

## RISE in Indonesia: Non-technical Research Overview

The RISE Country Research Team in Indonesia will undertake analysis of reforms that initiated at both local and national levels in Indonesia.

The five-year, £3.9 million project aims to expand global knowledge on the challenges and opportunities that arise when local, autonomous districts have the flexibility to devise ways to improve student learning. Researchers will strive to understand what happens when local districts are free to follow their own political agendas. They will closely analyse whether locally initiated changes prove effective, the key ingredients that lead to change, and whether and how effective innovations catch on elsewhere.

Indonesia provides an ideal laboratory to explore these issues because its more than 500 local districts are largely autonomous from national-level mandates as a result of rapid political decentralisation, begun in the years following the departure of Suharto in 1998.

The country also provides a platform for researchers to gain insights about how and whether an aspirational, middle-income country can find and wield policy levers that lead students to acquire higher-level, critical-thinking skills. Indonesia is seeking ways to give its young people more sophisticated and advanced skills in order for the nation to improve its overall economic and social development.

Researchers will also analyse national-level reforms to see whether they prove effective in enhancing student learning. The project will explore the coherence – or lack of coherence – between federal initiatives, and their execution ‘on the ground’ in local districts. In Indonesia, districts have autonomous political power while most education budget is borne by the central government.

Broad research questions include the following:

### At the local level

- **Assessing how innovation occurs** - Does self-determination at the district level work to improve learning? If so, what are the ingredients of local political agendas and initiatives that lead to policies to improve schools? How do changes take place in such a system? What motivates districts to undertake reform? How are schools in reform-minded districts affected? What are the features of district policies that facilitate or impede student learning?
- **Assessing how and whether innovation spreads** - Do district-level innovations spread to other districts? Do they percolate up to national levels? What forces facilitate the diffusion of policies elsewhere? What forces impede the spread of innovation?

### At the national level

- **Assessing reforms intended to improve teacher quality** - Do reforms improve teacher quality? Do higher teacher salaries attract more highly-skilled people who might have pursued other careers? If so, does the presence of better-skilled teacher lead to improved student learning? Does remedial training improve teaching quality? Do performance-based rewards lead teachers to change behaviours in ways that improve learning?



Image courtesy of SMERU/Rachma Nurbani

- **Assessing reforms intended to reduce student cheating on national exams** - Does a switch from paper- to computer-based exams reduce cheating? Do more analytical questions make cheating more difficult, and lead to improved student learning? Does reducing the stakes by offering students other measures of performance also reduce the pressure that has led to cheating?

## Context

Indonesia, the world's fourth-most populous nation, has achieved tremendous economic growth. It has also achieved a gender-balanced, near-universal enrolment at the primary-school level. Roughly eighty percent of its students enrol in secondary school. Public spending on education has increased sharply, from eleven percent of total government spending in 2001, to nineteen percent in 2014. Student-teacher ratios are low: eighteen to one.

Yet its education system faces a learning crisis deemed a 'state of emergency' by the former Minister of Education and Culture and current governor of Jakarta, Anies Baswedan. Despite the country's significant investments in education, the students' scores on international, standardised assessments are low, according to rankings on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a triennial international survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics, and science. More than 75 percent of students failed to achieve even basic proficiency in math. The levels are below what would be expected, given Indonesia's income levels.

Teacher quality is a major concern. Most of the nation's 3 million teachers did not pass a recent test in basic subjects; results show that 57 percent of maths teachers scored below 50 percent on the exam, for example. Thus, a major issue to be addressed focuses on finding ways to more effectively use resources to improve teaching quality and, in turn, to improve student learning in both urban and rural settings. The hope is that central reforms – which include improved teacher salaries, incentives and training – will lead more high-skilled people into teaching, and will improve the skills of existing teachers.

The Indonesia Country Research Team will explore a wide range of proposed, ongoing and past reforms. The analysis will examine which types of policies are associated with improvements in student learning, for girls and boys, and for students living in both urban areas and remote villages.



*Image courtesy of SMERU/Hastuti*

At the local level, the research project will closely follow and collect data from five, key innovative districts in hopes of better understanding the dynamics that underlie change. Districts - which have the power to set their education budgets, and to decide how to manage their schools - have introduced a variety of innovations in hopes of enhancing learning. Examples of innovations that have emerged from local policy changes thus far include the following provisions:

- Paying teachers additional wages to encourage them to lead extracurricular activities.
- Paying half of the costs for teachers' continuing education.
- Establishing new arrangements to bring subject-specific secondary school teachers to remote areas that confront teacher shortages; teachers who have been unable to secure a sufficient number of work hours in schools with multiple teachers in a given subject may complete their needed work hours by teaching in underserved areas.

Researchers will examine learning outcomes in districts nationwide to identify the twenty best- and worst-performing districts. The researchers will then analyse the educational policies that were employed in those districts to see what lessons may be learned from their results and experiences. At the national level, researchers will scrutinise the effects of a wide range of reforms to understand whether they are effective in improving learning, and, if so, why. The issues and related policies include:

- **Teacher recruitment.** A 2005 law doubled the base pay for certified teachers. Reforms established a certification process, and set new and higher standards for skills and knowledge of teachers. The government created a one-year, post-graduate teacher training programme.
- **Teacher professional development.** Indonesia created a nationwide remedial programme to train teachers who did not pass a basic skills test.
- **Teacher distribution.** The government established mechanisms to provide rewards and incentives for teacher performance in remote and underserved areas, and to encourage community participation in monitoring teacher performance.
- **High-stakes, national exams.** Indonesia's students must take national exams to graduate from elementary school (sixth grade), and from junior high school (ninth grade), and from high school (twelfth grade). In an effort to stop widespread cheating, the national government introduced measures to change the format, content and stakes associated with the exams. The government has introduced computer-based tests in some schools. Previously, all exams were taken on paper. The hope is that the computer-based format will prove less vulnerable to cheating than traditional tests written on paper. In addition, authorities have sought to make the tests' questions less rote and more analytical in nature. The government has also sought to lower the stakes associated with the exams by introducing other criteria that may also be considered in determining whether a student graduates.

Overall, the work in Indonesia is intended to provide insights about the underlying reasons why policy levers intended to improve student achievement work or fail – and to use these insights to inform policy both within Indonesia and globally.

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RISE is supported by:

