

The Struggle to Recruit Good Teachers in Indonesia: Institutional and Social Dysfunctions

Aris R. Huang, Shintia Revina, Rizki Fillaili, Akhmadi

Abstract

Why is it so hard for Indonesia to recruit good teachers? We argue that the struggle to recruit good teachers are due to institutional, political economy, and social dynamics of the recruitment process. We will discuss three factors that underpin this issue. First, Indonesia's dysfunctional teacher recruitment process as a by-product of the country's inchoate political and legal institutions. Second, the political economy "environment" of the teaching profession that prioritises stakeholder interests over education goals. Third, social expectations prioritising seniority rather than merit as indicators of teacher performance. We conclude with some directions for future steps to address said issues.

Keywords: Teacher Recruitment, Political Economy, Decentralised Government



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Abbreviations

BOS (<i>Bantuan Operasional Sekolah</i>)	School Operational Assistance Fund
CAT	computer assisted test
IGI (<i>Ikatan Guru Indonesia</i>)	Indonesian Teachers Association
MoABR	Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform
MoEC	Ministry of Education and Culture
MoF	Ministry of Finance
PGRI (<i>Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia</i>)	Teachers Association of the Republic of Indonesia

1. Introduction

Teachers are fundamental in good quality learning (World Bank, 2019; Popova, Evans and Arancibia, 2016). Because teachers are important in the learning process, the quality of a nation's education system thus rely on the quality of its teachers. Good teachers are teachers employing care and concern for the progress of their students' learning. They are also proactive to the constant need for developing and applying effective teaching practices. Developing countries' learning problems begin with the difficulty of staffing classrooms with good teachers. It is crucial, therefore, that teacher recruitment systems are managed effectively to ensure individuals with the appropriate skills, knowledge, and passion enter the teaching profession. However, the literature on teacher recruitment woes in developing countries have often focused on the mechanics of managing the teaching profession to improve teachers' performance. Research highlight the urgency to tackle key issues, such as inefficiencies of teacher monitoring (World Bank, 2015), lack of appropriate incentives to promote good teaching (Glewwe and Kremer, 2005), nepotism in hiring (Estrada, 2015), and limited resources to hire teachers (Chudgar, Chandra and Razzaque, 2014) to improve teaching. As a result, policy recommendations developed out of the corpus of teacher recruitment zero in on systemic management—improve and refine decentralisation of hiring to schools (Vegas, 2007), or improve oversight on school governance (Duflo, Dupas and Kremer, 2014)—indicating that efficient management would lift performance. This view is unsatisfying because government effort to streamline system management in the education sector can risk missing the key question to teacher performance: why is it so hard to recruit good teachers in developing countries?

This paper aims to analyse the institutional, political economy, and social dynamics that distort teacher recruitment. We argue that institutional, political economy, and social dynamics of the teaching profession are to blame for the struggle to recruit good teachers. We will use Indonesia's experience as a case study. Largely speaking, Indonesia's teachers have had a chronic underperformance issue—proxied by enduring absenteeism (SMERU, 2014), low subject content mastery (Rosser, 2018; Kusumawardhani, 2017; Chang et al., 2014), limited range of pedagogical strategies to manage classroom learning (Bjork, 2013), and lacked the confidence to support students to cultivate problem-solving skills (OECD/ADB, 2015). Yet, Indonesia's teachers do not improve even with pre-service professional certification programme (Kusumawardhani, 2017). One explanation to the enduring under-performance suggest substantive problems in the way teacher trainings are run (RISE Programme in Indonesia, 2019; Filaili et al., forthcoming). We disagree with this argument.

Reforms to teacher training programmes will only be window dressing unless teachers are individually motivated to learn and improve themselves. There are of course highly qualified and professional teachers in the country. But whether the recruitment system can consistently hire highly qualified aspiring teachers is the key issue here. Therefore, this paper will provide institutional, political economy, and social analyses to address the systemic shortcomings of Indonesia's teacher recruitment process to improve the overall quality of the teaching corps.

One intuitive hypothesis may place the blame squarely on the country's sustained employment of contract teachers as part of the educator workforce. There are two types of teachers in Indonesia: civil servant teachers and contract teachers. Civil servant teachers are tenured and they are individuals who have passed the national civil servant enrolment test—albeit recruited as a civil servant rather than for their teaching skills. Contract teachers (*guru tidak tetap* or non-permanent teachers, generally known as *guru honorer* or honorary teachers) refer to teachers employed informally. This meant contract teachers are those who were recruited without following a recruitment process that is clear, defined, and standardised by the government, and whose work are usually not covered by legally binding contract of employment with schools or any levels of government.¹

Informal recruitment of contract teachers is made possible by loosening national standard set by the central government.² The widespread trend to employ contract teachers suggests that they are to blame for poor teaching performance. Furthermore, this type of informal recruitment process often overlap with instances where patronage and discretionary hiring precede merit (e.g., Pierskalla and Sacks, 2019; Estrada, 2015). However, blaming contract teachers as the root cause of recruitment failure is inadequate to explain Indonesia's experience. Global evidence on contract teachers suggest that contract teachers perform at the same, if not better, level compared to tenured teachers (Chudgar, Chandra and Razzaque, 2014; Duflo, Dupas and Kremer, 2014; Muralidharan and Sundararaman, 2013; Atherton and Kingdon, 2010). The same is true in Indonesia (UNESCO IIEP Learning Portal, 2017; World

¹ The English literal equivalent to the Indonesian term of *guru honorer* is "honorary teacher". The distinction between "honorary" and "contract" teachers boils down to stylistic decision. We decided to apply the term "contract teachers" in the article simply to better relate to existing corpus of research on contract teachers around the world. The important note here is that no matter the terminology, teachers employed under the informal recruitment condition are held to different employment standards than their civil servant counterparts. In Indonesia's case, the informality of contract teacher employment is also associated with the "temporary" status of their employment within the education system, even when many contract teachers have taught for decades. The nuance is in the conditions under which employment can be terminated. Contract teachers can be fired at will, whereas civil service teachers can be fired only if there is a significant and massive cause to require their removal from active service.

² This is a generalised statement for the sake of illustrating an argument that is commonly held by the Indonesian public. We are aware that there are high-performing districts (e.g., Yogyakarta and Bukittinggi) with a well-developed and highly institutionalised standard of contract teacher recruitment within the district, but they are exceptions rather than the rule in Indonesia.

Bank, 2015; SMERU, 2014). Perhaps contract teachers are more inclined to perform than civil servant teachers because they have deeper community linkages or that they are driven for their continued employment and the possibility of promotion for tenure later in their career based on their performance. And since most of Indonesia's teachers start their career by becoming a contract teacher first before qualifying for a civil service tenure,³ the contract teacher explanation seems unlikely to be a major explanation of Indonesian teacher recruitment distortion and the corps' middling performance.

This paper will focus on institutional, political economy, and social dynamics that underline the teacher recruitment system. To achieve our aim, we reviewed legal documents related to the management of teacher recruitment and promotion, as well as the legal foundations of Indonesia's ministries and government agencies as relevant political institutions. We also conducted multiple in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with members of House of Representatives at national and local levels, technocrats from central government ministries, bureaucrats working with local governments, teacher union representatives, school supervisors, school principals, civil servant teachers, contract teachers, and parents. These interviews gave us detailed information on their interests in the teacher recruitment process as well as the social aspect of the profession that may be missing from reviewing formal documents. Interviewees were selected for their role overseeing the teacher recruitment process (politicians, technocrats, and bureaucrats), social and political interest in the teacher recruitment process (politicians and teacher union representatives), and beneficiaries of a more effective teacher recruitment process (school supervisors, principals, teachers, and parents). We conducted the interviews in Special Capital Region of Jakarta (Jakarta); Bogor, West Java Province; Bukittinggi, West Sumatera Province; and Kebumen, Central Java Province, for one year between 2019 and 2020.

