EDUCATION

Grade point average

Two girls sat in the corner of the room sobbing uncontrollably while all around them others shouted for joy, gripped by a kind of mass delirium. Some waited in quiet contemplation, many shouted into their mobile phones, and one thin boy fainted. The scene, which took place in a Jakarta Senior Secondary School, was repeated across Indonesia on June 19 as students received the results from their final exams.

Throughout the world, it is not unusual for the release of exam results to precede a period of national introspection about the state of the education system and how children are finally evaluated. But this summer in Indonesia saw debate reach unprecedented levels as thousands of students who had already been accepted for hard-won university places failed their exams, and it became unclear whether they would be allowed to retake them or if they would have to concede to another year's study.

THE RELEASE OF EXAM RESULTS THIS SUMMER CAUSED UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS OF CRITICISM.

For some this was a failure of the new examination system that was introduced in 2002 in an attempt to standardise testing in Indonesia. For others, however, it represented a severe lack of confidence in the nation's education sector as a whole. Those feelings are reinforced by the dire ratings Indonesia routinely receives in international surveys of student skills and knowledge.

It is not only the quality of the education in Indonesia that is in question but also the fact that the country scores badly on almost every educational indicator. As a percentage of GDP, Indonesia has the lowest levels of government spending on education and the highest rate of dropouts in Southeast Asia, behind Laos, Vietnam, and even war-torn Cambodia. Only 39 percent of Indonesia's 12 to 15 year olds make it to senior secondary school, and there are 17 million functional illiterates while absenteeism among teachers is close to 20 percent.

INTERNATIONAL INDICATORS SHOW INDONESIA IS PERFORMING POORLY IN EDUCATION.

Comparisons to Malaysia are particularly insightful, given that the two countries started from the same historical educational lows immediately after independence (See Box One). The irony of this data lies in the fact that, in the early days, it was Indonesia which sent school teachers to Malaysia to help develop the education system there.

Box One: Indonesia and Malaysia Compared

	Indonesia	Malaysia
Education spending as a % of GDP (2003)	1.2	8.1
% of education expenditure covered by public sources (2003)	64.3	99.9
Teachers starting salaries at primary school level (US$) (adjusted for cost of living) (2003)	1,002	9,230
Gross tertiary enrolment ratio (%) (2001)	14.6	28.3
No. of Students enrolled in the 6 most popular countries of destination (UK, US, Japan, Australia, Germany, France) for tertiary education (2002)	29,015	35,961

Sources: OECD, World Economic Forum, UNESCO

Back to basics

PARENTS CAN CHOOSE TO SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO STATE, PRIVATE OR ISLAMIC SCHOOLS.

Indonesia's education system groans under the weight of one of the largest school age populations in the world. Parents may send their children to either a state, private, or Islamic school, and as the figures in Table One show, private and Islamic education make up a growing proportion of student enrolments the longer they stay in the education system. Government funding has traditionally been concentrated in primary schools as a result of the great push made by Soeharto throughout his tenure to ensure that the vast majority of children have access to a basic education, raising primary school enrolment rates from 62 percent in 1973 to 95 percent today.

Table One: Indonesia's education system at a glance

Age	School level	Compulsory attendance	Total net enrolment ratio (2003)	Number of pupils in state, private and Islamic schools (2004)*
5-6	TK: *Taman Kanak-Kanak* (Kindergarten)	✗	22 %	State : 28,000 Private : 2.15 million Islamic : N/A
7-12	SD: *Sekolah Dasar* (Primary)	✓	94.6 %	State : 24 million Private : 1.9 million Islamic : 3 million
13-15	SMP: *Sekolah Menengah Pertama* (Junior Secondary)	✓	60.2 %	State : 5.6 million Private : 2 million Islamic : 2 million
16-18	SMA: *Sekolah Menengah Atas* (Senior Secondary)	✗	39.6 %	State : 2 million State Vocational : 2.1 million Private : 1.4 million Islamic : 700,000
18 onwards	*Universitas* (Universities)	✗	11.7 %	State : 900,000 Private : 2.9 million Islamic : 115,000

**figures for Islamic schools for 2001-2002*
Sources: Department of Education and Department of Religion

PRIVATE SCHOOLS CAN BE CHEAP AND OF A VERY LOW QUALITY.

