

The Difficulty of Improving Education Quality: District Head's Power and Education Policies in Indonesia's Decentralized Political System

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Learning Crisis: Research Background

- Learning has not improved much despite the rapid increase of enrollment
 - Progress toward adult literacy remains slow (i.e. half a billion women still lacked basic literacy in 2015) (Hickey and Hossain 2019).
 - Some 125 million children did not attain functional literacy or numeracy (World Bank 2017)
- Mixed effects of decentralization on education (i.e. Elacqua et al., 2021; Jeong et al., 2017; Leer, 2016)

Research Problem

- Decentralization and quality education policies
- Research question: “Under what political conditions does a local government pursue quality enhancing innovation in a decentralized education system?”
- Focus: bureaucratic capacity and local politics

Why Politics Matters

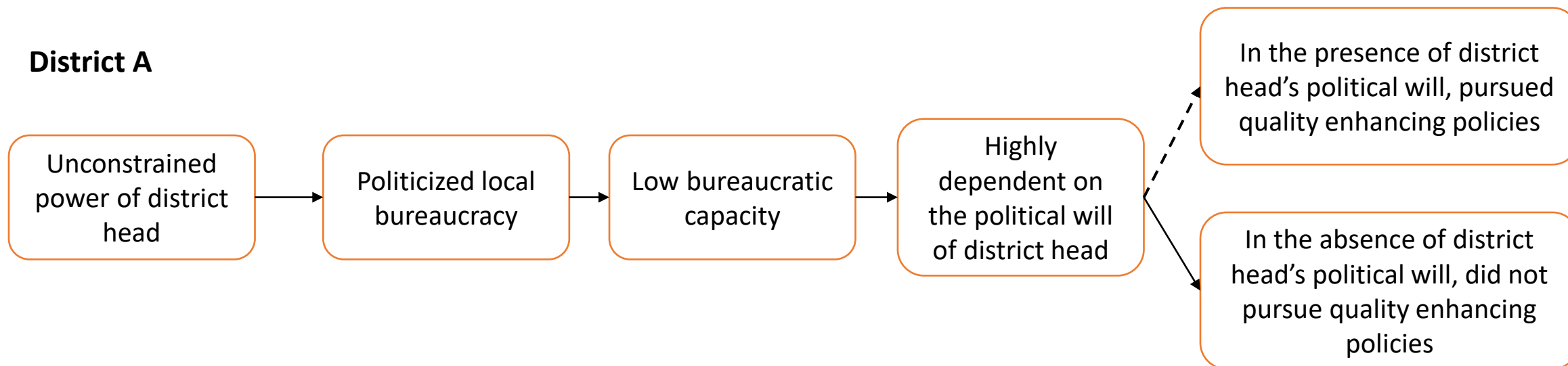
- Bureaucratic capacity and development
- Access-broadening vs Quality-enhancing policies
- Variations in the impact of decentralization on local politics

The Argument

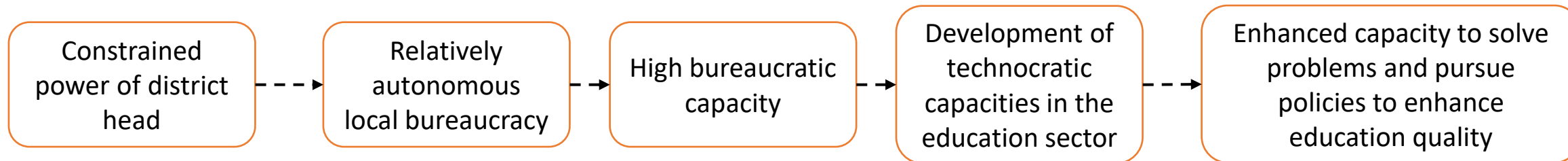
- Discretionary power of district heads: Less power, better outcomes
- Institutional constraints on the discretionary power of district heads
 - Bureaucracy more insulated from political motives
 - Under certain circumstances, incentivizes district heads to build meritocratic bureaucracy
- Working hypothesis: “Institutional constraints on the discretionary power of district heads will have positive impacts on learning outcomes as such a constraint is necessary for the development of the bureaucratic capacity of local education agencies”

