

This quarter, we feature the book *Education in Indonesia* which takes a multidimensional look at various aspects of educational development in Indonesia over the last 40 years – from education financing, early childhood education, tertiary education, skills training, integrating Islamic schools with the mainstream system, to improving the quality and efficacy of teaching.

Education in Indonesia¹

By Divya Ramchand

There is general agreement in the development sphere that countries starting from a low human resource base should invest in primary education due to the very high rate of return, both economic and social, from equipping their population with basic knowledge and skills. The literature cites benefits such as overall economic development, improvements in health, lowering fertility and slowing population growth to more sustainable levels, raising workforce productivity, and facilitating the development of democratic systems of governance. Indonesia caught on to this thread in the 1970s, and by 1983 the country achieved universal primary enrollment (though not universal completion of primary school), followed by substantial increases in secondary enrollment.

Despite having shifted its focus from primary enrollment to junior secondary education, Indonesia still grapples with basic problems of teacher absenteeism as well as problems with the quality of teaching and instruction. In one of the book's chapters, the author compares his own observations of teacher-student classroom interactions against teachers' self-reports of their own teaching methods. He found stark disjunctures between teachers' definitions of what constituted interactive teaching styles (assigning homework more regularly, using workbooks in class) and what is generally prescribed as active learning (class discussions, actively engaging students). Only 20% of the lessons observed in his study involved some form of hands-on activity and 5% included class discussion; the vast majority revolved around teachers lecturing to the class in spite of the Ministry of Education and Culture encouraging more active student engagement in classrooms.

The administration's commitment to education in Indonesia is visible; expenditure on education as a share of the government budget doubled between 2001 and 2010 and a constitutional amendment in 2002 mandated that 20% of government expenditure be allocated to education, making it the second largest government expenditure category and raising education expenditure as a share of GDP to 3.7%. Within that, while spending on basic and higher education increased, spending on early childhood education remained very low.

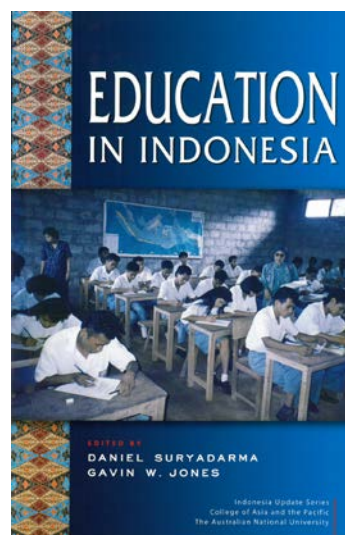
The increase in spending on basic education resulted in much wider access to schooling for children from poorer families who gradually stayed in school longer and, on average, enrolled earlier than before. However, education quality suffered. Measures of basic education outcomes and

quality showed little improvement (as measured by standardized test results) even though a large chunk of the spending on basic and senior secondary education went to teacher-related costs. The chapter on teacher effectiveness points out that while expenditure on teacher certification improved teacher welfare, it did not improve teacher subject knowledge or student learning outcomes. The hiring of teachers also rose faster than enrolment to the extent that student-teacher ratios fell to levels that raised costs considerably but did not translate to significant improvements in learning. Meanwhile, teacher absenteeism remains widespread, hindering students' learning. In remote areas, this problem has been mitigated by offering additional allowance to those working in designated areas, but its effectiveness is limited due to the way the allowance is calculated and administered. Existing measures are not sustainable for improving learning outcomes as they place significant pressure on the education budget. Improving teaching quality requires a system of professional development, assessment of teachers' performance, and an incentive system to reward high achievement.

Expanding and improving the resources of tertiary education institutions as well as attracting and retaining talent are challenges which the tertiary education segment needs to tackle. In addition, making the education system and training programs relevant to the job market so as to smoothen the transition from schooling to employment and improve workforce productivity, are among some of the unresolved challenges which Indonesia faces.

The chapters in this book provide a comprehensive look into the development trajectory of education in Indonesia as a result of various policies undertaken in the past, and the likely challenges it will face going forward, including recommendations on overcoming them from experts in each respective field. Overall, the state of education in Indonesia gives much cause for optimism, but requires the government to take a lead in addressing the various challenges through evidence-based policy making. The importance of acting quickly cannot be understated because of long lead times in translating increased levels of schooling into a more productive workforce.

The book is available at bookshop.iseas.edu.sg/publication/1852.



¹ Suryadarma, D. and Jones, G.W. 2013. *Education in Indonesia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies