

Persistent Predation: The Politics of the Learning Crisis in Indonesia

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About this country brief

The RISE Programme is a seven-year research effort that seeks to understand what features make education systems coherent and effective in their context and how the complex dynamics within a system allow policies to be successful. RISE had research teams in seven countries: Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Tanzania, and Vietnam. It also commissioned research by education specialists in Chile, Egypt, Kenya, Peru, and South Africa.

Those researchers tested ideas about how the determinants of learning lie more in the realm of politics and particularly in the interests of elites. They focused on how the political conditions have (or have not) put learning at the center of education systems while understanding the challenges of doing so.

Each country team produced a detailed study pursuing answers to two central research questions:

- Did the country prioritise learning over access, and if so, during what periods?
- What role did politics play in the key decisions and how?

The full studies detail their analytical frameworks, their data, and sources (generally interviews, government internal documents and reports, and other local and international publications), and the power of their assessments, given their caveats and limitations. Country briefs extract from the full studies how leadership, governance, teaching, and societal engagement are pertinent to student outcomes.

Introduction

Indonesia is in the midst of a learning crisis. Although the country has improved access to education in recent decades, it has done little to improve mastery of basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and science among primary and secondary students. A range of assessments suggest that students learn little at school.

Indonesia's learning crisis has reflected the political dominance during the New Order (1965–98) and post-New Order (1998–present) periods of predatory political, bureaucratic, and corporate elites. Rather than produce skilled workers and critical and inquiring minds, those elites have sought to use the country's education system to accumulate resources, distribute patronage, mobilize political support, and exercise political control.

Religious elites—some having supported the acquisition of basic skills in math, science, and literacy in line with Islamic traditions of learning—have been co-opted, harnessing them to predatory agendas and disabling them as a significant force for change. Parents and schoolchildren—the principal users/clients of education systems—have been at best minor players in contests over education policy and its implementation.

Technocratic and progressive elements have supported a stronger focus on basic skills acquisition, with occasional success, but generally contestation has been settled in favor of predatory elites. Accordingly, efforts to improve learning outcomes in Indonesia are unlikely to produce significant results unless there is a fundamental reconfiguration of power relations between these elements.

In the absence of such a shift, moves to increase funding, address human resource deficits, eliminate perverse incentive structures, and improve education management in accordance with technocratic templates of international best practice or progressive notions of equity and social justice—the sorts of measures that have been the focus of education reform efforts in Indonesia so far—are unlikely to produce the intended results.

This does not mean there is no hope for the future. The emergence of more inclusive policymaking spaces as a result of democratization has created room for technocratic and progressive elements to exercise continuing influence over education policy and its implementation. This is especially so at the national level where these elements are strongest, though perhaps less so at the local level where predatory forces are in general vastly superior. At the same time, intensifying structural imperatives for Indonesia to improve its education system have emerged as the knowledge and technology sectors have become an increasingly important source of global economic growth.

In this context, there may be some value in proponents of improved learning outcomes engaging more substantially with actors in the business community around issues of learning, particularly in “creative industries” such as information technology, software development, media, and film that are at the forefront of a knowledge/technology-based economy in Indonesia. By contrast, there is likely to be less value in seeking to promote improved learning through engagement with parents and schoolchildren given their weakness as political actors.

Enrolling without learning

Indonesia has done much to improve access to education in recent decades. Between 1972 and 2018, its gross enrollment rate increased from 85 percent to 106 percent for primary schools, from 18 percent to 89 percent for secondary schools, and from 2 percent to 36 percent for higher education institutions.¹ But the country has done little to improve mastery of basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and science, particularly among primary and secondary students. It has typically placed behind neighboring Malaysia, Vietnam, and Thailand on international standardized tests of student learning such as PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS since it began participating in these tests in the early 2000s.² Nor have its scores on these tests improved much, if at all, over time.^{3,4}

Indonesia's learning crisis has its origins in the nature of the political settlements that have characterized Indonesia's political economy for much of its post-independence history and specifically during the New Order (1966–98) and post-New Order (1998–present) periods. Political settlements during these periods have differed only slightly from one another. As a result, the government has failed to adopt and implement education policies that promote learning in Indonesian schools along the lines assessed by PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS tests. It has instead given priority to training students to be loyal and obedient to the Indonesian nation, the Indonesian state, and to some extent their religion.

