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, Haeil 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