

# Chapter 10

## Attraction of Authority: The Indonesian Experience of Educational Decentralization



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### 10.1 Introduction

The Asian financial crisis that started in Thailand in June 1997 has severely impacted Indonesia; the country experienced negative economic growth, increased poverty, and decreased employment opportunities. These eventually led to a major political crisis in Indonesia that brought the downfall of Suharto's New Order regime in May 1998 after 32 years in office (Diprose et al., 2019). Along with the regime change, came a fundamental change in the way Indonesia, the largest country in Southeast Asia spanning three time zones, was ruled. Specifically, the country moved from centralization to decentralization for education democratization, which was referred to as the Reform era. This change ended the prior governance model of centralization which had descended through several centuries from the Dutch colonial era and even from the kingdoms in Indonesia, including the Majapahit Kingdom. The great change in terms of size, speed, and scope of governance came to be known as the "big bang" decentralization model (Bennet, 2010), marking the beginning of democracy. New policies were initiated through two laws (the Law on Local Government and the Law on Fiscal Balance), made effective from 1 January 2001 (Lindsey, 2018). The developments associated with these policies were described as "one of the most

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17 radical decentralization programs attempted anywhere in the world” (Aspinall &  
18 Fealy, 2003, p. 3). As a result, education and other public sectors in Indonesia became  
19 the responsibility of more than 307 district governments (Sumintono, 2010).

20 Decentralizing public services was aimed to provide local citizens easy access  
21 to public services and thus increase their welfare (Mahi, 2016). This was triggered  
22 particularly by the emergence of a separatist agenda among three provinces (10%  
23 of the total) that staged minor rebellions in the 1990s. Since the three provinces  
24 were rich in natural resources (Tadjoeddin, 2007), their movements were a challenge  
25 to the central government (Usman, 2002). With the new offer of decentralization,  
26 locals in these provinces and throughout the country could enjoy democracy and  
27 efficiency, something that they were deprived of under the previous New Order  
28 regime. Except for five sectors (i.e., religion, justice, monetary and fiscal, defence,  
29 and foreign policy), other public sectors, including education, fell in the hands of  
30 each district government (Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006). The Indonesian education  
31 system is one of the largest in the world, catering to the educational needs of over 50  
32 million students taught by four million teachers from more than 200,000 primary and  
33 secondary schools and *madrasahs* across the archipelago (Rosser, 2018). Evidently,  
34 changing the country’s education system in a very short time can be both dangerous  
35 and chaotic.

36 The questions that remain unanswered are: (1) How has Indonesia managed educa-  
37 tion in the decentralization era? and (2) How has the country managed the changes so  
38 far? In the early 1990s, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC)<sup>1</sup> transferred  
39 some authority pertaining to curriculum content (Bjork, 2005). However, the result  
40 was not encouraging, mainly due to limited available experience and expertise as  
41 well as the fact that schools were closely inspected by their superiors (Bjork, 2005).  
42 Nonetheless, funding agencies like the World Bank have shown interest in shaping  
43 the Indonesian education sector (Mappiasse, 2014). During the economic crisis of  
44 1998, the World Bank published a report entitled “Education in Indonesia: From  
45 Crisis to Recovery”, which, among other things, supported the role of educational  
46 decentralization in reducing the central government’s bureaucracy layers to make  
47 delivery more efficient to the school level (World Bank, 1998). However, the truth is  
48 that the structure and the arrangement of educational decentralization were not clear  
49 even after the stipulation of the Autonomy Law in 1999.

50 This makes sense because, as Karmel (2017) asserts, “There is no one-size-fits-all  
51 approach for decentralization” (p. 8). In other words, there are a variety of ways to  
52 manage decentralization, including in education, and any country that chooses to  
53 decentralize should do it in a manner that suits its needs. Sumintono (2006), for  
54 instance, offers four dimensions to expound the concept of decentralization: degree  
55 of transfer, breadth of transfer, location of transfer, and functions transferred. The  
56 Autonomy Law suggests that the degree of transfer was devolution (Cheema &  
57 Rondinelli, 1983), which once given cannot be rolled-back easily. The breadth of

<sup>1</sup> The ministry’s name changed from MoEC to the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), then back to MoEC and now the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology. This chapter used the name MoEC, since it is the same institution.

58 transfer encompassed all public sector bodies except for five, while the location of  
59 transfer was from the central government to the district government (Sumintono,  
60 2010), not to the provincial or school level. Only the functions transferred were  
61 neither provided in much detail nor operationalized, as in this case the government  
62 and parliament decided that the MoEC had the expertise and information to do that  
63 better (Zamjani, 2016).

64 Indonesia has had experience with educational decentralization for more than  
65 18 years, involving change dynamics from the national to the school level. To under-  
66 stand the changes, we need to look into the progress made so far, including insti-  
67 tutional responses and contextual interpretations. We argue that Indonesian educa-  
68 tional decentralization has mostly been about legitimacy and authority dialectics  
69 between local and central institutions (Mappiasse, 2014; Scott, 2013; Sumintono,  
70 2006) which this chapter offers a new understanding of the issue. Moving from a  
71 highly centralized system to a more locally oriented one contests the legitimacy of  
72 each actor involved, resulting in competition for resources. The regulations and poli-  
73 cies that make educational decentralization a reality are somewhat contradictory, as  
74 we elaborate further in this chapter. Similarly, attempts to roll it back with different  
75 approaches and strategies have resulted in more contradictions. Although there are  
76 changes in the bureaucratic structure, local educational practices are the same and,  
77 thus, maintaining the centralized power as long as legitimacy remains (Meyer &  
78 Rowan, 1977, 1978).