Unlike many other countries, private schools in Indonesia are no guarantee of educational quality. Many of the poorest parents send their children to extremely cheap private schools run by foundations that offer a low-grade education. Utomo Dananjaya from the Jakarta-based Institute of Education Reform says, "There are tens, maybe even hundreds of thousands of families in Jakarta who have immigrated from all over Indonesia and are living in illegal settlements. Many don't have a KTP [identity card] and have fallen out of the system. The children of the rubbish collectors you see on the streets or those who beg for money at traffic lights often go to these schools, even if just sporadically."

THEY CAN ALSO BE OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARD AND ONLY FOR THE RICHEST FAMILIES.

At the other end of the spectrum, some private schools here charge expensive tuition fees and provide an international baccalaureate curriculum, making it easier for their students to later apply for overseas university study. In recent years, some of Indonesia's well-known conglomerates have moved into education. "They get good access to credit and so can afford to build up a school before it begins to turn a profit," says Utomo.

John Howe, Education Advisor for Save the Children U.K. in Indonesia, says that children attending Islamic schools, especially those in the regions, are also often from the poorest families. "Save the Children research has shown

that 85 percent of these parents have a lower than average income. They choose Islamic schools because they tend to be less expensive than state schools, they hold classes at times which don't interfere with a child's work schedules and are often considered 'morally safe' for female students in particular." He says that the private schools "are a very mixed bag," noting that some teach only Islamic law and Arabic, while others focus on the national curriculum and just add extra hours for religious instruction.

ISLAMIC SCHOOLS ARE ALSO USUALLY FOR THE POOREST FAMILIES AND OFTEN OF QUESTIONABLE QUALITY.

The wide diversity of the Islamic schools is a reflection of the piecemeal efforts that the central government has made since the early 1990s to integrate Islamic schools into the education system, advocating the spread of more secular Islamic day schools (*madrasah*) in the place of traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). The quality of learning at many of these schools is low. "In some cases senior school students are the teachers for the younger children, others can be centred around one strong personal religious figure, who basically runs the whole show," John explains. The government funds 10 percent of *madrasahs* and now as many as 20 percent of Indonesian school children attend Islamic schools.

The quality of state schools also varies widely with some well-known schools considered to be much more successful than most others. At the state schools, children are taught a national curriculum that covers a wide range of subjects but are only tested on Indonesian, Math and English, something that students who failed their exams this year complained over.

THERE IS ALSO A WIDE VARIETY OF QUALITY AMONG STATE SCHOOLS.

Most education experts agree that a lack of teaching skills is one of the most pressing problems that state schools and universities face. The vast majority of the country's 3 million teachers and university lecturers are civil servants and are managed according to civil service procedures. The central government sets pay rates, which average around Rp1.5 million per month for school teachers and between Rp1.5 million and Rp 3 million for university lecturers working in bigger cities.

SKILL-LEVELS AND WAGE RATES ARE LOW FOR THE AVERAGE TEACHER.

A Ministry of Education survey recently found that to supplement their income, around 80 percent of school teachers have additional jobs, making it difficult for them to improve their skills through extra training, even if it were available. Similarly, lecturers at state universities often take on extra teaching at private universities rather than spending their non-teaching time undertaking academic research to expand and develop their knowledge. It is not uncommon for state university students to be taught just once or twice a year by their lecturer with teaching assistants filling the remainder of the time.

TEACHERS AND LECTURERS OFTEN HAVE ADDITIONAL JOBS TO MAKE ENDS MEET.