The contestation of government education policy and its implementation by technocratic and progressive and other elements supporting a stronger focus on basic skills acquisition has generally been settled in favor of predatory elites. At the same time, however, these actors have been better placed to promote change in education policy and its implementation since the fall of the New Order in the late 1990s. This is due in part to the political effects of the Asian economic crisis, the emergence of more inclusive policymaking spaces as a result of democratization, and intensifying structural imperatives related to the country's model of capitalist development. This holds out some promise for change in the future.

Competing actors, interests, and agendas

Broadly speaking, four sets of actors have shaped the nature of education policy and its implementation in Indonesia since 1965, with distinct interests and agendas. The main institutional mechanisms for parental participation in education decisionmaking—school committees and education boards—have been captured by school principals and local political elites, limiting the scope for genuine input by parents into education decisionmaking.

Predatory political, bureaucratic, and corporate elites

Senior officials at the national and local levels have used their positions to accumulate wealth, as have the corporate elites to whom they are connected through family and other personal linkages. Such actors have permeated the state apparatus at both the national and local levels under both the New Order and post-New Order regimes. They have emerged out of a variety of institutions including the military, the police, the bureaucracy, the major political parties, and increasingly in recent decades the country's major business conglomerates. They have dominated all the key arms of government—the legislature, the bureaucracy, and the judiciary—

albeit to a lesser extent since the fall of the New Order, with democratization having precipitated a slightly more inclusionary politics.⁵

For the education sector, this set of actors has included senior figures in the national parliament's education and budget committees, various senior Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoEC) and Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) officials, their counterparts in local parliaments and agencies, business groups with strong bureaucratic and political connections to these individuals, and the Indonesian Teachers Union (PGRI), which, despite its name and common description as a trade union, is an instrument of the education bureaucracy rather than a trade union). There also are nongovernment organizations (NGOs) that have strong political or bureaucratic connections and established to access government funds without necessarily providing anything in return, often referred to as "red license plate NGOs" (the color of license plates on government vehicles).⁶

These elites have pursued three distinct agendas relevant for education policy and its implementation: seeking rents, promoting loyalty to the state, and fostering national economic, social, and cultural development. They have had little concern for improving learning outcomes through the acquisition of basic skills in mathematics, science, and literacy. Indeed, by reducing resources to education, misallocating these resources to corrupt purposes, and deflecting effort from serious study of basic curricula toward other activities, they have worked directly against such learning.

Religious/Islamic elites

The major Islamic organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, are mass organizations, both with tens of millions of members. They represent the two main streams of Indonesian Islam—traditionalism for NU and modernism for Muhammadiyah. Both organizations have key stakes in Indonesia's education system. Each runs a large network of schools (*pesantren* and *madrasah*), with NU schools tending to service poor rural communities and Muhammadiyah schools tending to service a more affluent and urban demographic. Between them, the two networks dominate the country's large private education sector.

Religious/Islamic elites have had some concern for promoting good learning outcomes through the acquisition of basic skills. Advocates for Islamic schools have persistently cited inequities in school financing models as an impediment to improving learning outcomes. Intellectual traditions among modernist Muslims have likewise emphasized scientific learning and its compatibility with Islamic learning. But the bargain struck early in the Republic that saw the majority of religious schools secure autonomy in return for not being under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Culture has also seen them isolated from sources of learning expertise. The default position of those co-opted by predatory elites has therefore been to seek opportunities in their designated area of expertise—religious learning.

