

More prosperous teachers have no impact on the quality of education

February 7 2018, by Luhur Bima And Asri Yusrina



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More than 60% of the national education budget in Indonesia is used to improve teachers' welfare. The budget is used in almost one hundred percent of all regions in the country. However, raising salaries and providing teacher [allowances](#) do not necessarily improve the [quality of learning or the number of school graduates](#).

Indonesia's education system, especially primary education, needs qualified and competent teachers to improve learning in the classroom. [In the era of regional autonomy](#), responsibility to improve the quality of education is no longer limited to the central government.

So, what is the role of [local governments](#) in improving the quality of teachers? The preliminary analysis of our research indicates the commitment and role of local government are crucial in supporting the central government to improve teaching quality.

Local government initiatives

Initial findings by the [Indonesian Research on Improving Systems of Education \(RISE\)](#) team showed only a few regencies and cities have initiatives related to improving the quality of teachers. Less than 10% of roughly 500 regencies and cities in Indonesia are identified as having such policies or programs.

We studied local government initiatives related to teachers, which could take various forms, outside their routine activities. Information was obtained from media searches and interviews with several relevant stakeholders. The team found at least 77 policies and programs spread across 43 regencies and cities which were related to [teacher](#) reforms.

Roughly 62% of the policies or programs are in the form of local allowances for teachers. These are distributed based on teacher performance, certain criteria (27%) or no criteria at all (35%). Only about 9% of local government policies are aimed at improving the quality of teachers through improved teaching skills or greater knowledge.

These findings show the small amount of initiatives implemented by local governments to improve teacher quality. They are generally still

limited to improving the welfare of teachers, rather than the quality of their teaching. In fact, improving the welfare of teachers does not necessarily [increase their competence](#) or have a positive impact on student learning outcomes, at least in the short term.

National teacher reform

At the international level, the [2015 Program for International Student Assessment \(PISA\)](#) test showed Indonesian students' ability in literacy, mathematics, and natural sciences to be lower than the ability of pupils of other countries. For the mathematics tests, Indonesia ranked 65th out of 72 countries, far below Vietnam (22nd) and Thailand (55th). The results of language and science tests were also similar.

The government has now realised improving the quality of learning cannot be achieved by improving teachers' welfare alone. Government interventions based on teaching ability and teacher knowledge are needed to improve teacher quality.

The central government conducts the Teacher Competency Test (UKG) to map the quality of teachers. It measures their pedagogical skills and competencies. The test consists of [10 competency modules](#), with the results from each teacher used for entrance to the government [teacher training](#) programs. Teachers who have results below minimum standards are required to join the Continual Professional Development program run by the Education and Culture Ministry.

Based on the results of a RISE Indonesia team interview with ministry officials, the government plans to raise the minimum standards of UKG each year. In doing so, teachers will continue to be encouraged to improve their professional competence through their participation in the professional development program.

Implementation of national policy

Implementation of the development program is targeted to improve the quality of teachers. However, the ministry's budgetary constraints make it difficult to provide large-scale teacher training. Therefore, it is necessary for local governments to participate in the program to support its implementation nationwide.

Government efforts to improve the quality of learning through teachers' development will not achieve optimal results without the support from local governments. But many local governments have a lack of knowledge and human resources to create policies that can have a direct impact on quality of education.

For that reason, strong coordination between central and local governments is important in improving [teacher quality](#).

To support the national program local governments need to allocate a budget for teachers' training. At the same time, the central government should invest in teacher training at regional education offices, to ensure they have the capacity to implement the national program.

Good communication is also important, not only between central and local government but among local governments. Local governments should be encouraged to learn from each other's experiences.

Ultimately, a common understanding between central and local governments will be necessary to provide quality [education](#) to Indonesians. Such understanding is a major factor in the success of teacher reform in this era of decentralisation. The hundreds of trillions of rupiah spent by the [government](#) on improving teacher welfare should be used to boost the [quality](#) of learning and the number of school graduates.

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