Furthermore, only one half of primary school teachers and two-thirds of secondary school teachers hold the minimum qualifications required for their jobs. While only 60 percent of the lecturers in the bigger universities have a masters degree and the figure drops even further to 40 percent in smaller universities.

MOST TEACHERS AND LECTURERS DO NOT POSSESS EVEN THE MINIMAL LEVEL OF QUALIFICATIONS.

Gross under-funding and the absence of even the most basic facilities has led to low levels of motivation for many of the country's teachers. In schools, the national curriculum has for decades been overcrowded with subjects, emphasising memorising facts and rote learning over the development of critical

UNDER-FUNDING AND AN OUT-OF-DATE CURRICULUM COMPOUND THESE PROBLEMS.

thinking skills. That is also reflected at the university level where students are often criticised for their lack of analytical skills and problem solving abilities.

Learning to change

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM WAS FORGED AFTER INDEPENDENCE.

Education systems worldwide are generally products of both a country's cultural heritage and its political background. Historically, formal education in Indonesia was limited to the Indonesian aristocracy but later some of these schools absorbed a greater number of students from the larger populace. Islamic schools, which had long been present on Indonesian shores during the pre-colonial period, were joined by a handful of Christian schools under Dutch colonial rule. It was after independence, however, that Indonesia's education system really took shape, as a new group of elites, keen to establish a nation, steered it toward the inculcation of national patriotism. Dr. Ella Yulaelawati from the Ministry of National Education writes that "explanation of natural phenomena, cultivation of aesthetics and eradication of superstition and violence were among the main goals of primary education at that time."

THE UNIFICATION OF INDONESIA BECAME THE MAIN RAISON D'ETRE OF EDUCATION UNDER SOEHARTO.

This emphasis on patriotism and citizenship continued throughout the 1960s, turning strongly toward the ideologies which would become synonymous with Soeharto's 32-year rule. "Pancasila identity," an appeal to a secular, united state which is still taught in schools today, was a major part of the curriculum. Teaching Indonesian also became key to uniting this ethnically fragmented group of islands. As Soeharto moved into his developmental state phase, science and technology gained greater currency in schools and universities, before it was recognised in the mid 1990s that more emphasis needed to be put on critical thinking. (See "Teaching history in Indonesia: the 1965 case" pg. 14 for an example of Soeharto's influence on the curriculum).

THE LEGACIES OF INDONESIAN HISTORY ARE STILL EVIDENT IN TODAY'S EDUCATION SECTOR.

All of these periods are still represented today in Indonesia's education system. Their impact can be felt in the deep cultural roots of the Islamic schools, whose enrolment rates are today growing by about 7 percent each year, and the practice of channelling the brightest children into math and science on arrival at Senior High School still occurs today. Most importantly, Soeharto's mission to instil a sense of national unity through the education system explains its deep absorption into the bureaucracy. To do that, it meant bringing tight control over schools and universities through a powerful central ministry of education.

THE NEW POLITICAL CONTEXT TODAY NECESSITATES FUNDAMENTAL REFORMS IN EDUCATION.

The Indonesian political landscape, however, has changed dramatically in the last five years; political liberalisation and governmental decentralisation have created a new framework for the education system and there are now many voices demanding that schools and universities keep in step. Table Two details some of the more important educational reforms to take place in recent years and the progress of their implementation.

Up to the mark?

WHO SHOULD BENEFIT FROM EDUCATION AND WHO SHOULD PAY FOR IT?

Although the broad outlines of these policies may seem like a step in the right direction, their implementation has uncovered more fundamental struggles about the purpose of an education system, who should benefit from it, and who should foot the bill.