Technocratic elements

Technocratic elements include senior officials in government (particularly within the economic ministries) who are ideologically committed to liberal markets and their allies among mobile capital controllers such as donors and sections of international finance. These elements have

sought to create an educational system that meets citizens' demand for education services and the economy's need for skilled labor as efficiently as possible in terms of the cost to the state.

In contrast to predatory elites, technocratic elements have viewed the purpose of education largely in economic and utilitarian terms. They have been cognizant of the role of education in promoting nation-building and establishing the foundations for democratic rule. But they have given greater emphasis to how education equips students with the skills and abilities to compete in the labor market, meets skills shortages, increases economic productivity, and promotes investment and economic growth.

Technocratic elements and the agendas they have pursued have promoted good learning outcomes in terms of the acquisition of basic skills. In this sense, they have stood in opposition to the agendas of both predatory elites and religious elites, at least to the extent that the latter have worked against such learning outcomes.

Progressive elements

Progressive elements include NGO activists and others ideologically committed to causes such as social justice, human rights, and corruption eradication. The main actors in this group have been the Jakarta Legal Aid Bureau, Indonesia Corruption Watch, and the Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (a prominent human rights NGO).

The theoretical underpinnings of their agenda have largely been couched in the language of human rights, good governance, and local wisdom. While progressive agendas recognize Indonesia's learning crisis and support initiatives to address it, solutions must first meet equality and equity benchmarks. So, this agenda stands firmly opposed to predatory agendas that erode public school funding as well as neoliberal initiatives for quality improvement that involve deregulation and privatization.

After the New Order

The economic crisis in 1997 and subsequent collapse of the New Order in 1998 shifted power in favor of government technocrats and donors and away from predatory elites at the national level.⁷ In so doing, it created a political context more conducive to market-oriented education policy reform. These developments led to a transition toward a democratic and decentralized political system more compatible with technocrat and donor emphasis on managerial and financial autonomy for education institutions and the principle of academic freedom. But the economic crisis dramatically strengthened the structural leverage of foreign donors, at least for the period of the crisis.

Over the next few years, donors provided loans and grants to the Indonesian government to support the reform agenda, particularly in school-based management, educational institution autonomy, and teacher management and upgrading, and they issued further reports encouraging market-oriented reform of the education sector.⁸ The emergence of new global discourse emphasizing the role of the knowledge and technology sectors in promoting national and international competitiveness during this period shined light on emerging structural imperatives for change.

Education policy and implementation

This more inclusionary political settlement produced important changes in Indonesia's education policies and their implementation. First, it led to a marked increase in government spending on education. The collapse of the New Order saw a renewed push by both technocratic and progressive elements to persuade the government to increase its education spending.⁹

Second, there was a marked decentralization of authority over education policymaking and its implementation. The country's decentralization laws devolved policymaking authority over education to the district and municipality, except for higher education, which remained centralized. They also transferred a substantial amount of resources from the center to the districts. In general, district governments became much better placed, both in their policymaking authority and financial capacity, to pursue their own goals and objectives in relation to education policy and its implementation.¹⁰

The central government also introduced school-based management (SBM), supporting it with a new school grant scheme—also aimed at realizing the country's long-held ambition of achieving free basic education—called school operational assistance. The move to SBM also saw new school committees (*komite sekolah*) and district education boards (*dewan pendidikan*) as mechanisms to facilitate parental participation in school and district decisionmaking.¹¹

Third, this more inclusionary political settlement—particularly the enhanced position of technocratic elements within it—propelled Indonesia's education policies in a much more market-based direction than under the New Order, particularly in the first decade following the Asian economic crisis. Key changes in this respect included decentralization measures.

But the more inclusionary character of this new political settlement—combined with the continuing political dominance of predatory elites—also laid the basis for effective resistance to many of these policy changes. Reforms seeking to transform the country's education system along market-oriented lines attracted significant resistance from predatory elites seeking to defend their control over education institutions, their access to rent-seeking opportunities, and their access to benefits accruing as a result of increased education spending. The reforms also attracted resistance from progressive elements unequally benefiting the middle classes and harming the poor.