## 79 10.2 Early Development: Exercising Power and Authority 80 at the District Level

81 The dawn of the year 2001 became a historic moment for Indonesia as a country which  
82 drastically changed its government system (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003; Bennet, 2010)  
83 via two laws (the Law on Local Government and the Law on Fiscal Balance) made  
84 effective from 1 January 2001. Prior to these laws, the education sector was managed  
85 by three ministries: the secular stream under both MoEC and the Ministry of Home  
86 Affairs (MoHA), and the religious stream under the Ministry of Religious Affairs  
87 (MoRA). However, schools under MoRA, which is still in the centralized system to  
88 date, are beyond the scope of our discussion in this chapter. For a long time before  
89 the Reformation era, the MoEC and MoHA had provincial as well as district offices  
90 across Indonesia to represent the central government's chain of command via policy  
91 and instruction. The MoHA was mostly responsible for the 3Ms (man[sic], money,  
92 and material) in primary schools (year 1–6) and junior secondary schools (year 7–  
93 9), whereas curriculum was handled by the MoEC, which was also responsible for  
94 senior secondary schools (year 10–12). Following the Law on Local Government  
95 and the Law on Fiscal Balance in 2001, responsibilities, personnel, and department  
96 organizational structures in these ministries were dissolved and transferred overnight  
97 to 307 district governments (in 2020, the number of districts is 514).

98 This legal process and its accompanying emergence of local governments are  
99 powerful in managing post-1998 Indonesian public sectors. In the education sector,  
100 besides district mayors and local parliaments, district education officers (especially  
101 teachers) are the real game changers responsible for carrying out government affairs  
102 in education. This is because teachers do not just comprise the largest proportion of  
103 government servants (roughly above 60%), but are located in all district areas. More-  
104 over, in the Indonesian context, teachers have an immense social influence on the  
105 community as social change agents (Bourn, 2016). Sumintono (2006) called this situ-  
106 ation “decentralized centralism”. For instance, the district education offices demon-  
107 strated that under the new landscape, they tend to refuse instructions from provincial  
108 and central offices, which was an unimaginable act under the previous centralized  
109 regime (Amirrachman, 2004; Zamjani, 2016). Disagreements also appeared when  
110 provincial offices thought they could choose new public school principals to replace  
111 those whose time expired, when in fact their choice clashed with the person appointed  
112 by the district offices (Sumintono, 2006).

113 However, exercising power and authority also presents a different story in the sense  
114 that, in managing the education sector, district governments actually do nearly the  
115 same as the management before decentralization. Sumintono’s (2006) study found  
116 that such similarities are mostly related to technical matters. To illustrate, one partic-  
117 ipant in Sumintono’s study (2006) said: “In terms of technical matters, such as how  
118 teaching and learning is practiced in school, how examinations are conducted, or  
119 how supervision is undertaken, most have remained the same. We are not brave  
120 enough to change all that” (p. 134). This was mentioned by the MoEC when talking  
121 about district readiness, because sufficient expertise, experience, and resources are  
122 generally not available at the district level. The reason for this is because under the  
123 previous centralized system, the central government was strong and full of experts,  
124 which left district education offices as well as MoEC’s remaining local offices to play  
125 only the role of local registrars (Sumintono, 2010; Zamjani, 2016). Further, Nielsen  
126 (2003) analyzed that the New Order regime was a bureaucratic authoritarian state,  
127 where its distinctive features emphasized rapid growth and expansion as indicators of  
128 quality improvement, excessive power and control at the central office level, and the  
129 promotion of inter-agency fragmentation and competition. As a result, the learning  
130 curve and stability of educational decentralization took longer at the district level to  
131 channel efforts toward efficient and effective education services (Jónasson, 2016).

132 One of the high-profile debates featured in national mass media around that  
133 time was the discussion on School-Based Management (SBM). The Minister of  
134 Education and Culture commented positively on SBM in the media, stating that  
135 “the implementation of the school-based management policy is to support school  
136 autonomy in order to increase education quality in accordance with national and  
137 international standards” (Sumintono, 2006, p. 93). Stakeholders such as principals,  
138 teachers, parents, and community members viewed SBM as an interesting concept,  
139 since it involves all school stakeholders in the country having more control over  
140 school activities for better student learning (see “Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah”,  
141 2000, 2001). Special policy about SBM leaked from MoEC officers, and was written  
142 in an official report by Jalal and Musthafa (2001). The policy indicated that various

143 functions were to be transferred to the school level (Sumintono, 2006), including  
144 budget, staff, and curriculum, which are practices implemented in most developed  
145 countries (see Fullan & Watson, 2000; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Murphy &  
146 Beck, 1995). What was actually transferred turned out to be different.

147 Sumintono's (2006, 2010) studies revealed that the regulation about SBM (MoEC  
148 decree number 044/U/2002) was not just extremely brief but also failed to deliver  
149 on promises previously made to the public. The national policy decree appeared to  
150 be unclear, vague, centrally conceived, politically inspired, promoting a "one-size-  
151 fits-all" SBM model, and not based on research and public consultation (Sumintono,  
152 2006, 2010). This indicates that the MoEC was confused about their position in  
153 the educational decentralization landscape. By applying a uniform model of SBM  
154 regardless of the vast diversity and variety of Indonesian schools in terms of size,  
155 location, community, and public-private distinction, the Indonesian education system  
156 had evidently, to some extent, made itself out of context.