Table Two: A Broad Summary of Recent Educational Reforms

Problem	Reforms	Current Situation
Education mired in a centralised bureaucratic system	Law No.20/2003 transfers many responsibilities, authority and resources for the delivery of education to local governments with some decision-making power given to the schools themselves under a "Schools Based Management system". Universities have also been granted new legal status to decouple from the bureaucracy and have autonomy over budgeting, hiring and paying staff, setting student fees and looking for additional sources of funding. Originating from World Bank and Asian Development Bank projects in the mid 1990s, its further implementation became a condition for the receipt of IMF funds at the time of the economic crisis.	Implementation for schools has so far been patchy and confused. For example, it is not clear whether the local or central government is responsible for teacher training. The theory of involving communities in school decision-making is so far largely unsuccessful as school committees are yet to function in many cases and in others are simply a reflection of the principal's growing power. Autonomy for universities is proving contentious as student fees rise and universities expand into commercial activities. So far university autonomy has only been implemented in the eight strongest state universities, bu there are plans for expansion in the near future.
Curriculum which emphasises passive learning	"Competency based curriculum" introduced in 2004 aimed at promoting active learning and shifting emphasis away from what is in the syllabus to standardised competence and learning output. Also decentralises syllabus development and implementation, giving teachers more autonomy and local governments the flexibility to introduce some local material into the syllabus.	Generally considered a step in the right direction, the implementation of the curriculum has been hampered by a lack of training for teachers and a complex structure of standards. There are still some complaints about subject overload. Some experts say the culture of the "teacher as king" will take decades to overcome. (Most schools are still using the old curriculum.)
Low-qualified and underpaid teaching staff	Law No.14/2005 raised salaries contingent on additional training, the cost is to be borne by the government.	Implementation to begin this year. Many question the ability of the government to properly fund this scheme.
Under-funding	In 2002 a clause was inserted into the constitution obliging governments to spend 20 percent of the annual budget on education in addition to paying teacher salaries.	Education budgets have risen year on year, but still fall far short of the 20 percent mark. In 2006, the education budget stood at Rp 38 trillion (US$4.13 billion), 10 percent of the annual budget. Education activists have taken the government to the Constitutional Court twice in recent years (once under Wahid and once under SBY), which has ruled the government is in contravention of the constitution but imposed no penalties.
Education too expensive for many of the poorest families	2005 introduction of BOS (*Bantuan Operasional Sekolah*) scheme to cover the tuition, registration, exam fees, and book costs for all children aged 6 to 15.	Estimated to cover only 10 percent of the costs of sending a child to school, Indonesian Corruption Watch (ICW) reports that most parents are still charged for the items which are supposed to be covered under this scheme. The BOS scheme is paid for by the government out of the withdrawal of petrol subsidies, but ICW findings state that the concurrent rise in transportation costs for school children has cancelled out any potential financial benefits of BOS for school children's parents.

THERE ARE MASSIVE INEQUITIES IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION.

Whether it be to aid economic development, instil values of citizenship, or to simply help individuals reach their full intellectual and emotional potential, for an education system to succeed it must be accessible to as many people as possible. In this regard, Indonesia falls far short. Here, many children are discriminated against when it comes to education depending on which area of the country they live in and their family's economic circumstances. (See Table Three).

Table Three: The Effect of Income on Access to Education: Net Enrolment Ratios by Income Quintile (2002)

	Enrolment from the Lowest Income Quintile	Enrolment from the Highest Income Quintile
Primary School	91.4 %	91.4 %
Junior Secondary	45.5 %	76.9 %
Senior Secondary	17.8 %	62 %
University	3.3 %	31 %

Sources: World Bank

With donor funding only comprising 6 to 7 percent of Indonesia's education budget, one of the dangers of all these reforms is that the spending needed to implement them properly is simply not sustainable. Training teachers adequately in delivering the new curriculum, raising their wages, or providing more financial assistance for children from the poorest families are all very expensive undertakings in such a heavily populated country as Indonesia.

DOES THE GOVERNMENT HAVE ENOUGH FUNDS TO KEEP REFORM ON TRACK?

But there is also a danger that the current re-structuring of authority and responsibility actually aggravates the problem of access to education for the poorest children and young adults. Decentralising the responsibility and the budget for education so that local districts can adapt spending patterns to local needs is a laudable goal. There is no guarantee, however, that local governments will spend their allocations wisely.