Major technocratic policy initiatives such as the introduction of “international standard” schools, school-based management, permission for foreign universities to establish branch campuses in Indonesia, teacher redistribution, institutional accreditation, and standardized testing became domains of contest between rival agendas, stymieing market-oriented reform.¹² In some cases, this stymieing came about because reforms enacted at the center ran up against the interests of predatory local elites who had their own interests in the education sector. For example, the newly established school committees have generally been captured by school principals and teachers, while education boards have generally been captured by local political and bureaucratic elites and/or parents from middle-class backgrounds.¹³

The growing influence of religious elites at the national level led to the enactment of a law on religious schools in 2019. This law was an apparent *quid pro quo* for the decision by Ma'ruf Amin,

then head of Nahdlatul Ulama, to support Joko Widodo in the 2019 presidential elections and run alongside him as his vice-presidential candidate. This law proposed a substantial redistribution of public funds to private religious schools, which do not teach the national curriculum.

The impact of this political situation on learning has been to significantly hold back improvements in learning outcomes as measured by international standardized tests. This is revealed perhaps most clearly in the PISA results. For instance, in the 2018 iteration of this test, only 30 percent of students demonstrated minimum (Level 2) proficiency or better in reading (compared with the OECD average of 77 percent), only 28 percent demonstrated proficiency in mathematics (compared with the OECD average of 76 percent), and only 40 percent demonstrated such proficiency in science (compared with the OECD average of 78 percent).¹⁴

Moreover, the country's performance showed no sign of improvement. Since Indonesia began participating in PISA in 2001, its "performance in science has fluctuated but remained flat overall, while performance in both reading and mathematics has been hump-shaped. Reading performance in 2018 fell back to its 2001 level after a peak in 2009, while mathematics performance fluctuated more in the early years of PISA but remained relatively stable since 2009."¹⁵ It is possible that these results have been affected by increasing student participation in the test,¹⁶ but they indicate that overall learning outcomes have remained very poor.

National exams

Historically, national exams in Indonesia have been designed to control grade progression rather than serve as diagnostic tools for measuring learning outcomes. More specifically, they have functioned to control access to a public education system where post-primary demand has exceeded supply.¹⁷ So, all permutations of the national exam system have created winners and losers among students.¹⁸ The winners have been able to advance their education through the (significantly cheaper) public system. The losers have dropped out or opted for the more expensive (and often lower quality) private schooling.

The collapse of the New Order in 1998 created the conditions for a reset of national exam policy. In 2002 a new iteration of the national exam was announced. The results in three subjects (Indonesian, English, and mathematics) would be the sole determinant of grade progression for junior and senior high school, and the pass level was set to rise incrementally each year. The new exam was one of a series of test-based reforms designed to create rankings and thereby stimulate competition. (Other major policy reforms saw schools ranked by a new accreditation agency and teachers subjected to new competency tests). In line with the orthodoxy of this reform movement, from 2001 forward Indonesia became a regular participant in international standardization tests, beginning with PISA in 2001, followed by PIRLS (2006), and TIMMs (2011).

The new exam regime provoked strong opposition from a range of stakeholders, not least the parents of tens of thousands of students who failed the exam and were forced to repeat and (for senior high students) forgo acceptance into tertiary institutions. Schools and teachers lost their power to influence progression pathways, placing the policy at odds with calls from the main teacher union to reconfigure national exams away from a high-stakes model that encouraged "teaching to the test."¹⁹ More broadly, all critics of the policy were unanimous on the point that

education was the biggest loser, as the measure of educational attainment for Indonesian students was reduced to a set of numbers in three two-hour exams.

Broadly speaking, contests over national exam policy between the introduction of a high-stakes test in 2002 and its final demise in 2019 involved two distinct yet complementary agendas. The first was led by progressive NGOs that challenged the legal validity of the exam policy through the courts, often on grounds related to the right to education. The second was spearheaded by the Indonesian Teachers Union (PGRI) for whom the neoliberal agenda represented not only a weakening of education officials', principals', and teachers' control over student progression but diminished their role as nation-builders. The combined effect of these two agendas would see the national exam become a classic case of policymaking on the run as the state endeavored to defend a neoliberal agenda that was at odds with key stakeholders in the education sector.