We divide this paper into five sections. First, we outline the steps on what it will take for individuals to become a teacher. In the second section, we analyse the institutional elements that underpin the teacher recruitment system. We specifically highlight how the dysfunctional design of legal and political institutions hinder authority sharing and thus inadvertently set

³ It is difficult to state exactly how many of Indonesia's teachers are currently working as a contract teacher in Indonesia given the informality of their employment. The formal approximation by the Ministry of Education and Culture puts the number at around 1 in 3 of all teachers in Indonesia as contract teachers, but this number reflects the size of teachers employed per official school reports. Some contract teachers may be working on implicit agreements with the community and/or the school and they may be excluded from the country's teacher statistics. However, our statement here is not to point to getting the numbers right or commenting on the sheer size of the contract teacher corps in the country. Our point is that contract teaching is often seen as a temporary settlement for candidates who want to teach but are unable to do so through the official civil service recruitment channel. Therefore, we can surmise that the large size of the contract teacher corps suggests Indonesia's teachers enter the profession by becoming a contract teacher to establish a foothold and gain an understanding of the education system's byzantine bureaucracy to be a "teacher" before taking the civil service qualifying exam with the hope of winning a tenured position.

traps for the recruitment system to fail. The third section outlines the political economy dynamics of stakeholders in the education system and how strategies to achieve stakeholders' interests can impede good learning for students. In the fourth section, we explore how norms and values of the teacher corps and the Indonesian public skew the teacher recruitment process. Our conclusions are presented in the fifth section, where we reflect on future directions for progress.

2. Teacher Recruitment Process in Indonesia

Indonesia's teacher recruitment process is tied to the country's development needs. The massive school expansion that followed the lucrative windfall from the oil boom in 1970's created the need for a lot of teachers in a short period of time (Duflo, 2001). The urgency to employ teachers then meant the entry bar to the country's teacher corps prioritised quantity over quality. Graduates of specialised senior secondary schools (*Sekolah Pendidikan Guru* or Teacher Training School, *Sekolah Guru Olahraga* or Physical Education Teacher Training School, and *Pendidikan Guru Agama* or Religious Studies Teacher Education Programme) were recruited to teach immediately with little pre- or in-service training programme. And the recruitment process to select and assign teachers to schools was nothing more than administrative formality. Whilst this ensured that Indonesia's rapidly growing education system was adequately staffed, the country's teacher recruitment process was demand-driven and focused on administrative compliance rather than teaching skills. The 1989 Teacher Education Reform, for example, implemented university-led teacher education and training to succeed the specialised senior secondary schools' teacher training programmes. However, the Reform improved teachers' formal qualifications only on paper because instituting university-level education throughout the country did not include substantive reforms on how teachers can develop their teaching skills as an individual. The necessity to satisfy development demands triumphed the need for quality teaching.

The focus on Indonesia's economic development drove subsequent attempts to refine the teacher recruitment process. Teacher candidates must take the civil servant enrolment test to win civil service tenure. The tests are developed by the central government and hosted by provincial or district governments. Pre-2013 paper-based tests were administered by district or provincial governments, which risked corruption as candidates could pay bribes to local government bureaucrats to pass the exam. In 2013, the central government implemented the computer assisted test (CAT) system to replace the paper-based test. The results of the enrolment test were reported to the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform

(MoABR), but civil servants accepted by the enrolment test are employed under the jurisdiction of the provincial or district government management. As a consequence, Indonesia's teachers are to go through a highly centralised recruitment process. Teachers need to pass the national civil service selection for the nation's civil service corps before they are assigned to teach at a particular school. Whilst this made for an efficient recruitment since decision-making regarding employment is centralised and discourages corruption in the periphery, teachers are not recruited effectively. Indonesia's provinces are diverse and the centralised recruitment system does not account for local preferences and needs.

Indonesia's teachers are thus recruited through a system that is neither chooses teachers with good teaching performance nor sensitive to local education needs. In fact, the administrative criteria and the basic competence tests of civil servants are the same for all professions nationwide. Civil servant applicants of teaching position or prison guard position, for example, will take the same basic competence tests—i.e., civics, psychology testing, and general intelligence—with identical passing grade. For each test round, the top three candidates with the highest scores will be shortlisted for the next round. The shortlisted candidates then need to take the field-specific test to qualify their desired positions. Thus, the top three teacher candidates will be required to take pedagogical and content knowledge test. Micro-teaching or interview is not required in this teacher recruitment process. The candidate with the highest score in the field-specific test will be appointed as probationary civil servant teacher and on track for life tenure within the civil service.

Since teacher shortages remain in multiple regions, provincial and district governments go around the regulation by letting schools recruit teachers on their own—mostly on contracts. Unlike civil servant teachers who must take a series of tests to get the job, contract teachers are recruited informally by schools. Contract teachers are paid from the school budget, the School Operational Assistance Fund (*Bantuan Operasional Sekolah/BOS*), which schools receive directly from the central government.⁴ Al-Samarrai and Cerdan-Infantes (2013) estimated that 260,000 contract teachers were paid by the BOS funds from 2006 to 2010. Contract teachers usually get a very small wage (Chudgar, Chandra and Razzaque, 2014). Gaduh et al. (2020) recorded that a civil servant teacher could receive salary fifteen times higher than that of a contract teacher. Note that civil servant and contract teachers have virtually the same responsibilities. Contract teachers bear working with such low salary

⁴ Indonesia's contract teachers are differentiated by the source of their stipend. K1 Contract Teachers are those whose stipend come out of the national budget and distributed through schools, while K2 Contract Teachers are those whose stipend are paid solely by the local government's budget. This distinction is minor as we found that contract teachers receive the same treatment regardless of their classification. Therefore, we refrained from delving into the details of the employment types and focus instead on "contract teachers" as a whole.

because they hope that someday they will be promoted as a civil servant without having to take the civil servant enrolment test.⁵ Following the implementation of Government Regulation No. 48/2005 on the Appointment of Honorary Staff to Become Probationary Civil Servant, there were numerous contract teachers under the age of 46 (above the general civil servant applicant age requirement) who were automatically promoted into civil service tenure as exceptions specific to the Regulation's implementation. The 2005 regulation served as a precedent. Contract teachers still demand to be automatically promoted as civil servants to date.

From 2010 onwards, contract teachers were gradually promoted into civil service tenure. Since promotion to civil service has become the central government's approach to teacher recruitment, the teaching profession becomes even more attractive. Especially so when the teacher certification allowance—which doubles teachers' salaries—was implemented in 2007 (Kusumawardhani, 2017). Since Indonesia's teacher management is divided between the local (provincial and district) and central governments, its teacher distribution channels are ad hoc and localised to the district level. Schools in remote areas usually have higher student-per-teacher ratios than schools in urban areas, which shows preference for urban areas due to its spatial proximity to urban centre as well as its closeness to positions of power (Chang et al., 2014). However, regulatory changes to the teaching incentive and management have widened the gulf of institutional responsibility over teacher recruitment and management. Both contract and civil servant teachers have dual responsibilities to both the local schools and the central ministries overseeing the education system and the civil service, respectively. As a result of these reforms, the issue of effectiveness of teacher recruitment must be assessed by the political and social dynamics of the teaching profession. The subsequent sections will analyse the institutions, political economy, and social elements as constraints to the teacher recruitment process.