157 Creating new organizations at the school level (called the school committee) and  
158 district level (called the education council) was another legitimacy game that came  
159 from the MoEC's bureaucratic outlook. Several studies on the School Committee  
160 (SC) and Education Council (EC) pertaining to the implementation of this decree  
161 revealed interesting findings. For instance, Bandur (2012), Sumintono (2006), and  
162 Fitriah et al. (2013) showed that the SC was established in different ways, from  
163 shoulder-tapping to continuing previous institutions under the new name of SC. One  
164 thing in common was that under this decree, principals in Indonesian schools have  
165 a stronger decision-making role in the decentralization era compared to the pre-  
166 decentralization era. The EC situation was not so different (Amirrachman, 2004;  
167 Sumintono, 2006, 2010), where education districts seek EC candidates who can  
168 get along with them, such as retired officials. Several districts have stipulated their  
169 own regulation about SBM; however, its content and structure are nearly identical  
170 to that of the MoEC decree, asserting the unquestionable influence of the central  
171 government in terms of regulation (Sumintono, 2006).

172 The regulation about SBM showed that the MoEC was not sure how to fully  
173 grasp their role and correctly gain legitimacy. Possibly, MoEC officials did not have  
174 trust in local capacity and commitment at both district and school levels, thereby  
175 publishing the decree with the intention of slowing the pace of decentralization  
176 (Sumintono, 2006; World Bank, 2004). It seems that by being brief and unclear in  
177 the decree's content, a minimum impact was preferred along with a slower decen-  
178 tralization process. By writing an unchallenged rule for other education stakeholders  
179 using a new law, what the MoEC actually aimed for was a much bigger prize that  
180 helps it survive with firm legitimacy. Ultimately, the early experience of Indonesia's  
181 educational decentralization was an indication of a power game (Daun, 2002), notably  
182 involving massive interplay among parties at the expense of interest in education or  
183 students' learning.

### 10.3 Regaining the Missing Legitimacy and Its Local Responses

The changes in the governance system from centralization to decentralization opened up opportunities to rearrange the country's social contract, including its basic constitution and education law. The Indonesian National Constitution 1945 had four sessions of amendment, one of which has a verse that specifically designates at least 20% state's annual budget for the education sector (Sumintono, 2006). The MoEC also informed the parliament that previous education law (Law 2/1989) was not relevant anymore because of its basis in the paradigm of centralized governance, which was not in accordance with the new tenets of the Reform era, namely, democratization and educational decentralization (Asikin-Garmager, 2017). At the same time, even without sufficient experience and technical expertise, district governments enjoyed exercising their power and authority in the education sector without having to consult with or be influenced by the MoEC. This situation was worrying and could affect the MoEC's survival in the near future; thus, preparing an education bill gave the MoEC an opportunity to rewrite the rules of the game about education governance and management based on the interest of the central government.

The new education bill was drafted by the MoEC and tabled to the parliament. After heated debates inside as well as outside the parliament, it was passed into a law called the National Education System Law (Law 20/2003). It is interesting to note that the most debated topics in parliament discussions at the time surrounded the age of schooling (age limit for compulsory education and preschool education), higher education (authority of universities in honorary degree provision, and university funding and management of their independence and progress), and religious education (the teaching of religious education in public and most private secular schools) (Musa, 2009). Debates on religious teaching also took place under the previous education law, but street demonstrations this time forced public attention to be limited to only those topics. The main course of the bill, which was about managing education in a decentralized Indonesia with the governance framework initiated by the MoEC, was agreed upon by all factions inside the parliament.

One of the famous jargons during that period referred to the changing role of the central government, which instead of "rowing" the country's educational development had turned to "steering" it. The new law introduced standards to be followed by educational institutions (both public and private) and their superiors (i.e., district governments). Similar to regulations about the SC and EC, bureaucratic perspectives were used to create new institutions and even activate remaining central government institutions in provinces to support the new law.

The following sections discuss and elaborate the changing situations brought by this law, as well as local reactions against it. New realities outside the central government showed that locals enjoyed autonomy and were capable of deciding on their preferences, even though they were perceived to have insufficient technical expertise and experience in managing education. The key points discussed here included a new regime of standards, school operational cost, teachers and principals, and National Examination.

### 10.3.1 *New Regime of Standardization*

Political decentralization is the reality of the Reformation era, and its laws have been enacted by district governments across Indonesia. An available tool for the MoEC to regain its legitimacy was the new education law; using justifications of efficiency and competence, it offered to establish a new system called standardization. This sounds logical and in accordance with the ideals of national prosperity, especially in the last 50 years, disparity has been a major and unsolvable problem under the New Order regime, wherein developments were predominantly focused only on Java island (Mappiasse, 2014).

Using this standardization policy, the MoEC received its desired solution, which provided it with professional legitimacy to easily be adhered to by other education stakeholders from central, district, and school levels. Education in the country, with its long history of centralization, now depends heavily on the central government as the ultimate source of funding, recognition, and confirmation under the standardization regime. This way, the central government catered to locals' needs so as to improve its own image and strengthen its symbolic power.