In 2018, the newly appointed Minister of Education announced that from 2021 the national exam would be abolished. The authority to assess student performance and progression would be restored to the school level. While the announcement was presented as a *terobosan* (breakthrough) in education policy, it was effectively a capitulation. For two decades, the national exam had been an unpopular policy for everyone except its architects. Pedagogy experts had lamented its effect on the narrowing of learning experiences. It had inflated the cost of education as parents were pushed to enroll children in the ubiquitous cram centers that prepared students for the exam. Universities had never taken the results seriously and managed their own entry exams.

Curriculum reform

Curriculum reform in Indonesia under the New Order (1966–1998) failed to drive improvements in learning outcomes because it was primarily an exercise in regime maintenance rather than learning enhancement. The collapse of that regime in 1998 opened an opportunity to address urgent concerns about the quality and relevance of student learning outcomes. Technocratic elements within successive governments came to dominate the policymaking process at the national level, with a high degree of cohesion over the goal of improving learning outcomes to meet perceived labor market demands. However, at the implementation level, curriculum reform has been shaped by a range of competing political agendas. Overall, there has been a “poor fit”²⁰ between national and district political and institutional contexts and various relationships of accountability between actors within the system have been marked by a high degree of incoherence.²¹ The result has been a very weak correlation between curriculum reform and the improvement of learning outcomes in schools.

Fittingly, the first curricular reform of the post-Suharto era was to address his historical legacy (Suharto was the architect of the New Order.) A key motivation for “Curriculum Supplement 1999” (an amendment to the 1994 Curriculum) was to revise content regarding the rise of the New Order and the role of the military in politics. It was an early sign of the shift to an inclusionary political settlement around the issue of curriculum design, as the decision was a highly symbolic acknowledgement of the role of progressive coalitions (particularly university students) in forcing Suharto’s resignation. The far more substantial reform, however, was the launching of a new curriculum in 2004. The design of the new curriculum was led by the Ministry’s Curriculum

Center, which had commenced work in 2000 as a continuation of reforms to the 1994 curriculum.²² It contained the hallmarks of the technocratic agenda, especially New Public Management theory, as student learning outcomes were tied to a range of defined competency standards and associated indicators. The preamble to the policy set education provision within a framework of regional and global competitiveness, in which “the quality improvement of our human resources must be the first priority.”²³ It was in stark contrast to the New Order priority of “creating the true Pancasila individual.”²⁴

The speed of the shift was startling. Only a few years prior, the “divergence of opinion with regard to educational philosophy among key stakeholders” had been identified as a primary obstacle to curriculum development.²⁵ Now a curriculum had been launched that was closely aligned with a global education orthodoxy based around standardization, core competencies, and corporate management practices. While it is tempting to seek out the smoking gun that triggered this package of policy reform, the more realistic scenario was a confluence of factors. Comparable developments in neighboring countries were one reference point, as was input from multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, which had long pressed for market-oriented reforms in the education sector.

The key to effective curriculum reform was not, however, capacity building. Of foremost importance was getting the right balance between center and districts. On paper, the new model—whereby the center would retain control over curriculum policy development and standards with the districts controlling implementation—played to the strengths of both actors. In practice, however, reform measures have suffered from the “poor fit” between the technocratic consensus at the national level and the political and institutional context at the district and school level.²⁶

At the school level, the curriculum overhauls prompted confusion and hesitancy among teachers. Three decades of didactic policy control from the center had left them utterly unprepared for the level of agency that post-New Order curricula granted them in content development and competency assessment.²⁷ And institutional and political reform at the center was not matched by similar processes in the districts. Established hierarchies and practices in local institutional contexts not only weathered *reformasi*, but in many cases were strengthened.²⁸

The implication for learning outcomes was that the main quality assurance mechanism for a textbook was the size of the kickback a publisher could muster. As with the tendering for national exam support services, providers often sought to maximize their margins by using the cheapest available materials. Worse still, the practice had the effect of driving up the cost of schooling for parents as school principals were often complicit in the system. Students went from being consumers (the neoliberal ideal) to a captive market (the predatory reality).