3. Political and Legal Institutions

Indonesia's teacher recruitment process is dysfunctional because of the inchoate political and legal institutions. First, the teaching profession is held back by laws and regulations that obfuscate rather than clarify institutional responsibilities over the recruitment process. Therefore, Indonesia's political authorities are discouraged from collaborating because they do not have the necessary mandate to share power. Even if they do want to collaborate to

⁵ Interview with a former member of the House of Representatives, Jakarta, 22 November 2019.

better the teacher recruitment process, they lack the instruction on how to do so because the nation's laws and regulations are too prescriptive on what constitutes a good teacher. Second, Indonesia's legal and political institutions overall prefer lawmaking as a solution to social and systemic issues. This is self-sabotaging. The preference for lawmaking limits political and social options available for policymakers to improve the teacher recruitment process.

The 1998–2001 *Reformasi* era following the fall of Suharto's New Order regime oversaw a period of rapid decentralisation. This was achieved by a series of laws that enabled local governments to enact their own policies and secure their own funding without having to rely on central government intervention. Two laws are of particular interest here. Law No. 22/1999 on Regional Government gave local governments the authority to organise public service delivery and manage public servants as they see fit without having to report to the central government. Furthermore, Law No. 25/1999 on Fiscal Balance between the Central Government and the Regions (which was followed up by Law No. 34/2000 on Regional Taxes and Regional Levies to amend Law No. 18/1997). In short, these laws provided local governments the necessary legal foundation to determine the level of funding needed for public service delivery at the local level. In terms of teacher recruitment, this shift was substantial because it gave local governments the executive authority to hire and fire teachers without having to go through the central government. Teachers could have been recruited directly by local governments depending on their own individual circumstances.

But this is not the case in Indonesia today. Teachers continue to be recruited from the central government and distributed top-down to local governments without local input. This section will investigate why Indonesia's teacher recruitment remain top-heavy at the hands of the central government despite decentralisation. We will focus on the structure of institutions and the regulatory process managing the teaching profession.

3.1. Institutional Design

Today, the management of the teaching profession has continued to be tightly controlled by the central government because the nation's educator corps were previously regulated as part of the state civil service during the New Order regime (Bjork, 2006). Since teachers are seen as civil servants, they are placed under the jurisdiction of three ministries. The MoABR is tasked with the responsibility of overseeing the teacher recruitment process to ensure that teachers (as civil servants) are recruited from a merit-based selection process. The Ministry of Finance (MoF) oversees financing teacher salaries. The Ministry of Education and Culture

(MoEC) is authorised to manage only the substantive matters of the education system, which was mostly limited to personnel development. Indonesia's "decentralised" teacher management is thus off to a difficult start because the institutional arrangement did not make any one ministry with a complete authority to supervise the teacher corps.⁶ As a result, all of the regulatory reforms designed to improve teaching quality will always be political in nature because reforms would need to untie the Gordian knot of ministerial responsibility by balancing the interests of MoABR, MoF, and MoEC before any policy solution could be implemented.⁷

The divided ministerial responsibility becomes apparent when discussing the issue of contract teacher recruitment. Whilst we mentioned earlier that contract teachers do not necessarily worsen the overall teaching quality in the country, their informal employment status nevertheless raises the crucial point on the nature of the profession in Indonesia's education system: to whom should teachers report? The MoABR, MoEC, and MoF triumvirate gives room for deniability for each respective ministry to resolve the problem of defining teachers' employment within the recruitment process. When pressed publicly to change the teacher recruitment system to only select tenured civil servants, the MoABR would refer to their management of mass recruitment drive for teachers as part of the civil service corps. In fact, the MoABR would insist on their mandate over the management of civil servants. On the other hand, they refrain from resolving the dilemma of promoting contract teachers who do not qualify for the civil service. Instead, they defer the decision for promotion to local governments (Wicaksono, 2020), therefore absolving any remaining legal responsibility for their roles in solving the teacher corps employment duality. However, there is a conundrum. Ensuring that teachers can be promoted to the civil service tenure from the contract teacher pool is not simply a matter of creating the space for teachers in the civil service recruitment because their salaries and recruitment packages are financed wholly by the state. Moreover, the MoF have vehemently opposed the addition of contract teacher recruitment to dampen the growing fiscal burden of having to support civil servant teachers in the national budget.⁸ The MoEC, despite their jurisdiction over the substantive matters in managing the education system, does not have any say in how to make progress on the issue. They prefer to refer to the MoABR for all

⁶ We are aware that there are two other ministries also relevant in the teacher recruitment management. Ministry of Home Affairs are responsible for implementing national laws and regulations and Ministry of Religious Affairs are responsible for managing the state-run religious schools. However, we found that these two ministries were indirectly involved in the management of teacher recruitment process. As our paper aims to analyse parties with direct responsibility over the teacher recruitment, we are only focusing on the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform, Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Education and Culture. We will discuss the consequences of decentralised governance on Indonesia's education system in a later paper.

⁷ Provincial and district interests as well as the provincial/district political leadership interests are also influential in the process of implementing government reforms. However, the discussion of the full extent of the interplay between local versus central government interests is out of the scope of this paper. Future research may be needed to investigate this topic.

⁸ Interview with a former member of the House of Representatives, Jakarta, 22 November 2019.

teacher-related recruitment matters, and all teacher financing issues to local governments instead (Kemdikbud, 2018).

The logic of decentralisation suggests that local governments have the authority for setting requirements to recruit and manage teachers depending on their respective individual needs. Law No. 23/2014 on Regional Government states that local governments have the mandate for managing teachers once they are assigned to the district after they are recruited from the central government. This implies local governments have the ability to collect data to inform central government of their needs for teachers, and central government complies with the request from the local government and assign the appropriate number of personnel to answer the demand. However, this is not the case. Teachers are assigned by the central government to serve a district regardless of the number of teachers already working in said district. One local parliamentarian commented that local governments do not have the ability to negotiate for the number of teachers assigned to their district.⁹ One possible counterpoint to the parliamentarian's observation may be that some local governments are more powerful than others to coax the central government for more teachers in their respective district. However, a combination of our field observation and off-the-record conversations with stakeholders at all government levels support the parliamentarian's claim. The result of the inchoate division of power lends to a jammed recruitment process that relies too much on inter-ministerial discussions rather than local input. The awkward jurisdiction of authority thus results in haphazard recruitment process throughout the country,¹⁰ loosening the national teacher recruitment standards (Chang et al., 2014). Any reform to the recruitment process will need to go through a layer of political negotiation because it needs to address the institutional dynamics between (i) ministries and (ii) central versus local governments, before actualising the substance of the reform itself.

3.2. Lawmaking

The apparent legal contradictions of the management of the teaching profession has not deterred from deregulation. Bjork (2006) observed unsuccessful bottom up engagement with policymaking comes as hollowed achievements from decentralisation. Indonesia perhaps needed time for her citizens and government to acclimatise with the new expectations that comes from greater local authority. But a decade after Bjork's studies (2004; 2005; 2006) on

⁹ Interview with a member of Jakarta Regional Legislative Council, Jakarta, 7 January 2020.

¹⁰ Focus group discussion with contract teachers, Kebumen, 6 March 2019.

post *Reformasi* bureaucratic management under the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono presidency (2004 to 2014), the drive for improving teaching quality has in fact resorted even deeper into instinctive policymaking that is dependent on heavy-handed regulations than deregulation and localised decision-making.

