

Key Issues:

- **Human resources constraints** are a key factor behind Indonesia's stagnating growth and poverty alleviation rate.
- **Investments in human capital** must begin early in life and continue throughout schooling. Increasing parental engagement during this period can help improve the production of human capital.
- **Indonesia's education reforms** have largely ignored the importance of parental engagement in schooling for student achievement.
- **Indonesia can feasibly implement policies** such as nurse home-visit programmes, increased parent-teacher conferences, and democratically elected school committees, to boost human capital development through greater parental involvement.

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Developing Human Capital by Supporting Parental Engagement in Indonesia

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Indonesia's stagnating economic growth rate is largely attributed to human capital constraints. This is partly because Indonesia's education system leaves students ill-prepared to enter the workforce. Studies from developing and developed countries reveal that encouraging parental engagement in the child's early years and during schooling can improve student outcomes. The Government of Indonesia should implement policies that encourage parental engagement through a nurse home-visit programme, frequent parent-teacher conferences, and democratically elected school committees. These initiatives build on programmes that are already implemented on a trial basis or small scale in some parts of Indonesia. The central government should allocate resources to roll out these policies on a wider scale.

The Issue

To prepare for technological disruptions in the workforce, it is imperative to improve the human capital of the next generation of workers. Constraints on human resources have led to a stagnating growth rate (Resosudarmo and Aburohman, 2018), resulting in a slower rate of poverty alleviation. Schooling is an important determinant of human capital that is lagging in many developing countries, including Indonesia

Despite Indonesia's rising school enrolment rate (Beatty et al., 2018) human capital development remains problematic. Almost universal enrolment in primary education was achieved decades ago, while junior and senior school enrolment have seen a steady uptick. However, schooling has not translated into useful knowledge gains, leaving students ill-prepared to enter the workforce. In the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Indonesia was placed well behind similar middle-income Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members Viet Nam and Thailand (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2016). To rectify this 'learning crisis' (World Bank, 2018b), Indonesia needs to redouble its efforts to reform education.

Table: Trends in PISA Mathematics Scores of Viet Nam, Thailand, and Indonesia, 2012–2015

Country	PISA 2012	PISA 2015
Viet Nam	511	495
Thailand	427	415
Indonesia	375	386

PISA = Programme for International Student Assessment.
Source: Adapted from World Bank (2016a, 2016b, 2016c).

Since the early 2000s, Indonesia has made several efforts to improve its education system, including mandated funding allocation, teacher certification, and curriculum revamp. However, reforms have largely ignored the importance of parental involvement during a child's early life and schooling years. Evidence from developed countries such as the United States (US) have shown that higher levels of parental involvement are associated with higher test scores and motivation (Hastings and Weinstein, 2008). A number of government initiatives in developed countries, such as the 'No Child Left Behind' legislation in the US and the 'Schooling Strategy' in New Zealand, have targeted parental involvement as the key factor in educational improvement (Hornby and Witte, 2010). Such investments must begin even before birth and continue to ensure that children thrive at school.

It is both feasible and desirable to implement similar programmes in Indonesia. In this brief, we propose three policy interventions for a holistic, parent-centric approach to improving human capital: (i) implementing a home-visit nursing programme, (ii) encouraging regular parent–teacher interviews to foster greater accountability, and (iii) conducting mandatory democratic school committee elections. These programmes require scaling up of existing programmes and some reallocation of funds towards new usage, and thus can be accomplished in the short term.

Recommendations

1. Implement a nurse home-visit programme

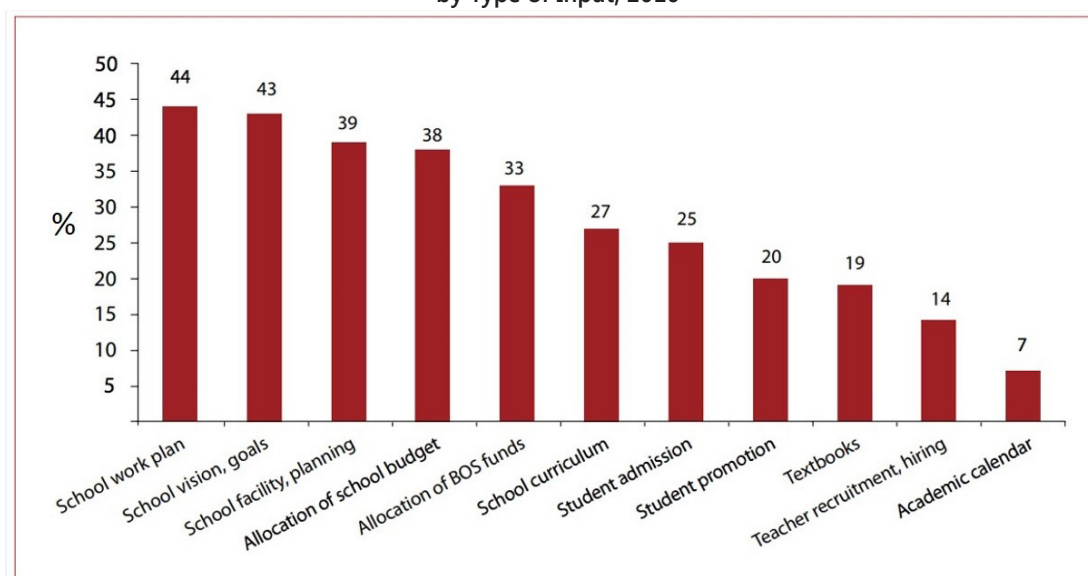
As a result of poor nutrition and persistent illness, stunting affects 37% of Indonesian children under five (World Bank, 2018a). Stunting is associated with lower cognitive capacity and places affected children into lower developmental trajectories. For children to obtain their full learning potential, these gaps need to be addressed early.