The National Education System Law (Law 20/2003) introduced the new regime of standards, which consists of minimum service standards (called SPM or *Standar Pelayanan Minimum*), National Education Standards (SNP or *Standar Nasional Pendidikan*), and international standards (SI or *Standar Internasional*) to be complied by schools and district governments across the country (Asikin-Garmager, 2017). The unique and unavoidable nature of these three regimes of standardization led to them being characterized as hierarchical (from SPM to SNP and then to SI). SPM refers to the lowest acceptable education service for compliance across Indonesia, which is now administered by district governments directly or indirectly through schools. The application of the SPM is intended to ensure that every school meets the minimum conditions to ensure the implementation of an adequate learning process. For instance, at the primary school level, the mandated ratio is one teacher for every 32 students, at least four teachers in each school, and at least 40% of teachers with undergraduate qualifications (MoEC, 2013). This policy is targeted to make sure that district governments help private schools in rural areas where conditions vary greatly from urban areas. This would potentially solve the disparity gap between developed and developing regions via the same level of education service.

Compared to the SPM, the SNP has more criteria for schools to fulfill. It outlines eight standards of technical aspects in education: academic competence, content, process, evaluation, personnel, facilities, financing, and management. Notably, the SNP has many derivative regulations. Zamjani's (2016) study found that among SNP's 187 standards, a major proportion (i.e., 67 standards or 36%) are about management, followed by those on content (29 standards) and personnel (28 standards). This shows that "education management has been the most highly regulated, despite the massive managerial decentralization" (Zamjani, 2016, p. 148). This is an ironic fact that contradicts the spirit of regional autonomy and democratization in the Reform era. Further, the SNP reveals the eagerness of the central government

271 to regulate all facets of education, from school establishment, teacher recruitment,  
 272 and students' school uniform to curriculum and public examination. This indicates  
 273 that the central government's interference in the education sector is deeper and wider  
 274 than in the previous centralization system, when it was usually limited to curriculum  
 275 and assessment matters.

276 One of the powerful mechanisms of the SNP policy is its detailed prescription  
 277 and monitoring of the eight standards' implementation in schools and district govern-  
 278 ments. As a result, additional bureaucratic agencies had to be set up in each capital  
 279 city to partner with MoEC. These agencies are the Board of the National Stan-  
 280 dards of Education (BSNP) and the Board of National Accreditation (BAN). The  
 281 BSNP was established in 2005 and functions to develop national standards and to  
 282 organize national examinations (BSNP, 2020). Since the standards are stipulated by  
 283 MoEC's official decree, the main role of BSNP from its conception is to legitimize  
 284 national examination. Meanwhile, BAN started in 2012 with the main function of  
 285 conducting school assessments across Indonesia using the SNP's instrument (BAN,  
 286 n.d.). The division of labor under this new bureaucracy apparatus is undoubtedly  
 287 clear, where BSNP manages students' evaluation in terms of public examinations,  
 288 while BAN manages schools' evaluation based on the SNP. Zamjani's (2016) study  
 289 found that members of BSNP and BAN are professional and mostly lecturers from  
 290 state universities, but their work and functions are generally influenced by, and rely  
 291 on, MoEC, despite being independent agencies. This possibly happened because  
 292 their appointment is carefully executed by the minister.

293 A two-edged ramification of BAN is the establishment of a non-discriminate  
 294 audit culture in the Indonesian school system. Previously, the targets of audits  
 295 were only private schools with disparate quality (Bedi & Garg, 2000), whereas  
 296 public schools were exempted because the government always supported and moni-  
 297 tored such schools, with no one to challenge its decision (Asikin-Garmager, 2017;  
 298 Mappiasse, 2014; Sumintono, 2006). With the new system, as long as schools comply  
 299 with the SNP criteria, they are recognized as a National Standard School (called as  
 300 SSN). On the one hand, this supposedly removes the barrier between private and  
 301 public schools and closes the gap of public schools being regarded as favorites and  
 302 private schools being less-favored schools, a legacy of the colonial era that has been  
 303 hard to get rid of (Sumintono et al., 2019). On the other hand, the real challenge  
 304 faced by BAN is the scope of their work, which covers more than 200,000 schools  
 305 that need to be accredited periodically across the archipelago spanning three different  
 306 time zones. The accreditation process itself is a complex one which includes site visits  
 307 and assessors' checking of SNP implementation using a specific instrument. Because  
 308 of insufficient budget availability and resulting annual quotas, not all schools can get  
 309 accredited. When a school is not accredited, it faces problems that can impact its  
 310 graduates' status (Zamjani, 2016). However, not all the standards from MoEC were  
 311 followed and complied with by district governments in many cases, and some are  
 312 simply avoided when the standards contradict with local interests (Mappiasse, 2014;  
 313 Zamjani, 2016).

314 Unlike SPM and SNP, whose success has become the new platform to regain the  
 315 ministry's legitimacy and even to broaden its scope, the international standard (SI)

316 was chaotic and eventually eliminated from the new education law. According to Law  
317 20/23, district governments have to develop at least one school that fits the SI criteria.  
318 This encouraged the MoEC to launch a pilot project to guide international standard  
319 schools (called RSBI) in 2007, which was initially participated by 200 junior and  
320 senior secondary schools (MoEC, 2007, 2008; Sumintono et al., 2014). What really  
321 went on inside the project is that the best school in a town was selected, given extra  
322 funding from the central government, and required to show “international flavor”,  
323 which mostly involved teaching subjects in English (Coleman, 2009). The schools  
324 were also allowed to regularly collect substantial amounts of money from parents,  
325 which became problematic because of its transparency and accountability, since most  
326 RSBI were public schools (Sumintono et al., 2014). The difference in the treatment  
327 of RSBI led to public protests amid the realization that the incentives given to these  
328 schools did not benefit the society (Winarti, 2008), as the quality of RSBI schools  
329 failed to reflect international standards as expected (Zamjani, 2016).