Indonesia has undergone significant legal reforms to better regulate its teachers since democratisation and decentralisation in the *Reformasi* era. The most notable legal document here is the introduction of Law No. 14/2005 on Teachers and Lecturers which defines teacher responsibilities and Government Regulation No. 48/2005—both of which became the legal foundations of subsequent regulatory reforms in the country's contemporary governance.¹¹ However, this episode of lawmaking indicates a more serious issue of national compulsion for enacting legal solutions to social or political problems. Teaching, as a profession, is regulated by the Law No. 14/2005. Yet the specifics of the Law do not explain what ideal teacher candidates would look like apart from having lofty and virtually impossible to measure ambitions, such as an individual sense of calling for the profession (Law No. 14/2005 Article 7). In fact, the selection criteria with desirable professional characteristics did not go beyond urging the government to uphold ideals of objectivity and non-discrimination throughout the recruitment process, or exactly what desirable skillsets and certifications a competent teacher should have to excel in the job (Law No. 14/2005 Articles 7–12).

Professional competence that should have been tied to key performance indicators for a job have instead been defined in a set of abstract legalese. And when read together with the moratorium on hiring contract teachers under Government Regulation No. 48/2005, the legal definitions of eligible candidates for the teaching profession is confusing. Individuals are burdened with complex legal compliance without certainty over job security (Chang et al., 2014).¹² Moreover, the legal regulations themselves do not specify how exactly said certifications could be accepted by the government. The regulation also did not establish an explicit connection between the professional standard with teaching excellence, as well as the accountability measures to maintain teaching quality. All government levels are responsible for teacher recruitment without actually specifying what role they play in the process (Law No. 14/2005 Article 24). Ironically, this article was later contradicted in Law No. 23/2014, which stated that central government is the only government body with the authority to oversee teacher recruitment.

¹¹ Whilst this Regulation included other contract employees akin to contract teachers (e.g., healthcare workers, field supervisors for farm work), the Regulation is widely known as a regulation issued specifically to target contract teachers because they consist of Indonesia's largest contract employee stock.

¹² Interview with a former member of the House of Representatives, Jakarta, 22 November 2019.

The awkward legal turn is just one example where the national instinct for lawmaking is hindering progress to improve the effectiveness of teacher recruitment. Since the premise of the teacher recruitment is incentivising loyal and obedient civil servants, the incremental legal solutions have been counterproductive because more definitive legal boundaries do not have any policy translation to recruitment effectiveness. The legal restrictions imposed on the recruitment process inadvertently locks out the teacher candidate rather than actually lifting standards of recruitment for well-qualified candidates to enter the profession. The fact that teaching competence is defined in a set of ratified law indicates that improving the teacher requirement process requires reforms to first address the legality of the teaching profession, and then to pass the reforms by the national legislative body through political negotiations. The teacher recruitment inertia is therefore a function of institutional and legal blurring between the political structure versus professional performance.

4. Political Economy

President Soeharto's resignation in 1998 was followed by a rapid implementation of decentralisation. It ushered an era of *Reformasi* in Indonesia's national politics. However, despite the grand goals of the project, *Reformasi* failed short from realising democracy in Indonesia. The introduction of decentralised government allowed a vacuum of authority. In fact, state predation flourished by Indonesia's transformation from authoritarianism to a democratic state as elite interests were infused with institutions of local authority and enabled by widespread impunity (Aspinall 2010; Robison and Hadiz, 2005). Decentralisation and local self-determination have catapulted local political leaders to be more daring with their state predation by co-opting state structures to their interests (Hadiz and Robison, 2010). Local direct elections have done little to produce impact on meritocratic leadership through political competition because of proliferation of patronage networks (Berenschot, 2018; Aspinall, 2013).

On this note, teachers too have become symptomatic of the patronage and clientelism that defines Indonesia's decentralized political economy.¹³ Teaching positions are often distributed by political leaders to their supporters following local elections (Pierskalla and Sacks, 2019), and that teachers themselves have been observed to organise political support for local leaders who are standing in for elections (Rosser and Fahmi, 2018). These trends suggest

¹³ Similar trend was observed in Mexico where powerful teacher unions acted as de facto recruiters and imposed discretion over teacher hiring until standardised testing was introduced in the 2013 constitutional amendment (Estrada, 2015).

teaching positions have become coveted positions in the public service as a currency for political horse-trading to extend patronage networks for winning public offices rather than for improving teaching quality. And since this paper focuses on Indonesia's difficulty to recruit good teachers, we will investigate now the influence of the political economy of the teaching profession and how that impacts the formal teacher recruitment process. Note that our analysis here will not delve into corruption or collusion practices that often colour public policymaking in developing countries. We prefer to instead emphasise the following points (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014): whose interests are strongest; when are stakeholders exercising their authority to achieve their interests; and what is the political and/or economic logic driving their actions?

Therefore, we provide a sketch of each stakeholder group's drivers and analyse their impact on the teacher recruitment process by summarising the constraints to their power to achieve their goals. Civil service tenure teaching position is a type of political good that is widely prized and contested because the job grants exclusive access to the state's political and bureaucratic machinery, social prestige, and lifelong financial security. In short, the demand for teacher quality is low. There is too much politicking at stake in the teacher recruitment process that precedes high-quality learning.

4.1. Political Actors

We define political actors as members of both national and local parliaments, political leaders at all levels of the Indonesian government's executive wing, and members of political parties. Political actors overall have interests to further their stay in the political arena by winning elections. The link between teachers and the Indonesian political arena has been recently explored, in which teachers are argued to be key to the political machinery for local political leaders in organising and mobilising votes. Teachers have a unique access to the community and are able to mobilise constituents as part of the direct local election cycles (Rosser and Fahmi, 2018). A politician's career can depend on the strength of their relationship with the teachers as a group, and this is reflected in the increased number of contract teacher recruitment following the direct local election cycles (Pierskalla and Sacks, 2019). This dynamic suggests there exist a patron-client relationship where political leaders profit from teachers as a political force to support the weight of political actors' ambitions, as well as for individuals aspiring for a position in the coveted state bureaucratic system by way of mobilising voters through the school system.

Political leaders who have been involved with the lawmaking process to regulate teacher recruitment have voiced concerns on the process' effectiveness, but the reasons that motivated them differ according to their jurisdiction. National politicians stated that their push to freeze contract teacher hiring and to make a more exclusive regulation for the teaching profession was to achieve two aims: they refrained engaging political conflict with the MoF over fiscal policies and they wanted to gain public approval by "honouring" teachers' service by enacting laws that would grant contract teachers tenure.¹⁴ Local politicians stated that they have the legal authority over the fiscal planning and inter-government coordination at the local level to enact laws within their local jurisdiction to hire contract teachers into the civil service tenure. Yet, they are unable to do so. Once the contract teacher becomes a civil servant, then they are managed under the MoABR. Local politicians are unable to override the ministry's authority because the central ministry has the utmost executive power to determine the formation of civil servant teachers.¹⁵

Regulatory solutions offered by the national legislative bodies in recent years have been political compromises. In fact, politicians devoted their attention to achieve a "balanced" policy to the teacher recruitment system. The result was a system of conditional promotion. Contract teachers were allowed to be promoted to civil service tenure if they were able to pass promotion conditions such as bureaucratic compliance or submission of teaching portfolio.¹⁶ The solution enabled contract teacher promotion whilst simultaneously shifting political responsibility to teachers' individual onus. As a result, the politicians were able to minimise their political exposure over the recruitment system. Teachers who did not pass the promotion process were deemed as unqualified to work as a teacher regardless of their individual experience and pedagogical or subject matter expertise. The tenure promotion system thus signalled to the national teacher corps that teaching quality mattered less than bureaucratic compliance for winning civil service tenure.