A nurse home-visit programme, similar to the US Nurse-Family Partnership programme, could help address the development gaps that emerge early in life. A parent education and health programme would provide low-income first-time mothers with qualified nurses who perform regular home visits during pregnancy and until 2 years after birth. During the visits, the nurses would provide a growth and weight assessment, teach positive health-related behaviours during and after pregnancy, inform patients about immunisations and nutrition, and link to the available services for mother and child.

Indonesian women remain the primary caregivers, with motherhood and marriage considered a form of identity. Working together with mothers will therefore have the greatest impact on optimal childhood development. Nurses could provide the information necessary for mothers to make the best decisions and keep them informed of their children's progress. This allows quick remedial action if necessary.

Similar programmes have shown promising results. A randomised control trial in the US amongst low-income mothers found that nurse-treated children made sizeable gains in language development and executive function (Olds et al., 2004).

Figure 1: Percentage of Principals Reporting That Parents Provided Input, by Type of Input, 2010



BOS = Bantuan Operasional Sekolah (School Operational Assistance).

Source: Reprinted from Vernez, Karam, and Marshall (2012).

Indonesia already has a foundation upon which a nurse home-visit programme could be built. Its 'Village Midwife Program' places trained midwives in every village in Indonesia and provides assistance in the delivery and short-term (up to 4 weeks) care of the child. Whilst the programme is warmly received by expectant mothers, Titaley et al.'s (2010) study in West Java found that low attendance rates were attributed to financial constraints and physical proximity. This is more pronounced in rural areas, where transportation during the rainy season is more dangerous. The implementation of a free home-visit programme will thus address these limitations to access.

2. Encourage parental involvement in school through regular parent–teacher conferences

Teacher quality remains a key factor behind Indonesia's education lag. In 2015, the central government's compulsory teacher's test found that more than half of participants fell below the target score for subject knowledge and pedagogical skills (Rosser, 2018). Increasing parental involvement through instituting voluntary, monthly, face-to-face parent–teacher conferences in primary schools could address these concerns. Parents have the strongest influence over their child's home life and can monitor schoolwork and attendance, whilst providing encouragement. Parent–teacher interaction strengthens mutual obligation, trust, and coordination of efforts to help students achieve.

To encourage parents to participate, an information session outlining the importance of monthly meetings, followed by a written or verbal reminder from their children, would be helpful. Meetings can involve a review of students' report cards, class score averages, and suggestions for parents to support learning at home. A face-to-face method is preferable to SMS and email communications. Moreover, face-to-face meetings are low-cost, easy to implement, and do not rely on written communication which is especially pertinent in areas with low literacy rates.

This increased parental involvement creates greater accountability and transparency, as it can place external pressure on teachers to teach according to specific learning outcomes. Such programmes have proven to be successful in some other contexts.

A randomised field study in Bangladesh that implemented parent–teacher conferences in primary schools had a significant positive impact on students' results. Test scores rose by 0.3–0.4 standard deviations and students displayed positive attitudes and higher aspirations, with many spending more time studying with additional help from their parents (Islam, 2019).

Conducting these meetings in primary schools allows close monitoring of academic progress to address any skill gaps. As children age, their brains become less malleable, which makes correcting learning gaps more difficult (World Bank, 2018b).

To ease the financial burden on parents, parents could be compensated for transport costs and forgone hourly wages associated with attending the meetings. In Islam (2019), teachers in Bangladesh were given a lump sum honorarium of \$25 for their participation over 2 years and parents were provided with sweets. Funding for such an initiative could be allocated from Bantuan Operasional Sekolah (BOS) grants, which are financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and currently support school operational costs for primary and junior secondary students.