330 A historic moment came on 8 January 2013, when following lawsuits from the  
331 community, the Indonesian Constitutional Court (MK) declared the international  
332 standard school pilot project to be unconstitutional. This outcome shows that the  
333 quality of policy development and implementation of SI at the ministry was far from  
334 satisfactory (Sakhiyya, 2011). Sumintono (2013) concluded that, “In a nutshell, the  
335 policy design of RSBI was neither carefully planned nor executed, and unfortu-  
336 nately it was not based on solid research and eventually led to negative impacts  
337 on society. It also mirrored the policymakers’ failure to fully grasp the Indonesian  
338 school system and its capacities, casting doubts over the feasibility of the program  
339 to achieve success”.

### 340 **10.3.2 School Operational Cost**

341 One of the positive developments during the Reform era relates to school operational  
342 cost. As Rosser and Fahmi (2016) noted, Indonesia has significantly increased educa-  
343 tion spending up to 20% of its budget since the beginning of the 2000s. This policy  
344 has improved children’s access to basic education through the new national school  
345 grant program (*Bantuan Operasional Sekolah* [BOS]). However, it seems to have  
346 made little contribution to student learning improvement. For example, Indonesian  
347 children’s performance in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)  
348 only showed marginal improvement and remains relatively poor compared to the  
349 performance of children from neighboring countries.

350 Although this is one of the standards stipulated in the SNP, it was released a bit  
351 later in 2009 with MoEC decree number 69 (BSNP, 2020). The main reason was  
352 that the SNP follows development at the national scale. BOS was a political and  
353 economic decision which has solved problems mostly at the primary school level  
354 (Fitriah et al., 2013).

355 Ten years after Indonesia started building and developing itself following sporadic  
356 wars defending its independence in 1945, participation in public education increased

357 fivefold compared to the colonial era (Poerbakawatja, 1970). This fast-growing situ-  
358 ation called for many new schools and thousands of new teachers to accommo-  
359 date six million students in the education system, exceeding routine operational  
360 costs from the government. Because new public schools did not have sufficient  
361 funds, they sought financial help from the community through organizations at each  
362 school whose members were parents. These members collected a monthly tuition fee,  
363 “paying a major share for the upkeep of schools including the allowance of teach-  
364 ers” (Lee, 1995, p. 171). This practice continued and became the norm for public  
365 school systems in Indonesia over the next fifty years, since regular financing from  
366 the government was insufficient for school building maintenance and non-permanent  
367 teachers’ salaries. Therefore, education decentralization was followed by financial  
368 deregulation to make sure that financial support from the government was sufficient  
369 (Bray & Thomas, 1998; Yonezawa & Muta, 2001).

370 Several empirical studies found that parents’ contributions were crucial for public  
371 school operational costs. At the primary school level, schools received more money  
372 from parents than from the government (Ghozali, 2005), reaching 89% of their non-  
373 salary budget annually (Supriadi, 2003). Even for public junior secondary and senior  
374 secondary schools, the amount of money from parents was bigger than that from  
375 the government (Sumintono, 2006; Sumintono et al., 2014). Unlike government  
376 funding that comes with tight regulation and allocation, the usage of monthly money  
377 collected from parents has limited transparency and accountability in terms of official  
378 financial reports to parents (Cohen, 2001). Despite the changing political landscape  
379 with regional autonomy after 2001, when MoEC introduced a new “governing body”  
380 at the school level called the school committee, the aforementioned usual practice  
381 did not change. Sumintono (2006) found that the arrangement of a school committee  
382 leaves parents no other choice than to follow its decisions, since committee members  
383 could be set up by the schools and principals for their own benefit.

384 Nevertheless, there were also some positive developments on school operational  
385 costs. UNICEF and MoEC initiated a small project to make parents’ contributions  
386 more effective among primary schools in a rural area in Central Java (Mariane, 2018).  
387 This project emphasized transparency, active community involvement, and teachers’  
388 training for students’ learning enjoyment, resulting in more trust in the school and  
389 higher student achievement. At the district level, several district governments intro-  
390 duced a free school policy and abolished tuition fees in all public schools (Mus-  
391 Banyuasin in Sumatera, Sinjai in Sulawesi, Bontang in Kalimantan, and Jembrana  
392 in Bali) (Sumintono et al., 2019). The result in Jembrana, the poorest district in Bali  
393 Province, was remarkable and became a bright spark for others to follow. Specif-  
394 ically, the Jembrana district government analyzed the education budget and stipu-  
395 lated operational costs for every school level. It provided funding for the schools and  
396 required them not to collect money from parents and to instead practice transparency  
397 and accountability in their financial reports (Nugroho, 2008). This made the public  
398 schools concentrate more on teaching and learning as well as additional welfare for  
399 educators, resulting in great learning outcomes such as the highest improvement in  
400 national examination results (Suprana, 2009).