4.2. Technocrats

Most of the direction and the policy framework in Indonesia's education system is set between three ministries involving the organisation of the substantive matters in the public education system, management of civil service as state apparatus, and public finance management: MoEC, MoABR, and MoF respectively. Since Indonesia's education system is organised in

¹⁴ Interview with a former member of the House of Representatives, Jakarta, 22 November 2019.

¹⁵ Interview with a member of Jakarta Regional Legislative Council, Jakarta, 7 January 2020.

¹⁶ Interview with a member of the House of Representatives, Jakarta, 10 December 2019.

sectoral terms, decisions made in one sector are made in alignment to each ministerial agenda and left to the discretion of each individual minister to pursue their own goals. For example, MoABR treat the candidates as a civil servant applicant rather than as a professional educator. Teacher candidates are examined for the depth of their theoretical knowledge rather than teaching practices,¹⁷ and vacancies are determined by the number of civil servant retirement rather than school needs.¹⁸ This may explain why even the civil servant teachers who had been recruited through a more rigorous system have no necessary skills to teach, or that teacher recruitment has to follow civil servant opening schedule rather than based on schools' needs.

On the other hand, contract teachers are left to the whims of each individual school to recruit said teachers. The MoEC is responsible to track contract teachers' registry in order to monitor their career progression and to enable local education agencies for their remuneration. However, because there are no cohesive promotion pathways between contract teaching and civil service tenure aside from the general civil service test, Indonesia's contract teachers are mainly financed through the local education agency or school budget. This is where the teacher recruitment process breaks down—and there are two ways the teacher recruitment system is blocked by technocratic decision-making. First, every teacher promotion must come with a direct approval from the MoF regardless of institution who introduced the plan to do so. Education spending consists of 20% of the national budget (Kementerian Keuangan Republik Indonesia, n.d.), and promoting *all* of the country's contract teachers on top of existing teacher corps and future civil service hiring is fiscally impossible. Increasing the number of teachers employed by the state will add to Indonesia's financial burden at a time when the government is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic; concerned in boosting the infrastructure development (Suhartono and Salna, 2019); facing slower economic growth (Dong and Manning, 2017); having limited fiscal flexibility to respond to systemic shocks (Triggs, Kacaribu and Wang, 2019), and close to the 3% legal limit to budget deficit (Hamilton-Hart and Schultze, 2017).

Second, despite the inter-institutional tussle, there is no accountability mechanism to ensure that each ministry is acting on behalf of public interest either by collaborating or to delegate duties to other ministries. As previously discussed, the legal regulations of the teaching profession do not specify which ministry is ultimately responsible for the teachers. Technocratic elements in each ministry is concerned with achieving the best possible policy coherence within their own limited jurisdiction. At its best, this factor is detriment to the inter-

¹⁷ Interview with the head of Teachers Association of the Republic of Indonesia (*Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia/PGRI*) Branch Kebumen, Kebumen, 8 March 2019.

¹⁸ Interview with the head of Human Resource Department of Bukittinggi Government, Bukittinggi, 26 February 2019.

institutional collaborative efforts. At worst, the institutional silo may amplify technocratic instincts for more regulations over processes when there should not have been such a “tight” grip. It is highly unrealistic to expect that all forms of politicking in teacher hiring can be extinguished by instituting stricter regulations. Document forgery, for example, has been noted as a widespread practice to sidestep regulations designed to specifically protect the teacher recruitment process from cheating.¹⁹ It means every legal instrument introduced to regulate the teaching profession would risk opening loopholes to be exploited by any parties interested to further their private interests through the teacher recruitment process. As a result, the technocratic faith in policy cohesion and technical purity may be self-limiting if the aim of policymaking is only focused on gaining more control of the process instead of the outcome of the recruitment.

4.3. Administrators

Indonesia’s decentralised government meant each province and district would mirror the state institutions for policymaking and programme implementation that is, hopefully, sensitive to local context. Local education agencies are therefore pertinent here. They are tasked with the institutional coordination and policy translation at the province and district levels and have the authority to preside over the technical and administrative matters of the education system within the particular area. Despite having almost exclusive access in the management of the public school system at the local level (in terms of programming, staffing, and budgeting), local education agencies have little authority or the budgetary space to determine the civil servant teacher position (*formasi*).²⁰ They are pressured by the central government to follow any ministerial regulations to the letter regardless of the local demands and needs. At the same time, education agencies are also urged by the public to be more responsive by leading the policy negotiation process, from the bottom-up, to promote contract teachers into civil service tenure.²¹ Local education agencies are politically trapped. On one hand, they needed to comply with central government agencies keen to exercise their political influence to set how policies are implemented. Despite the country’s decentralisation policies and legal frameworks, top-down policy implementation remain the standard to which all bureaucratic excellence is measured. On the other hand, local education agencies needed to answer to

¹⁹ Interview with Kebumen Education Agency official, Kebumen, 25 February 2019.

²⁰ Focus group discussion with Kebumen Government officials, Kebumen, 5 March 2019.

²¹ Focus group discussion with Kebumen Government officials, Kebumen, 5 March 2019.

their local constituents—who are more active and aware of citizenship rights to demand for better public service.

Given the political sensitivities to the teaching profession in the public service, bureaucratic corps at the regional government are ideally deft managers at balancing demands of the central government and the public. However, that is not necessarily the case. Bureaucrats at the regional level are as motivated as all other political actors in the Indonesian polity to ensure that resources flow to their advantage. Aspiring teachers often rely on social networks with officials from the local education agency to provide information on job vacancies or for particular principals open for negotiation and bribery in order to support the deliberate creation of a contract teacher position in the respective school.²² In this case, the bureaucratic game has become a veneer to mask corruption in order for individuals to profit from the lax standard of entry into the education system (Chang et al., 2014). This is just one small example of the corruption case occurring in the teacher recruitment process and it may suggest that the state bureaucratic elements are easy prey to quick profits at the cost of the country's education goals. However, we wish to note that there is another, more interesting aspect to the teacher recruitment: the bureaucratic independence exercised by local bureaucrats to recruit teachers even despite the national laws forbidding them to do so.

Pragmatism is the rule of the teacher recruitment bureaucratic game. A bureaucrat with the local education agency lamented that teachers are assigned from the MoABR depending on the number of retiring civil servants in the particular year instead of the real need for teachers in the particular area. Despite the moratorium on hiring contract teachers, local education agencies have little choice but to recruit contract teachers because waiting for the MoABR to assign teachers to fill the teaching vacancies will miss the urgency to staff the district's classrooms' needs.²³ District-level pragmatism thus effectively created a dual track of teacher recruitment: the civil service recruitment that is open nationwide under the management of the MoABR and the contract teacher recruitment open to the respective district and under the management of each district's government. In Bukittinggi, for example, the district government has made an agreement with schools to “centralise” the contract teacher recruitment under the district government instead of the school principals' discretion.²⁴ This was to allow more effective distribution of teachers throughout the district. To ensure that each teacher candidate recruited are skilled teachers, the Bukittinggi Government incorporated the same set of written

²² Focus group discussion with contract teachers, Bukittinggi, 2 March 2019 and interview with a former member of the House of Representatives, Jakarta, 22 November 2019.

²³ Interview with Kebumen Education Agency official, Kebumen, 26 February 2019.

²⁴ Interview with a primary school principal, Bukittinggi, 27 February 2019.

tests, psychological assessments, and interview process as the national civil service recruitment scheme.²⁵

Teacher quality thus depends on the political willingness of the local administrator; whether they can acknowledge the urgency and severity of the issue and whether they are willing to break the top-down political dynamic between the central and local governments.²⁶ The local education agency thus becomes an institutional vessel to legitimise claims for policy relevance at all levels of stakeholders, from the public governance aspect (at central and regional levels) and in private realm (individual and public interests). Since the question of teacher quality depends on the 500-odd district governments throughout the country, it is acceptable to have a diversity of standards (or practices) in the teacher recruitment process as long as there is a quality assurance standard from the central government. Each district government should have the bureaucratic capability to carry out an effective teacher recruitment and there should be a collaborative central-local government dynamic to ensure basic professional standards are met. However, both are ideals given Indonesia's current conditions.

