas. Designing a curriculum that citizens in all corners of the country will find relevant and beneficial to their own needs is no facile task. Indonesia's linguistic, religious, ethnic, and economic diversity complicates this process. Local conceptions about the primary responsibilities of schools may vary significantly from village to village and island to island. Throughout the nation's history, this reality has complicated the challenge of obtaining local buy-in for education policies designed in Jakarta. Critics have highlighted the uneven distribution of resources to schools located in different parts of the country and raised questions about the appropriateness of using a single national examination to measure the performance of all Indonesian students. How was it that children living in remote areas of Papua were assessed using the same standards relied on to evaluate pupils attending schools in Jakarta?

Another factor that has complicated the process of educational reform in Indonesia has been its (in)ability to produce citizens who value and support the nation's multicultural society. The thickening politics of identity – be it religion, ethnicity, or gender – have been overwhelming, partly due to the constellation of global politics and the thrust of transnational ideologies. One example of the charged nature of this topic involved the former governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaya Purnama, who is Christian and ethnically Chinese, was accused of blasphemy after a widely circulated video captured him making a joke about a passage in the Quran that concerns non-Muslims serving as leaders. In the field of education, making the headscarf compulsory for female Muslim students in many schools across the archipelago – and the growing prohibition of this same clothing in Bali – illustrate how education has been vulnerable to these politics. The current education system and its reforms have not shown appropriate responses to this challenge (Rahani 2014).

## **3) *Culture of teaching***

Indonesian teachers organize their professional lives according to a unique set of assumptions about what an instructor can and should accomplish. When the first national system of education was being established in Indonesia, political leaders focused on creating national cohesion and stability. As a result, teachers came to define their responsibilities quite narrowly: to faithfully disseminate a set of ideas formulated in the capital. Now that the MOEC has shifted its focus to improving the quality of curriculum and instruction, new demands are being placed on educators. After decades of rewarding teachers for dutifully following the orders of their superiors, the ministry is asking them to act autonomously – to shape policy and practice in the schools. This requires a conspicuous shift in the role of the instructor.

As McLaughlin has observed, the effects of any education reform effort will depend on the “incentives, beliefs, and capacity” (McLaughlin 1987: 175) of the individuals entrusted to enact an initiative in the schools. MOEC plans to improve the quality of instruction tend to delegate

extensive responsibilities to teachers, who are expected to assume leadership for implementing plans developed in Jakarta. Teachers, however, often lack the capacities to realize those plans. For example, creating a competency-based curriculum that fits the unique needs of students in a particular learning community sounds laudable. But it is also an immense undertaking, likely to prove taxing even to instructors with extensive experience in curriculum design. Few Indonesian instructors have such a background. Historically, they have been rewarded for displaying loyalty rather than initiative or creativity. This mismatch between the objectives of recent education reforms and teacher conceptions of their professional responsibilities frequently impedes efforts to reform the schools.

If teachers are to assume responsibility for improving the quality of curricula and instruction in the schools, they will need to develop the motivation, skills, and sense of collective responsibility required to realize education officials' plans for change. Developing an infrastructure that treats teachers as professionals and gives them the support necessary to act autonomously is an essential antecedent to fundamental reform of the Indonesian education system.

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