While the failure of curriculum reform to produce a measurable impact on student learning outcomes was frequently linked to resourcing bottlenecks and the lack of teacher training, these issues were largely manifestations of deeper structural problems. In a nutshell, it could be said that central policymakers failed to appreciate the fact that the rapid pace of institutional and political change in the metropole’s and major cities has been far slower (and even regressive) at the district level. Rather than stimulating improvements in learning quality (or even an

appreciation for the need to pursue this agenda), curriculum reform created a range of rent-seeking opportunities for predatory actors at the local level and generated a largely apathetic response from teachers.

Teacher career trajectories

The country has done little to ensure the quality of the educational workforce. A highly bureaucratic approach to promotion, widespread politicization of senior appointments in the school system and education bureaucracy, and rampant corruption within the education bureaucracy have combined to create a context in which promotions and appointments are either sold to the highest bidder or given to political allies. Ambitious teachers have had little incentive to excel in subject knowledge and pedagogy and great incentive to cultivate linkages to senior administrative and political figures instead. Or they have had reason to pursue external income generating opportunities through moonlighting such as by running businesses or taking teaching opportunities at other educational institutions, even if this meant abandoning teaching responsibilities at their home institution.²⁹

Such struggles have shaped teacher career trajectories for civil servant teachers (*guru PNS*) and honorary teachers (*guru honorer*), the two main categories of teacher in Indonesia's education system. The former hold permanent positions, receive relatively good salaries and pension benefits compared with many other Indonesian workers, and are virtually un-sackable. The latter, by contrast, are casually employed and do not have civil servant status or the benefits that go with it.³⁰

To gain promotion, teachers need to accumulate sufficient credit points to meet the requirements for the next level. *Minister of Bureaucratic Reform Decree No.16/2009* identifies nine levels that are relevant for teachers: IIIa-IIIc followed by IVa-IVe. Teachers are typically appointed at Level IIIa, and it has been easy for teachers to accumulate the required credit points to gain promotion through to Level IVa, but further advancement has been difficult.³¹ This is because teachers have had to produce a 'written scientific paper' (*karya tulis ilmiah*, KTI) to earn the points required to meet the requirements for Level IVa.³² Few teachers have been capable of doing this.

Because few teachers have had the ability to produce a KTI in line with specified requirements, many teachers have failed to progress in their careers beyond level IVa/IIIb.³³ The number of affected teachers is very large. For instance, in 2010, the *Republika* (2010) newspaper reported that according to official data sources: 'In December 2009, there were 569,611 teachers at Level IVa and only 13,773 teachers at Level IVb.

The increase in teacher numbers following decentralization in 2001 was mainly due to an increase in the number of *guru honor*. For instance, as Pierskalla and Sacks (2020: 1290) have noted: "From 2006 to 2010, 377,000 new teachers were hired, 60 percent of them as contract teachers." The dramatic increase in the number of *guru honorer* created new challenges for teacher career paths because *guru honorer* became an increasingly important part of the teacher workforce, but they had no clear opportunities for professional development or career progression. Under government law and regulation, *guru honorer* did not progress through the bureaucratic levels mentioned earlier, nor could they be promoted into school principal, supervisor, or senior

educational agency positions. Most important, they were denied access to the salary and pension benefits afforded civil servant teachers, including those associated with the teacher certification scheme.

