As the twenty-first century unfolds, Indonesia has evolved into one of the world's emerging markets. Being the largest economy in Southeast Asia and a G-20 member, Indonesia offers lucrative investment opportunities, but one should not overlook how the country treats its population. Boasting 240 million citizens and a mushrooming middle-class, it is imperative to scrutinize the country's effort to guarantee better-educated people to meet the ever-increasing demand for labor and management in its rapidly growing and industrializing economy. Under the New Order's regime, elementary school enrollment increased but overall academic achievement in the country has failed to meet policy goals and aspirations. Result from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 1999, 2003 and 2007 shows that the average eighth grade Indonesian student achievement in mathematics fell significantly below the international average. In 1999, Indonesia was ranked thirty-fourth out of 38 countries, globally. In 2003, it was ranked thirty-fifth out of 46 countries and in 2007 it was ranked thirty-sixth out of 49 countries. In science, Indonesia was ranked thirty-second in 1999, thirty-seventh in 2003 and thirty-fifth in 2007 out of the same number of countries as in mathematics (Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic of Indonesia 2011). Furthermore, in a wider sense, the knowledge sector continued to lag behind its neighbors. SCImago Journal and Country Rank recorded that Indonesia published merely 13,047 scientific papers, far below Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. Measured by correlation of research intensity and per capita GDP, Indonesia's performance was also worse compared to Vietnam and the Philippines, whose per capita GDP was actually lower than Indonesia (Guggenheim 2012: 144–145).

Education in Indonesia critically looks at the country's education sector, which has not received much attention by international observers amid the advancement of the country's economy as Indonesia, the world most populous Muslim country, also becomes the third largest democracy after India and the United States. Despite the gloomy picture of Indonesian student achievement in math and science, and the poor development of the knowledge sector, the editors claim that 'The past decade has seen major changes in the structure of the education system and in the schooling trajectories of Indonesian children and adolescents [...]’ (p. 1). The book analyzes the changes and identifies challenges for future improvement, drawing on the expertise of some of the most knowledgeable people in the field.
Chapter 1 (by the editors Suryadarma and Jones) introduces what is discussed in every subsequent chapter. Chapter 2 (Suharti) examines Indonesia's trend in education, which includes improvement in educational attainment, trends in access to education, the supply of education, student learning outcomes, and the financing of education. Chapter 3 (Christopher Bjork) scrutinizes teacher training, school norms, and teacher effectiveness. Chapter 4 (Robert Kingham and Jemma Parsons) examines the integration of Islamic schools into the national education system, showing how the madrasah (Islamic schools) are financially marginalized within the perceived dysfunctional integration of Islamic education into the national system. Chapter 5 (Hafid Alatas, Sally Brinkman, Mau chu Chang, Titie Hadiyati, Djoko Hartono, Amer Hasan, Marilou Hyson, Hael Jung, Angle Kinnel, Menno Pradhan, and Rosfita Roesli) discusses early childhood education and development (ECED) services. Chapter 6 (Samer Al-Samarrai and Pedro Cerdan-Infantes) scrutinizes the financing of basic education. Chapter 7 (Asep Suryahadi and Prio Sambodho) examines policies to improve teacher quality and reduce teacher absenteeism. Chapter 8 (Hal Hill and Thee Kian Wie) examines the rapid growth and major challenges of universities. Chapter 9 (Rivandra Royono and Diastika Rahwidiati) discusses locally relevant universities as alternatives to world-class universities. Chapter 10 (Bruce Chapman and uryadarma) examines the viability of a commercial student loan scheme in higher education. Chapter 11 (Khong Kim Hoong) discusses Malaysian experience in the transformation and internationalization of higher education. Chapter 12 (Emmanuele di Gropello) elaborates the role of education and training sector in addressing skill mismatches.

One can argue that Indonesian students did not perform well in international standardized tests because of poor teacher quality, which results from an oversupply of teachers, a low teacher salary, inadequate pre-service training, a weak performance assessment, and a weak recruitment system. The pre-service teacher training doesn't offer the latest didactic methods and the civil service-based appraisal system used fails to reliably evaluate teacher performance. Decentralization has further worsened the situation as district and municipal governments tend to hire teachers more than needed. The local governments have no concern about paying teachers because the central government covers teacher salaries via block grants from the General Purpose Fund (Dana Alokasi Umum), as Asep Surhayadi and Prio Sambodho wrote (p. 145). Despite this under funding of salaries, teachers nevertheless attract the attention of political figures, perhaps because of teachers' sheer numbers and influence on society. High officials within the municipal and district office who are preparing themselves or their preferred candidates to contest in local elections...
exert their pressure upon school principals and teachers. Dismissing school principals and transferring teachers to remote areas are common as political punishment for not supporting certain political candidates. This has stoked fear among teachers every time a local election looms, distracting them from teaching, as my own research confirmed.