4.4. Teachers Unions

In Indonesia, teachers are divided across two umbrella union groups: Teachers Association of the Republic of Indonesia (*Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia*/PGRI) and the Indonesian Teachers Association (*Ikatan Guru Indonesia*/IGI). PGRI membership is compulsory for all teachers regardless of the employment type and the two union groups differ in the focus of their activities, where IGI has focused primarily on contract teachers' issue more than PGRI.²⁷ Overall, teachers unions are active in demanding better working conditions for contract teachers, most commonly through organised strikes, but also lobbying politicians and other political institutions in all government levels. However, despite their political power to persuade and lobby, the extent in which teachers unions are able to enact long-lasting structural changes are debatable.

Teachers unions are interested to champion the issue of professional welfare. Unions themselves has been noted as a channel to represent minority interests that would otherwise

²⁵ Interview with the secretary of Bukittinggi Financial Body, 26 February 2019.

²⁶ Focus group discussion with contract teachers, Kebumen, 6 March 2019.

²⁷ Both PGRI and IGI have an overlap of authoritative and geographic jurisdiction. Since PGRI was established first, it has more social influence over IGI because of its organisational "seniority". But whether one union group is more powerful over the other or what channels of influence they use to exercise their authority remain open questions. And given that there are actually more than two teachers unions, we will refrain from discussing the specifics of teacher unions' social influence and political lobbying over the teacher recruitment process.

be out of reach for many outside the political arena (Aspinall, 2014). But the primary concern that limits the effectiveness of Indonesia's teachers unions is the extent of which the issue of teacher welfare has been used to mobilise teachers to action. Whose interest does the cause really serve? Unions may also campaign on higher pay issues of contract teachers, such as allowance or minimum salary. While unions do have sufficient power to lobby the parliament, both in the central and provincial/district levels, they do not necessarily intervene to make the recruitment and promotion of teachers more effective across the country. In fact, unions were often reported to have connections with political parties and organise teachers to vote for some politicians, and in return the politicians will come up with campaign promise of teachers better working conditions and higher pay.

Teachers unions' stake in the teacher recruitment process is most apparent with the issue of managing contract teachers.²⁸ The problem of contract teachers here is the dilemma of incorporating contract teachers fully into the civil service without exhausting the national budget to finance teacher salary. However, the issue of contract teacher employment has become a highly politicised polemic because of the extensive media coverage of the genuine plight of destitute contract teachers (e.g., CNN Indonesia, 2019; Hamdani, 2019). And because of this, the policymaking technicalities of managing teacher recruitment, politicking, and complex inter-ministerial negotiations are simply reduced to a Manichean narrative of "evil government" that has long been predatory of the public interest and unwilling to look after its citizens. An image that is historically congruent to the country's long-standing history of authoritarianism and an unfinished business with its quest to achieve good governance.

Since the size and intensity of the public attention to the contract teacher polemic is so great, the systemic causes of the need for good quality teaching are drowned out. In the end, the issue of contract teachers often becomes a shouting match between the public and the government. Unions sometime organise public demonstrations and exercise their individual connections to pressure policymakers to promote contract teachers to become tenured civil servant teachers without examinations or certifications. Furthermore, persistent demonstrations have created a nationally disjointed approach to the contract teacher promotion. This was by part due to MoABR and MoEC's unwillingness to engage with the

²⁸ Despite similarities in terms of political influence they wield, PGRI and IGI differ in composition of membership. PGRI constituents are mostly civil servant teachers and IGI primarily serve contract teachers. However, teachers are not restricted to a single union membership. We noted there were several instances where teachers were paying dues to multiple union groups. The multiplicity of union membership will make discussing their impact difficult because the slightest nuance between organisations may effect differently. There are also other factors to consider such as timing (e.g., election versus non-election years), diversity of regional characteristics (politics, social, cultural), and the strength of public support towards their cause. Further research is necessary to investigate Indonesia's teachers unions, the sociology of their institutions, and the mechanics of their influence over policymaking. For the purpose of this paper, we will forego subtleties and prioritise writing economy instead. We refer to teachers unions as a blanket term and discuss their impact as a group.

issue overall. Another part is different level of political willingness of local governments to strike deals with union groups to finance teacher salary. But the critical flaw here is that there is no one policy that covers the employment certainty to *all* contract teachers, regardless of their teaching experience and expertise. And due to this haphazard approach to contract teacher management, the standard for teacher recruitment has been further distorted because contract teaching has effectively become an entrenched “second career track” to the official civil service tenure, either by natural demand stemming from unequal distribution of teachers or artificially as a by-product of local election promises (Pierskalla and Sacks, 2019). Thus, teachers unions’ advocacy for contract teachers has become an irony in the teacher recruitment process. Unions have been successful to pressure policymakers to incorporate contract teachers, but their political victories come at the cost of establishing a disciplined standard for teaching quality.

4.5. Principals and Teachers

School principals are primary the stakeholder group with the most leverage in the contract teacher recruitment process because of their positioning as the top administrator of the school. They bridge the gap between the government and the public because they have the mandate to exercise discretion in how their school achieves the targets set by the local education agency over the use of BOS funds and the in-school staffing conditions (incoming and outgoing teacher, retirement, distribution of classroom staffing). Since school principals can exercise jurisdiction over the school’s day-to-day operations, they act as *de facto* gatekeepers to the school system as they have the power to informally hire individuals as contract teachers and to determine their career progression over time. As a result, the principals are privy to the mechanics of translating policy determined by the MoEC, and their capacity to set the operational standards at the school-level is crucial.

Public school principals are not responsible for the recruitment of civil servant teachers but they have the power to recruit contract teachers. As mentioned previously, there is no single formal procedures to hire contract teachers in public schools. The vacant teaching positions are not publicly announced. When schools have vacancy, usually the method was through word-of-mouth recruitment. Most often, informal interview with school principal was the only selection process teacher candidates had to go through. In relation to the recruitment process of contract teachers, one secondary school principal commented, “When we need new teachers, we do not have any formal hiring procedure. We usually hire the one who responds to the vacancy fastest as long as the applicant can fulfil administrative criteria, such as

minimum education background. This is concerning as I cannot ensure applicant quality by only looking at their education certificate.” (Interview, Bogor, 2 December 2019).

Overall, they have control over which and how many contract teachers are employed at a school. As school principals are the manager of the teachers, they are in the position to support effective contract teacher recruitment process. According to school principals, once a teacher is hired, he or she will influence the school environment in many ways. If they are not, the school principal will be responsible to supervise and develop the teacher. Principals have little power to sanction civil servant teachers already in the system, unless the teacher has serious behavioural misconduct. But principals are able to retract appointment of non-performing contract teachers. Another school principal mentioned that teacher candidates who apply to the contract teacher positions are usually relatives of his teachers or of his connections. There have been only a few cases where individuals who applied to his school have no connection with the existing school staff.²⁹ The nature of this relationship with the newly hired teachers has worsened the situation when teachers underperform.