In early 2004, then Education Minister A. Malik Fadjar stated that he would upgrade honorary teachers to civil servant status as soon as possible.³⁴ In 2005, the government issued Government Regulation No. 48/2005 on the Appointment of Honorary Staff to Become Probationary Civil Servant, providing the legislative basis for the conversions. According to Huang et al. (2020: 6): “The 2005 regulation served as a precedent. Contract teachers still demand to be automatically promoted as civil servants to date. From 2010 onward, contract teachers were gradually promoted into civil service tenure.” According to one source, more than one million *guru honor* were granted civil servant status between 2005 and 2014.³⁵ The government rationalized this move by arguing that it would help the country deal with a looming teacher shortage driven by large numbers of retirements of teachers hired during the 1970s and 1980s.³⁶

In the midst of these developments, technocratic elements raised questions about how the upgrading of *guru honor* to civil servant status would improve teacher performance and help the government address teacher distribution problems.³⁷

So...

What, then, are the implications of this analysis for efforts to promote improved learning outcomes in Indonesia? These efforts are unlikely to produce significant results unless there is a fundamental reconfiguration of the political settlement that has characterized the country’s political economy since the mid-1960s. Specifically, there needs to be a marked shift in the balance of power between predatory elites, and technocratic and progressive elements in favor of the latter. Without such a shift, moves to increase funding levels, address human resource deficits, eliminate perverse incentive structures, and improve education management in accordance with technocratic templates of international best practice or progressive notions of equity and social justice—the sorts of measures that have been the focus of education reform efforts in Indonesia so far—are unlikely to produce the intended results.

The best prospects for a shift probably lies in intensifying the structural imperatives for Indonesia to improve its education system that have emerged as the knowledge and technology sectors have become an increasingly important source of global economic growth. At this point, however, there is little sign that such structural imperatives have translated into greater support for change among elites.

Even so, there probably is some value in having proponents of improved learning outcomes in Indonesia engage more substantially with actors in the business community around issues to do with learning—for two reasons. First, the business community has the political clout to promote change in education policy and its implementation—especially for learning—should it choose to do so. Second, recent years have seen significant growth in so-called “creative industries,” such as information technology, software development, media, and film. To the extent that businesses in such industries are at the forefront of the emergence of a knowledge/technology-based economy in Indonesia, they may have interests in the quality of Indonesia’s education system that differ from businesses in manufacturing and mining relying on unskilled labor and exploiting

natural resources. Serious potential for business lobbying for an improved education system awaits a marked change in the sources of wealth acquisition. But it may be possible to lay some groundwork in the meantime.

There likely is to be less value in seeking to promote improved learning through engagement with parents and (school) students. Much analysis of the politics of learning in developing countries expresses hope that parents and children—as the principal users/clients of education systems—will exercise voice in a way that puts pressure on education providers and the state to improve quality. Yet parents and students have been at best a minor player in contests over education policy and its implementation in Indonesia, with the dysfunctional character of school committees being perhaps the clearest indication of their weakness in this respect. To be sure, a few individual parents—typically from middle-class backgrounds—joined forces with NGOs and other progressive elements to engage in litigation that defeated market-oriented policies such as the Education Legal Entity law, the national exam, and the international standard schools policy.³⁸ But the wider pattern has been one of inaction.

Annex 1 Indicators of learning for RISE countries

A country's learning adjusted years of school combines the quantity and quality of schooling into a single indicator by multiplying the estimated years of schooling by the ratio of the country's score on the most recent test scores harmonized to 625 (World Bank data for latest year of assessment).

Learning poverty, a combined measure of schooling and learning, is the proportion of children unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10 (World Bank data for 2019).

The Human Capital Index is the amount of human capital that children born today can expect to acquire by the age of 18 given the prevailing risks of poor health and poor education. It combines the likelihood of surviving to school age, the amount of school they will complete and the learning they'll acquire, and whether they leave school ready for further learning and work. For example, a score of 0.5 means that they will be only 50 percent as productive as they might be with complete education and full health—and that their future earning potentials will be 50 percent below what they might have been.³⁹

	Learning adjusted years of school	Learning poverty (%)	Human Capital Index (0–1)
Chile	9.4	27.2	0.7
Egypt	6.5	69.6	0.5
Ethiopia	4.3	90.4	0.4
India	7.1	56.1	0.5
Indonesia	7.5	52.8	0.5
Kenya	8.5	—	0.5
Nigeria	5	—	0.4
Pakistan	5.1	77	0.4
Peru	8.6	44.4	0.6
South Africa	5.6	78.9	0.4
Tanzania	4.5	—	0.4
Vietnam	10.7	18.1	0.7

Note: — = not available.