3. Introduction of mandatory democratic election of school committee members

The 2002 decentralisation of education provision gave Indonesian school committees the power to oversee budget processes, teacher quality, and the publication of student outcomes (Pradhan et al., 2014). Despite this increased autonomy, Vernez, Karam, and Marshall (2012) found that parents had low active participation in final school matter decisions in more than 400 public primary schools (Figure 2). Additionally, in Central Java and Yogyakarta, Pradhan et al. (2014) revealed how school committee members were handpicked by school management and were unrepresentative of parents or the wider community.

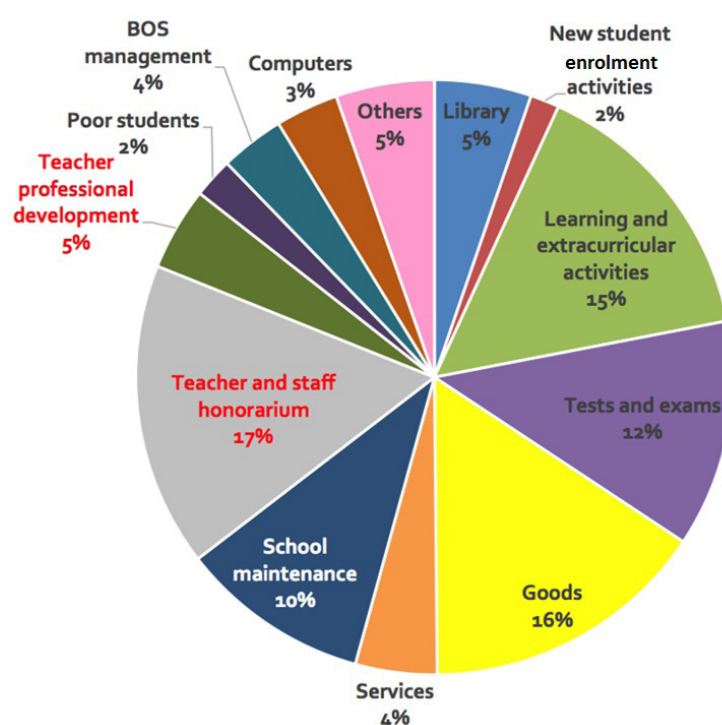
Increasing parents' participation in school committees through the introduction of democratic elections can improve oversight and learning outcomes. It empowers parents, as it makes school committee decisions reflective of the wider community – encouraging parental involvement.

A similar policy was implemented on an experimental basis in Java from 2007 to 2009 by Pradhan et al. (2014). Facilitators assisted parents and community members in selecting an election committee, which undertook human resource mapping. Potential candidates were selected and then voted on by parents, teachers, and the community. A democratically elected and parent majority school committee, with links to the village council, empowers parents and raises the status of the committee. The study found that teaching efforts increased by 0.6 hours per day and households were spending on average 80 minutes more a week helping their children with homework. The authors theorise that the greater legitimacy of the school councils meant that teachers were better supported and parents were more satisfied, leading to an increase in overall education quality.

After the conclusion of the study in 2009, the Ministry of Education and Culture released a document stating that school committees should be democratically elected. With no explicit mention of the field experiment, the ministry's guidelines followed the exact election process of the study. However, Vernez, Karam, and Marshall's 2012 study found that less than 25% of school committee members and less than 15% of chairs were elected. This suggests that, in practice, democratic elections according to strict quotas are still underdeveloped and require further support for implementation.

In comparison to the other initiatives to encourage parent involvement in Pradhan's study, including providing school committee training and grant facilitation, this initiative proved to be the most effective both in cost and impact. The intervention cost \$174 per school. For nationwide implementation, the funding could be allocated from the BOS grants. Such use of BOS funding, which allocated Rp580,000 per primary student in 2012 (World Bank, 2012), would be consistent with its aim of improving school-based management.

Figure 2: Allocation of BOS Education Budget by Usage in 2015



BOS = Bantuan Operasional Sekolah (School Operational Assistance), MOEC = Ministry of Education and Culture.

Source: Reprinted from World Bank (2017).

Conclusion

Developing human capital by improving student learning is essential in Indonesia, as the country grapples with a stagnating annual economic growth rate and the slowdown of poverty alleviation. Despite previous education reforms, including decentralisation and teacher certification tests, quality remains an issue. This policy brief recommends the adoption of a more holistic, parent-centred approach to education reform as a viable solution. This includes the implementation of the nurse home-visit programme, which delivers maternal care through the first 1,000 days of life to ensure optimal development. Secondly, the introduction of regular parent-teacher consultations during primary school to foster greater accountability and monitoring. Lastly, mandatory democratic school committee elections to empower parents and teachers. The funds necessary for the programme could come from the education budget that is already allocated towards education, with the nurse programme jointly funded by the health and education budgets.

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