As one World Bank document states, "Local decision-makers may choose to spend most of their revenues on budget items that are likely to have a quicker and more stimulating effect on the local economy rather than education…on the other hand, they may be driven by the desire of local voters for better schools." It concludes that, given the complex system of allocations, the success of education reform will depend in large part on the "willingness of the regions to invest in education."

DECENTRALISATION OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR EDUCATION IS NO ANSWER TO THE FUNDING PROBLEM.

Similarly, it has been suggested that giving individual schools such flexibility in spending through the Schools Based Management System without first building a credible oversight mechanism will inevitably mean increased corruption. Ade Irawan from the Indonesian NGO *Koalisi Pendidikan* (Coalition for Education) points to research which unveils a new era of corruption in schools where the principal is aided and abetted by the new parent/teacher committees that are supposed to provide oversight.

The Indonesian education system is riddled with corruption from teachers marking up textbooks for sale to students to inflated contractor fees for building repairs as well as the straight embezzlement of funds by principals. In a system like Indonesia's where the handing over of authority for spending

is not coupled with an institutionalised system of checks and balances, the misuse of funds is practically inevitable.

DEVOLVING RESPONSIBILITY FURTHER TO THE SCHOOL LEVEL MAY AGGRAVATE CORRUPTION.

Lessons about institutionalising oversight mechanisms before liberalisation is undertaken should have been learned after Indonesia's disastrous experience of financial liberalisation in the 1990s exacerbated the 1998 financial collapse.

International institutions are promoting the idea of competitive grants for schools, where schools that are assessed as having adequate financial management are given funding based on a raft of educational achievement indicators. But this remains in the pilot process at some universities and has not proven to be overly successful yet.

ARE COMPETITIVE GRANTS THE ANSWER?

Nevertheless, the block grant system for funding some state universities is gradually being replaced with competitive grants. Whereas in the past the department of education handed over large sums of money with strict guidelines on how the universities could spend it, now universities have much more flexibility over what they can do with the funds. Before they can access them, however, they must meet a number of criteria, including a demonstrated capacity to administer the funds and they must show a higher quality of educational standards.

SOME SUGGEST THAT SUCH GRANTS MAY LEAD TO AN ELITE LAYER OF UNIVERSITIES.

That has led some to predict that an elite layer of universities will result, with those able to fulfil these criteria gaining the most funds. The concern is that strong universities will become even better while the failing universities will be left behind all together. And with universities now allowed to set their own tuition levels, many suspect that the most successful and best-funded universities will be able to charge high fees, leaving the weaker universities for the poorest students.

OTHERS POINT TO MECHANISMS WITHIN THE GRANTS TO ENSURE THAT THIS DOES NOT HAPPEN.

These criticisms are not entirely fair, however. The competitive grant scheme separates universities into three levels depending on their management capacities, so that the strongest do not compete directly with the weakest. Another pre-condition of the competitive grants is that universities set aside a pool of funds to enable the poorest students to attend university. But how effective these mechanisms will be is not yet known.

UNIVERSITIES ARE NOW SHIFTING THEIR FOCUS TOWARD MAKING MONEY.

In the first flush of autonomy, the universities involved have aggressively expanded their biggest money makers. They are now providing more extension courses and diplomas outside of the normal degree scheme, leading some to detect a shift of focus in university efforts away from purely academic disciplines. The other big new money pot for universities is their ability to set their own fees, which has meant a steady incline in the costs of a university education, especially for the most prestigious schools.

MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE TO MITIGATE THE RISING COSTS OF EDUCATION FOR THE POOREST.

It is clear that reform of a sector as big and complex as education is not an overnight task; it will take decades before it is fully embedded. But if Indonesia is to avoid the unwelcome side effects of these reforms, a focus on oversight combined with more attention on how to mitigate potential losses to the poorest students is desperately needed to ensure that the current generation does not lose out in the meantime.❐