¹ World Bank 2020.

² Chang et al. 2014: 23–24.

³ For instance, Indonesia's PISA scores for reading in 2000 and 2018 tests remained the same (371), declining from a high of 402 in the 2009 round. Over the same period average scores in mathematics and science showed negligible improvement (19 and 3 point increases respectively). See OECD (2019: 3).

⁴ Pradhan et al. 2017.

⁵ Rosser et al. 2005.

⁶ Rosser and Fahmi 2016: 16–19.

⁷ This section draws heavily on Rosser (2016).

⁸ World Bank 2004; 2007a.

⁹ Triaswati et al. 2001: 104–105; World Bank 1998: 113; Soedijarto 2008.

¹⁰ Kristiansen and Pratikno 2006.

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- ¹¹ Irawan et al. 2004: 73.
- ¹² Chang et al. 2014.
- ¹³ Rosser and Fahmi 2016.
- ¹⁴ OECD 2019: 2.
- ¹⁵ OECD 2019: 3.
- ¹⁶ OECD 2019: 3.
- ¹⁷ The primary school gross enrollment rate (GER) has been around 100 percent since the mid-1970s. At the same time only around 20 percent of those students were advancing to junior or senior high school (Suharti, 2013: 25). It was not until the mid-1990s that junior high school GER reached 50 percent, an achievement not matched at the senior level until 2003. For the relevant data, see (<https://www.bps.go.id/statictable/2010/03/19/1525/indikator-pendidikan-1994-2019.html>).
- ¹⁸ Indonesia has not always had a state administered 'national exam', but equivalent school-based exams have always been employed to control progression.
- ¹⁹ Kompas 2000.
- ²⁰ Levy et al. 2018.
- ²¹ Spivak 2021.
- ²² Soedijarto et al. 2010: 95.
- ²³ Departmen Pendidkan Nasional 2003.
- ²⁴ As stated in one the first formal New Order statements on the goal of the national education system. Pancasila are the five principles of the Republic of Indonesia. See Ketetapan MPRS No. XXVII/1966.
- ²⁵ UNESCO 1999: 86.
- ²⁶ Levy et al. 2018.
- ²⁷ Yani 2005.
- ²⁸ Hadiz 2010.
- ²⁹ Widyoko 2011; Ilfiyah et al. 2015.
- ³⁰ Rosser and Fahmi 2016.
- ³¹ Jalal and Mustafa 2001: 138; Suhardjono 2006.
- ³² Teacher's work is seen as falling into four broad areas: (1) education (*pendidikan*), (2) study process (*proses pembelajaran*), (3) professional development (*pengembangan profesi*) and (4) supports for study process (*penunjang proses pembelajaran*). The KTI is considered a professional development activity. According to Suhardjono (2006), teachers could potentially accumulate the required credit points for promotion related to professional development through other professional development activities such as by producing creative works and engaging in curriculum development activities. But the required technical guidelines for such activities are so far 'not yet operational, forcing a large proportion of teachers to use a written scientific paper (KTI) as their professional development activity.'
- ³³ Ludiyanto 2019.
- ³⁴ Media Indonesia 2004.
- ³⁵ Pratama 2020.
- ³⁶ Indrasafitri 2010; Jakarta Post 2016.
- ³⁷ See, for instance, Chang et al 2014: 163-164 and OECD and ADB 2015: 274.
- ³⁸ Rosser and Curnow 2014; Rosser 2015.
- ³⁹ World Bank Human Capital Index for September 2020.

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