401 The most significant change in school operational costs came from a non-  
402 educationally related condition in 2004 to 2005, when the world's crude oil price  
403 increased significantly and the Indonesian government adjusted petrol prices in the  
404 country. This policy led to public protests and demonstrations across the country  
405 (SMERU, 2006). In return, the government stipulated a policy to make basic educa-  
406 tion services across Indonesia (six years of primary and three years of lower secondary  
407 schooling) completely free, along with significant subsidies for the upper secondary  
408 school level. This policy was called school operational cost (BOS), and was a break-  
409 through for two reasons: first, school operational cost is given directly to the school  
410 based on the number of students enrolled, and second, no differentiation exists  
411 between public or private schools (Fitriah et al., 2013). Since the country's inde-  
412 pendence in 1945, the government of Indonesia has allocated money to school oper-  
413 ational costs based on school units. This previous policy did not meet the needs of  
414 schools in general and was a problem for schools with high enrollment, and an even  
415 worse problem for private schools that did not have adequate financial support. In  
416 contrast, the current policy marked the government's new mindset to show the spirit  
417 of Reformation. In fact, one of the uses of this free school policy has been as a favor-  
418 able leverage in politicians' local and national campaigns during general elections  
419 (Ahmad, 2013).

420 After just three years of implementing the BOS policy, the MoEC released a  
421 policy on school standard cost, restricting public primary and junior secondary  
422 schools across Indonesia from collecting money from parents, and at the same time,  
423 urging local governments (provincial and district governments) to provide additional  
424 funds to schools (Ahmad, 2013; Rosher & Joshi, 2013). However, students at the  
425 senior secondary school level are still charged school fees, since the government can  
426 only subsidize 50% of the total unit cost. Nevertheless, districts like Surabaya and  
427 provinces like Jakarta have abolished tuition fees completely for all secondary school  
428 levels (Zamjani, 2016). Before the closure of the international standard school policy,  
429 any school that participated in the RSBI program (i.e., public schools) would enjoy  
430 fully paid tuition fees, which became a national issue that showed the insensitivity  
431 of public schools. The extension and clarity of school operational cost is thus crucial  
432 in fulfilling social justice for Indonesians in the education sector.

### 433 **10.3.3 Teachers and Principals**

434 With the new education law, managing school educators in the autonomy era devolved  
435 to the district level, offering the opportunity to change the landscape into a more open  
436 one. One of the articles in the new law states that any matter associated with teachers  
437 is governed under the teacher law. The central government and the parliament passed  
438 the Teacher Law in 2005 (Law 14/2005) to set a new standard for the profession and  
439 as part of the SNP.

440 Under the new law, teachers must be competent in four areas: pedagogy, person-  
441 ality, professional, and social (Chang et al., 2013). Principals, meanwhile, have

442 to be competent in five areas: personality, managerial, entrepreneurship, social,  
443 and supervision (Sumintono et al., 2015). The idea of such competences for the  
444 teaching profession is new to the Indonesian education system, which now recog-  
445 nizes teaching as a professional job (Asikin-Garmager, 2017). This is an effort to  
446 change the culture and profile of Indonesian teachers via Law 14/2005 (Bjork, 2006;  
447 Jalal et al., 2009), which can be used by local governments for their own interest.  
448 To operationalize these competencies, the MoEC stipulated the requirement for all  
449 teachers, both in public and private schools, to have an undergraduate degree of  
450 four-year university education, pass extra professional training, and graduate with  
451 professional certification.

452 The bulk of the work started in 2007. For the first batch, 200,000 teachers (out of  
453 four million in service) were selected to join the certification program. This program  
454 was done in two ways; a majority underwent portfolio assessment while a few  
455 attended a 90-h professional training. The MoEC devolved certification programs  
456 conducted by both public education universities and the education faculties of public  
457 universities in provincial capitals. Such efforts showed that even though the district  
458 government controls teachers, recognizing their professional capability is the central  
459 government's business. This initiative was welcomed by teachers and district govern-  
460 ments as it carried real value for them without much effort on their part beyond  
461 disseminating and facilitating the process (Jalal et al., 2009). While there were some  
462 problems in this program (Utami, 2015), the pass rate was more than 95%, and  
463 teachers received professional allowances, which doubled their monthly basic salary.  
464 Like school operational cost, the provision of professional allowance applies for both  
465 public and private school teachers. This monetary incentive changed the landscape of  
466 Indonesian education, leading all teacher education programs in Indonesian universi-  
467 ties to be in high demand. Chang et al. (2013) noted that in the five years before and  
468 after the certification program, the increase in in-service teachers with four years  
469 of education doubled from 17 to 35%, while students who enrolled in education  
470 programs rose to one million (500%) both in public and private universities.

471 Teachers who are public servants have become the highest-paid profession. To  
472 avoid resentment from those who have not been certified, teachers who pass the  
473 professional qualification have to teach at least 24 h a week. Failing to do so, their  
474 professional allowance can be suspended and even stopped. This appears to make  
475 sense as a norm for district governments to follow; however, the emphasis on teaching  
476 periods is only to keep teachers busy without measuring their effectiveness in the  
477 classroom. Intensive study on teachers from 20 districts by de Ree et al. (2018)  
478 brought to light that students' achievement is no different regardless of being taught  
479 by teachers with or without professional certification. The study revealed that the  
480 unconditional increase of the teachers' salary, which is gaged only by fulfilling a  
481 certain number of teaching hours, is far from satisfying its intended purpose. The  
482 requirement of 24 h per week is also not in favor of secondary school teachers, given  
483 that there are subject teachers who work in rural or suburban areas who need to travel  
484 long distances to teach students in other schools to fulfill the requirement (Chang  
485 et al., 2013).