The final and the most relevant stakeholder in the topic are teachers themselves—and they are discussed last because of their impotence in how they can exercise control and authority and assert themselves in the recruitment and process. Teachers have been noted as having a misplaced obligation to the state rather than to refining their pedagogy or curriculum mastery (e.g., Bjork, 2003). The unwillingness to initiate is so ingrained within the super-identity of the education corps that even when given autonomy, teachers are reluctant to take control and lead the classroom to implement meaningful pedagogical reforms (Bjork, 2003). But in the systemic organisation matters of how teachers are managed, they are also less potent with their willingness to accept risks to experiment with voicing dissent or to institute individual space for negotiation with the local principal or education agencies. It suggests that teachers’ sheepish attitude is a historical burden stemming from decades of experience of being a political arm of an authoritarian regime to control social intercourse at the lowest levels of community. This explanation may be sensible if we are to offer a critique to the neoliberal institutional reforms that has since followed Indonesia’s decentralisation and the *Reformasi* era (e.g., Hadiz and Robison, 2010). If teachers are politically impotent and are unable to advocate for their cause and to initiate reform, then the onus to push systemic changes would fall to the hands of central and local bureaucrats. We disagree with this perspective. Teachers are not passive beneficiaries of systemic changes.

²⁹ Interview with a primary school principal, Bukittinggi, 28 August 2019.

Our contribution to the debate about teachers' political and social position here is that they are victims of their own success by institutional design and by self-inflicted political economy failures. The management of teachers in the country are so structurally tight that it has not been able to foster individualism and space for continuous learning to happen. Furthermore, the government's inability to enact meaningful reorganisation have only reinforced the duality of teacher employment in the country. Another factor to the disarray in teachers' interest is the low capacity on average coupled with politically motivated activism rather than a genuine desire to see improvements and supported by a truly high-quality individual capacity to understand the depth of their demands. Contract teachers' activism so far has rested on the claim for the need to be recruited as civil servant tenured teacher on the basis that they are rightful heirs to the tenured positions as they have sacrificed their lives to do so. For civil servant tenured teachers, they have been spoiled by the financial benefits and the social status that comes with the job and they are reluctant to be challenged to do more and to grow in their positions. Therefore, the teachers' interests in the story is not a direct legitimacy to winning a victory for civil service tenure because they are fighting the wrong fight with the wrong reasons and with the wrong tools.

4.6. Civil Society

For parents and students, their interests and stakes in investing a good teacher recruitment process is not as clear cut as it may seem. It is obvious that parents and students would benefit from excellent and passionate teachers hired for their teaching competence and supported for their teaching. However, this ideal assumes that all parents and students have a good and thorough understanding of what they expect from the education system. The reality paints a less positive picture as activism for a more rigorous selection process and promotion is not uniform. Not all parents and students have high levels of attachment to the education system (e.g., Pradhan et al., 2014). In fact, our experiences tell us that parents and students with deep investment for improving education are exceptions rather than the rule. This has to do with the educational experiences that go along the lines of socioeconomic classes that favour privileged middle and upper classes. The concept of class mobility and economic aspirations, for example, are more intimately related to families who have experienced the windfall of good education and exposure to global competitive pressures for meritocratic performances in professional settings.

The spotty activism from parents and students thus set a low standard for how policymakers approach the subject of organising the teaching corps. On one hand, parents have long been

side-lined by the decision-making in education policies and have been trusting “the government” to make the best possible education policy on their behalf (Akresh, Halim and Kleemans, 2018; Bjork, 2003). On the other hand, the New Order’s co-optation of the nation’s academia limited the Indonesian public discourse on how education should be organised by emphasising the exact sciences over social sciences and dampened critical thinking in the pursuit of knowledge (Hadiz and Dhakidae, 2004). The decentralised government also mean that whatever movement for public demand to better and improve teaching quality is directed not as a national movement but rather as a localised and individualised demand directed to the local education agencies instead of the central government. And insofar central government responses to the public demand for improving teaching quality or teacher welfare depends on the local government rather than parents’ consideration as the most important client in education service delivery. As a result, the parents and students’ claim in the process of teaching recruitment and promotion process is reduced to becoming a matter of symbolic representation of government policies.³⁰

5. Norms and Values

The last element to Indonesia’s teacher recruitment systemic woe is the social factor of the teaching profession. Earlier we discussed at length the institutional and political economy obstacles to recruiting good teachers in Indonesia. We argued that the legal and institutional design hinder ministries and local governments from reforming the teacher recruitment. Unclear division of authority, autonomy, and accountability between every political institution involved in the recruitment process make reforms difficult to succeed. Furthermore, diverging political economy of stakeholder interests add extra layers of political negotiation to reconcile the different interest groups. This section will extend the previous argument by emphasising the social aspect of the profession. We argue that teachers are burdened by social dynamics of the profession, namely the social priority for civil service tenure and the preference for seniority over merit. These are important because social considerations of the teaching profession may discourage able candidates and burden teachers from improving their job performance despite technical improvements to the recruitment process. This section will analyse the consequences of the two social factors mentioned above.

³⁰ Interview with secondary school principal, Bogor, 2 December 2019.

5.1. Social Expectations

Teaching is a coveted job because of the financial stability and access afforded by the civil service tenure, rather than the social prestige that comes with academic mastery or their responsibility to educate the public. Perhaps non-performing teachers are motivated more by social respect that comes with civil service tenure rather than satisfying a sense of individual curiosity or a passion for pedagogy. For example, after winning the civil service tenure, teachers were more interested in displaying the financial benefits that comes with the job. One of our interviewees noted that some teachers from Bukittinggi preferred to partying and dining rather than dedicating themselves to the teaching responsibilities once they passed the teacher recruitment process.³¹ Whilst this observation may be a localised incident, it nevertheless exemplifies one of many cases where financial security of the civil service tenure can result in social side effects beyond classroom learning. And if the ideal, high-functioning education system would surmise teachers to become both leader and facilitator to the learning process, then individual expectations to the teaching role itself matters just as much as the recruitment process. The incident mentioned in the interview displayed lax professional standards in public service where teachers invest their time in a profession with the expectation that is unrelated to teaching excellence and self-development. Since role expectations determine behaviour, the incident highlights the difficulty of enforcing civil servant conduct in the profession.

The perceived virtues of the civil service tenure also introduced a dimension of social pressure for contract teachers. Aspiring candidates enter the teaching profession with the hope to someday win the civil service tenure, either by qualifying the national civil service test or through special regulatory intervention by ministerial or local government edicts. This employment arrangement also encourages for individuals to stick with the profession rather than leave after several years of terrible salary; legal ambiguity as an employee in the education system; and demanding professional obligation to teach similar load to civil servant teachers.³² This social dynamic indicates that there is an expectation to the teaching profession that, again, prizes civil service tenure above all other professional obligation to teaching. And, more importantly, the split employment system has incentivised individuals to enter the profession to weather the job uncertainty of contract teaching as Indonesia's education system blurs the distinction of professional responsibility between contract and civil service tenured teachers. The difference between contract teachers and civil servant teachers

³¹ Focus group discussion with primary school teachers, Bukittinggi, 2 March 2019.

³² Interview with a contract teacher, Bukittinggi, 27 February 2019.

has effectively entrenched a feudal employment system as teachers are divided into social classes that goes along with their employment status.