Furthermore, particularly for secondary education, the availability of well-trained teachers remains a central issue. For example, in Chapter 2 Suharti admitted that while Indonesians are becoming increasingly educated, teacher problems persist. She wrote, ‘The first is that Indonesia now has a surplus of teachers, which to some extent leads to short working hours. The second is that the improvement in teacher qualifications and levels of certification does not appear to have paid off in better performance among students’ (p. 49). According to Law 14/2005, teachers are entitled to receive double salaries if they participate in the ‘certification process’, which examines their competence. Since the process only began in 2007, it is still too early to examine the impact on student performance, but Asep Suryahadi and Prio Sambodho admitted that the certification program at least ‘had reduced the likelihood of teachers holding additional jobs, and of them having financial difficulties’ (p. 149). Thus, at least teacher motivation has improved. While this might have attracted people to become teachers (World Bank 2010), whether it will have a positive impact on student outcome remains to be seen. My own recent research shows that teachers have not yet used their professional allowance to improve their professionalism, but they used it more to fulfill their personal needs. Furthermore, Christopher Bjork (Chapter 3) warned that the norms of Indonesian civil servants, which rewarded obedience rather than initiative, could obstruct teacher professional development. In the era of decentralization, where teachers are expected to become facilitators rather than mere knowledge transmitters, previous decades of centralization under the New Order could pose a serious mental obstacle in the change of attitude of teachers.

Indeed, with the certification program, more and more people are expected to become teachers. This means they must enroll themselves in a teacher training school. However, as mentioned previously, the quality of pre-service education for teachers has been seriously neglected. Becoming a teacher now may mean having more money thanks to the certification program, but that does not mean going to teacher training school is prestigious. Nevertheless, there has been little effort to upgrade and improve teacher training. The government, instead of investing in this very crucial area of reforming and upgrading teacher training, instead preoccupies itself with replacing the curriculum with a new one called the 2013 Curriculum. The conception and implementation of this new curriculum was made in a rush, apparently without any thorough research.
into whether schools really need a new curriculum. Any kind of curriculum, no matter how good it is, without well trained and capable teachers can not succeed in the class room. Teachers have generally reacted with confusion to this new curriculum. As my research shows, many of them in remote areas admitted they had not even mastered the current curriculum and now suddenly there is a new curriculum to master and implement. The discussion of this sort of 'erratic' behavior of the ministry of education in producing and implementing the new policy, which could become a serious hindrance to reforming the education sector, is somehow missed in this book.

At the early implementation of decentralization, the gap between schools in urban and rural areas was widening as schools were competing to gather financial support from parents (Amirrachman, Syafi'i, and Welch 2008). However, as the country has tripled public expenditure in education over the last ten years (Chapter 6), the government has poured more money in the form of BOS (Bantuan Operasional Sekolah or the School Operational Assistance) to help mediate these market forces. The money covers operational assistance for every student at elementary and junior high school, at both public and private institutions. Although public schools are prohibited from asking for money from parents, many of them, particularly those located in urban areas, nevertheless do ask because pressure for high quality education is also high. Some teachers from these schools argued that the BOS is simply insufficient to cover all school activities. Some also argue that the BOS has limited schools’ initiative in creating new programs because they have to adjust the programs to what they describe as a very limited budget. Before the BOS, teachers were free to offer new additional programs to parents who were willing to pay more. The BOS itself has yet to cover senior high school. Overall, however, as my own research shows, this BOS has helped many poor households to ensure that their children can go to school. A vast number of schools in rural areas have been significantly benefiting from this program.

The country also needs to revisit the integration of Islamic education into the national education system; Robert Kingham and Jemma Parsons (Chapter 4) show how these madrasah (Islamic schools) areas are financially marginalized within the perceived dysfunctional integration. With regard to the national education budget, Samer Al-Samarrai and Pedro Cerdan-Infantes (Chapter 6) points out that Indonesia has almost tripled its public expenditure on education in real terms over a ten-year period (2001–2010). Higher education also faced acute challenges. Hal Hill and Thee Kian Wie (Chapter 8) assert that while Indonesia’s higher education is growing rapidly, the spending on higher education, ‘from both public and private sources, is barely adequate to keep pace with the rapid growth in enrollments, let alone to lift quality and
make any substantial progress towards improving participation by the poor’ (p. 178). Chapman and Suryadarma (Chapter 10) suggest that it would be better for students from poor areas to use income-contingent loans rather than mortgage-type loans to ease the repayment burden. And to ensure the absorption of the graduates into the market, Di Gropello (Chapter 12) argues for the need to strengthen the link and match between teaching and firms, exposing critical issues of quality and relevance in the formal education and training sectors.

Academic culture also needs to change in order to encourage excellence in teaching and researching, and to push for stronger peer review mechanisms, goals that likely demand radical reforms in the mindset of policy makers. Khong Kim Hoong (Chapter 11) shares Malaysia’s experience in internationalizing its higher education through partnerships with prominent Western universities. The Malaysian government allows reputable foreign universities to establish branch campuses in the country. It is still a big question whether the Indonesian government would allow foreign universities to play greater roles and allow English as a medium of instruction. Given Indonesia’s strong nationalist sentiment, even if this is allowed, ‘they would probably proceed cautiously and at a slower pace than in Malaysia’ (p. 234).

Overall, the book provides a detailed and well-researched analysis of Indonesia’s current education development. It sends a strong message that unless Indonesia seriously reforms this sector, the country will not be able to catch up with the ever increasing demand for an educated workforce. Investment in education, along with its infrastructure, is vital for the country to sustain its burgeoning economy and to avoid being caught in what economists call a ‘middle-income trap’. Countries suffering in a middle income trap can’t compete with advanced economies in high-skill innovations and manufacturing, nor with low income, low wage economies in cheap production. The ministry of education should be aware that the coming ‘2045 golden generation’, when Indonesia’s productive aged population is the biggest in Southeast Asia, may not live up to expectations if much more comprehensive initiatives in improving education are not undertaken now. And other clouds are on the horizon. Standard & Poor’s (S&P) has recently downgraded the outlook for Indonesia’s economy from ‘positive’ to ‘stable’ amid the gloomy global economic situation.

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