486 The MoEC's effort to manage teachers nationally continued with the establish-  
487 ment of a new directorate general in 2014. The directorate general of teachers and  
488 education personnel is one of the institutions in the MoEC to recentralize teacher  
489 management. The main reasons for this are to reach teachers' aspirations across  
490 Indonesia and to overcome the incapability of district governments to develop teacher  
491 professionalism (Zamjani, 2016). One of the big moves by the directorate general  
492 was a Teacher Competency Assessment (called UKG) in 2015 for all teachers across  
493 Indonesia (MoEC, 2015). The contentious nature of this assessment was evidenced  
494 by its reliance on fully online multiple-choice tests to test teachers' mastery in their  
495 subject matter and their pedagogy knowledge, followed by the combination of the  
496 results into one score to indicate individual teacher performance. The UKG shows  
497 similar ambitious efforts of the central government to regain and even extend its power  
498 in teacher management under the guise of testing capability and expertise. However,  
499 practically, such tests do not really measure the four areas of teacher competency  
500 stated in the SNP. In addition, combining two raw scores from two different variables  
501 does not reflect teachers' performance.

502 Regarding the public school principal position, at the beginning of educa-  
503 tional decentralization, tensions arose mostly between education provincial offices  
504 and district governments (Sumintono, 2006). In the previous centralized system,  
505 the MoEC assigned public school principals based on the education provincial  
506 office's selection, where the candidate had typically attended a week-long training  
507 (Sumintono et al., 2015). The autonomy era, in turn, enables district governments to  
508 appoint any teacher as principal within their scope of authority. For the purpose of  
509 controlling quality, the MoEC stipulated principals' competencies as part of the SNP,  
510 and then established the Agency for School Principal Empowerment and Develop-  
511 ment (LP2KS) to provide national pre-training for principals of public and private  
512 schools (Sumintono et al., 2019).

513 This initiative has many benefits for the education system. It provides equal oppor-  
514 tunities for all qualified teachers, who can nominate themselves so long as they  
515 have an undergraduate degree and at least five years of teaching experience. This is  
516 democratization in practice, whereas the previous era was restrictive and secretive  
517 (Sumintono et al., 2015). Training by the LP2KS, which includes 300 h of lecture  
518 and practice on instructional leadership (regarding teaching and learning improve-  
519 ment) to equip candidates with relevant skills, is a breakthrough compared to the  
520 mere emphasis on general public administration (Sumintono et al., 2019). Candi-  
521 dates who pass have a unique registration number for appointment by the district  
522 government, indicating a good school leader succession plan. However, tensions and  
523 micro-political constraints still arise about the choice of appointment at the district  
524 level (Sumintono et al., 2015). This reality shows that even though the MoEC has  
525 funded principals' training and set procedures for appointing principals, local interest  
526 prevails as the winner, proving the dialectical dynamics of Indonesian educational  
527 decentralization (Zamjani, 2016).

### 10.3.4 National Exam

One educational policy in the Reform era that actively involved many education stakeholders in the first six months of every year was the national public examination, which was a point of disagreement among parties. Public examinations were conducted for final year students (at year six of primary school, year nine of junior secondary school, and year twelve of senior secondary school) across the country. The implementation of this policy has always faced criticism and heavy resistance from every corner of the society, forcing the MoEC to subsequently change its content step by step and finally, abolish it completely in 2020.

Since the 1945 independence, National Exam has experienced changes in several forms and names, while remaining a high-stakes test implemented at the end of the school term in Indonesia. Until 1971, the public examination was centralized, as were pass-fail decisions of the test takers. Then, a fundamental change occurred, such that the decision to pass students was made locally at the school level. As predicted, the percentage of passes was always above 95% after this change. This situation continued from 1972 to 2002, despite modifications to the education system. For instance, several new curriculums, teacher qualifications, and promotion policies were incorporated to improve education quality; however, regardless of how low students' achievement was, most schools passed at rates even close to 100% in public examinations (Sumintono, 2006). Consequently, in 2003, the MoEC changed the arrangement of the public exam to reclaim decisions to graduate students back to the central office, naming it *Ujian Akhir Nasional* (UAN or National Final Examination).

The UAN was a significant change toward centralization because all test papers came from the central office, guarded by the police and even army personnel in some places (Hasanudin, 2012). Moreover, students' answer sheets were collected right away after the exam and sent to education provincial offices, while the results and final decisions came from the MoEC. The main reason for this action was because the government needed an instrument to control education performance in the autonomy era, wherein tests were standardized as a common tool to identify the disparity gap between districts. Other authors (e.g., Asikin-Garmager, 2017; Mappiasse, 2014; Prasetya, 2020; Zamjani, 2016) have stated that the country is adopting a neoliberal spirit of market competition in education, influenced by multilateral institutions that impose a test-based accountability policy to improve the quality of education. This is one way to increase national workforce competitiveness in the global economy.