5.2. Professional Development

Teachers' career development is an important factor to ensure they are able to stay on top of their subject matter. We will not be delving into the deep details of the professional development requirements as it is beyond the scope of this paper. Our point here is that teacher recruitment and the continued individual development is intimately linked to the particular teacher cohort rather than on the basis of meritocratic development that is tailored to the career progression of the individual teacher (Revina, 2019). In fact, the cohort cohesion is so strong that it becomes a defining point for the teacher identity as a professional. For example, one of our group interviews with education officials at the district level concluded that the government should take seniority as a differentiating factor for all contract teachers who qualified the national certification process.³³ This point was also echoed by national lawmakers when enacting policies and regulations regarding teachers to emphasise the years of service and dedication spent as one of the primary qualifying factors for civil service tenure and state recognition—which also determines the salary and pension benefits for the individual.³⁴

Professional progression based on seniority may be second-order implications to the dysfunction of the national teacher recruitment scheme. One may argue that the social preference for seniority may be mitigated by introducing merit-based pay. However, the politics of merit-based pay may be used as a tool to discriminate in a professional environment that is supposed foster cooperation and collaboration towards realising learning as a common good (Leigh, 2012). But the politics of merit-based pay aside, the problem is not about refining pay structure to favour individual performances. Seniority is a social norm within Indonesia's teaching corps.

Age cohortism is a strong influential factor in determining one's teaching career.³⁵ One explanation to this was put forth by Bjork (2006), which argued that Indonesia's teachers have a superordinate identity as a group that defines their individual interpretation of teaching and it is salient enough thus enable a mental sanctuary for teachers to utilise in moments of

³³ Focus group discussion with education stakeholders, Kebumen, 5 March 2019.

³⁴ Interview with a former member of the House of Representatives, Jakarta, 22 November 2019.

³⁵ Interview with a contract teacher, Central Java, 25 February 2020.

uncertainty. The corps' preference for seniority means that teachers are socially incentivised to conform rather than to undergo individualised professional development. The problem is that the teacher corps has promoted teachers to senior positions based on their tenure instead of merit. Individuals are not incentivised to upgrade their teaching skills, and hence emphasises the status quo rather than developing a teaching corps that learns. One way to implement change is to remove low-quality senior teachers and promote high-performing teachers to positions of seniority. However, civil service teachers are tenured and firing is rare. Systematic removal of non-performing teachers is a politically expensive move lest the government incurs the wrath of teachers unions and trigger widespread protests against the policy.

The enduring age cohortism as an organisational value within the teacher corps thus suggests socially constructed organisational norms are also potent determinants of quality teaching. Any bureaucratic or institutional reforms of the teacher recruitment process will need to account for the social norms of seniority-based career progression. It is important that future reforms of the teacher recruitment practice emphasises individuals who are truly passionate for teaching rather than for the financial stability afforded by the public service. But since the public service emphasises conformity, it would be difficult to take the first step of escaping the inertia of teaching mediocrity. Individuals who are truly passionate and skilled in teaching, and those who are willing to stomach risky innovation are then excluded from the service since they are seen as deviants from this conformity—dampening the profession from the possibility of enriching itself from talent diversity and the vigour for talent development.

6. A Way Forward

The key to improve education performance start with improving the stock of the country's teachers. The ideal recruitment process is admission of highly qualified and interested individuals whilst keeping out those whose intention and interests are outside of the learning process. And the struggle of recruiting teachers extend beyond tweaking the recruitment standards; increasing incentives to attract aspiring teachers; or improving bureaucratic efficiency (Guarino, Santibañez and Daley, 2006). We argue in this paper that Indonesia's teacher recruitment process is held back by inchoate legal and political institutions; divergent stakeholders' interests; and social values that prioritise status and seniority over teaching performance. Thus, by addressing these three issues, we hope that Indonesia's teachers are not distracted from their primary obligation to teach and, hopefully, lift Indonesian students' learning. Indonesia's experience of being stuck in the middle of performance distribution after

largely succeeding in getting most children to school is not a bad outcome given the country's immense governing challenges over a very diverse population and geography, as well as its history of overcoming colonialism and authoritarianism in a very short time. However, the country must acknowledge that improving the way its teachers are recruited will require some sacrifices and risks for innovative reforms.

The following are our reflections on how to proceed with improving the country's teacher recruitment process in line of Pritchett's (2015; 2018) measures of accountability:

- *Delegation.* Indonesia's political institutions (ministries and local government agencies) are deadlocked because of unclear laws and over-prescriptive regulations. This is because political actors, stakeholders, and institutions are not yet ready to give up their authorities. But instead of addressing the political sacrifices needed to be made to re-align institutional authority, we should instead look at ways to re-define jurisdictions of institutional authority. This could be achieved by clarifying objectives of each institution involved with the recruitment process and how each institutional objective fit with each other.
- *Finance.* Limited budgetary space to finance teacher salary dictates the type and number of teachers recruited each year. In short, decisions to policy implementation is directly and indirectly centralised under the MoF. Rather than devolving MoF authority to other ministries or district level government, perhaps policymakers should explore streamlining financial authority over budgetary spending. It is important to then introduce fiscal independence for districts by specifying a form of spending discretion and a regular audit of district budget planning to ensure teacher recruitment goals are met. The key is to introduce a tight control over the goal of the reform and a loose supervision of achieving said goal.
- *Information.* The chaotic dynamic of stakeholder interaction allows private gains from public responsibilities. We should not try to build an incentive system for collaboration because that will be politically costly and will take too long to be successfully implemented. What the country needs instead is to focus on collecting the right information and disseminate it transparently. Be consistent in opening public access for government data on teacher vacancies and recruitment. Be consistent in explaining the logic of policymaking so that every stakeholder can understand the consequence of their actions. The key is to include as many stakeholders as possible in every decision made.
- *Motivation.* Teachers are entering the profession with political and social motivations to further their individual profit rather than to serve a common learning goal. The key here is

not to introduce more rules to compel teachers to teach rather than score political or social points. Or that teacher performance are closely monitored with explicit and stringent measures of success. Instead, we need to think about the pecuniary motivation within the teaching profession. How can teachers be socially useful in Indonesia? And, how do we determine the guiding principles of teachers' success in the country? What is therefore necessary is making a consistent and coherent narrative of what the teaching profession entails and what individuals can do to succeed in the job.

Based on the above reflections, we would like to conclude this paper by offering three possible areas of reform for policymakers to consider.

First, professionalise Indonesia's teachers. The source of the political tug-of-war between ministries and between central-and-local governments can be traced back to the inchoate legal design that is unsuccessful in delegating tasks and responsibilities. As a result, teachers are absorbed by the civil service. They are assessed by their obligation and obedience to the state rather than a mastery over the subjects they teach. Instead of issuing more laws to regulate teachers' professional behaviour, we urge policymakers to open information channels to clarify teacher-related information. For example, teacher vacancies at the district level. This is to inform the government at all levels of real demands at the local level and set recruitment targets for each district. Only by understanding district demands can the central government then be able to determine the standards of training needed to adjust teachers for each district's learning needs. And by doing so, the government's aim is to attract professional educators who are motivated by the teaching rather than by the political or the social factors of the job.

Second, set a time limit to contract teaching. Indonesia's dependence on contract teaching is politically costly because each regulation and institution involved in the education system must deal with two separate career channels. One possible solution here is the introduction of a mandatory service within a specified time as contract teachers for all teacher candidates. This is to sift candidates who are most able and motivated for the profession to enter the profession. And new teachers may also benefit from having on-the-job training experience to Indonesia's diverse learning challenges. The aim here is not to erase the contract teaching track or to promote civil service tenure as the single viable teaching career. Policymakers should instead take advantage of Indonesia's dual-track teaching career system by re-defining it as a sorting mechanism.

Third, dedicate significant political will to set expectations for teaching quality. Political negotiation is necessary at all levels of policy implementation. Instead of introducing laws to discourage politicking, policymakers should instead capitalise on the lack of an overarching

political institution responsible over teacher management as a way to build a national narrative for teaching quality. The aim is to persuade the Indonesian public to understand the importance of education. And, the government should consider institutional mechanisms to stimulate public demand for high-quality teaching. This is an important long-term goal because it guides how the Indonesian government approaches issues in education.

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