The first UAN in 2003 made big headlines across the country, where for the first time, the number of students who failed in public examinations were disclosed to the public by the MoEC ("Tahun 2003 ratusan ribu", 2004). In the following years, the situation became different because success in final examinations is now considered as reflecting district education's quality, and thereby forming a hierarchy of pressure across the country where district governments forced school principals to gain higher pass rates. Consequently, they passed this pressure down to teachers, from whom it finally trickled down to students and parents (Prasetya, 2020). The passage of the National Education Law provided more legitimate support for the MoEC, as the

571 BNSP had the right to organize national evaluations for students, though in reality  
572 the BNSP itself was under the control of the ministry's bureaucracy (Zamjani, 2016).

573 For students and parents, the final examination result was not only an evaluation  
574 of their performance but also a selection tool for primary school and junior  
575 secondary school graduates. Their acceptance into higher education (i.e., public  
576 and private universities) depended on that result. This and the hierarchical pressure  
577 pushed students to pursue better results without considering ethics and good practices  
578 (Asikin-Garmager, 2017; Mappiasse, 2014; Prasetya, 2020). For instance, teachers  
579 drilled their final year students with numerous examination practices after and even  
580 before regular teaching, in addition to motivational speeches and mass religious  
581 prayers to strengthen students (Arifin, 2012). However, various reports of students  
582 cheating during the national examinations, sometimes with help from their teachers,  
583 were mentioned by local press, local and international researchers, and international  
584 institutions (LaForge, 2013; OECD & ADB, 2015; Prasetya, 2020; Sembiring, 2013;  
585 Widiatmo, 2012; Zamjani, 2016).

586 The final examination thus came under constant criticism by the public and was  
587 the source of stress and anxiety for students and parents as well as teachers and  
588 principals. The MoEC tried to resolve the policy to make it less daunting, such as  
589 by allowing school-based exams to carry a 40% weightage of the total score in 2011  
590 (Prasetya, 2020). The contribution of school-based examinations increased slowly,  
591 which diverted public attention. Finally, the MoEC decided that all forms of final  
592 examinations will be abolished in 2021 (Catherine, 2019). However, because of the  
593 COVID-19 pandemic, it was abolished earlier in 2020 and all tests and decisions to  
594 pass students were again returned to schools ("Virus Corona: UN 2020", 2020). This  
595 change in final examinations from being centralized to decentralized is considered  
596 relevant to the education decentralization policy in Indonesia.

## 597 10.4 Conclusion

598 In this chapter, the development and experience of educational decentralization in  
599 Indonesia was presented. The efficiency and effectiveness benefits of a public govern-  
600 ance system run by locals who know better made the country choose local autonomy  
601 under a new law to survive and avoid fragmentation (Purwanto & Pramusinto, 2018).  
602 The choice also reflects the external influence that promotes freedom and democra-  
603 tization (Mappiasse, 2014). As per Harris and Jones (2018), in the education sector,  
604 policy borrowing does not always work as expected without policy learning and full  
605 understanding of the context.

606 The transfer of power to the district level empowered districts as the new center  
607 of education for schools and teachers. This early development worried the central  
608 office (i.e., MoEC), which then attempted to keep itself relevant and gain even more  
609 legitimacy (Scott, 2013). It is interesting to know that the legal change that started with  
610 autonomy was rivaled by other laws on education (Zamjani, 2016). As a result, the  
611 functions transferred and the operationalization of the educational decentralization

612 context were written by ministry bureaucrats who aimed to expand their scope beyond  
613 that of the previous era.

614 The new set of standards was stipulated to cover several aspects of education as  
615 an institutional framework to be complied with by districts and schools in Indonesia  
616 (Asikin-Gamarger, 2017). As a result, an audit culture emerged where the central  
617 office's newly established institutions (BNSP and BAN) certified the achievement of  
618 required standards in terms of management, deliverables, and student performance.  
619 This indicates that the ministry capitalized on legitimacy as well as professional  
620 judgment to regain power (Zamjani, 2016). However, when the standards go against  
621 locals' interest, such as in principal appointment (Sumintono et al., 2015), curriculum  
622 (Asikin-Gamarger, 2017), and National Exam (Prasetya, 2020), the central office has  
623 to realize that it does not have the real power to force compliance.

624 The Indonesian experience of educational decentralization suggests more  
625 emphasis on a power game and less on improving students' learning and achieve-  
626 ment. For instance, schools and districts are busy establishing school commit-  
627 tees and educational councils to portray democratization and local participation  
628 (Amirrachman, 2004; Bandur, 2012; Fitriah et al., 2013; Sumintono, 2006). The  
629 standardization regime also makes schools eager to fulfill requirements and comply  
630 with the criteria set by the BAN (Zamjani, 2016). Consequently, teachers are occupied  
631 with certification despite its minimal impact on student achievement (de Ree et al.,  
632 2018). Even international outlooks show that the center's capacity is still developing  
633 (Sumintono et al., 2014).

634 Nevertheless, there have been advances in social justice and student learning  
635 support. Distinctions between public and private status have become irrelevant in  
636 this Reformation era. For instance, public and private schools must undergo the  
637 same audit process, and as long as teachers pass the certification process, they are  
638 entitled to receive professional allowance regardless of whether they serve in public  
639 or private schools. The most fundamental change is in schools' operational cost,  
640 which is now provided directly to schools based on student enrollment numbers.  
641 This shows that searching and selecting the right policy that helps and improves  
642 students' learning is always essential and strategic in Indonesia's new landscape of  
643 educational decentralization.

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## Chapter 10

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