Causal Mechanism Linking the Power of District Heads and Education Polities

District A



District B



- - -> Necessary condition

—> Sufficient condition

Theoretical Context

- Political settlement approach: dominant political settlement
 - Dominant political settlement → political dynasty
 - Pro-education politicians
 - Linkages between political settlement and bureaucratic capacity
- Political leadership
 - Should be embedded in its social contexts
 - Good bureaucracy still needed

Decentralization and Education in Indonesia

Decentralization has varied impacts on local politics

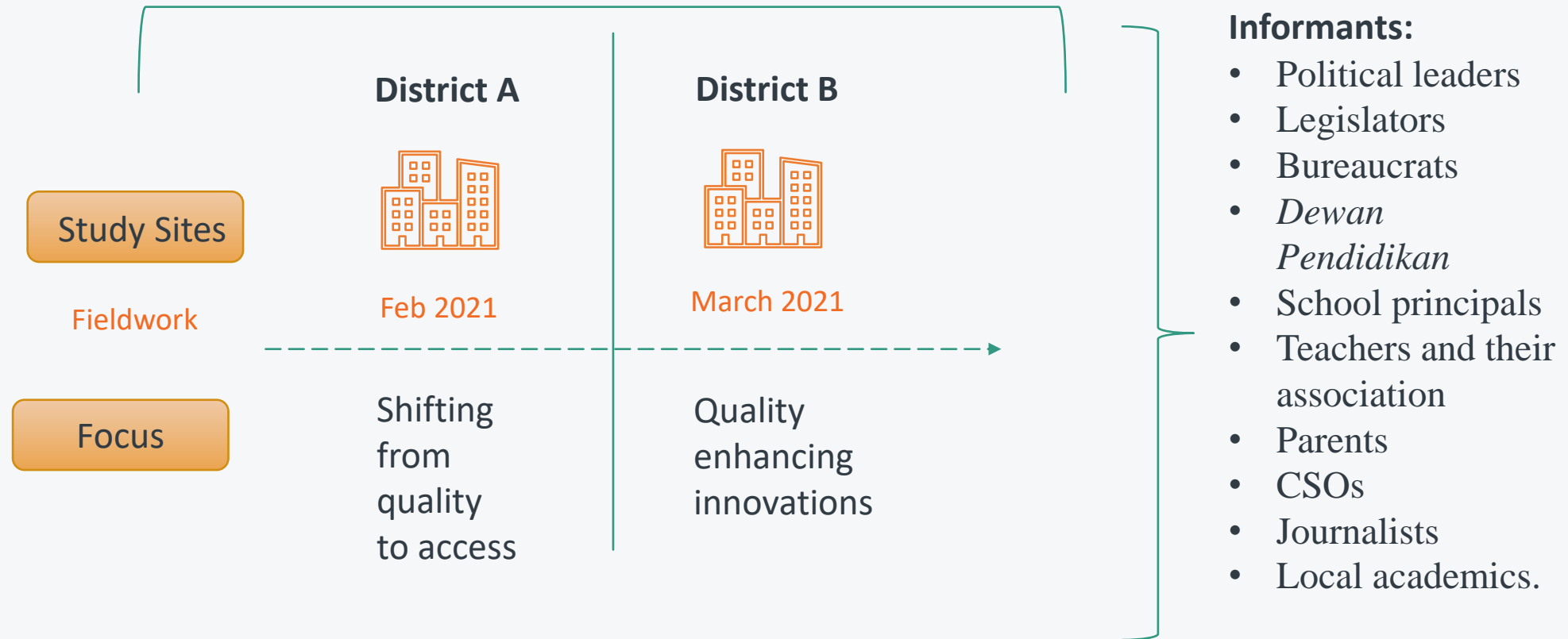
- Opened up more political opportunities for various social groups (Antlov, 2003; Aspinall 2014; Rosser, Roesad and Edwin 2005)
- Consolidation of old, political elites (Buehler, 2010, Hadiz, 2003, 2010)

The policy did not always have positive effects on education

- No significant impacts on numeracy and literacy achievement (Beatty et al. 2018; Leer 2016)
- Impacts on educational attainment is negligible (Muttaqin et al 2015)
- Teachers' efforts declined after decentralization (Leer 2016)

Only few districts had quality education policies (Zulfa et al 2019)

Research Method



Case Selection: Dependent Variable

District A

Education policies

- student voucher for tuition and uniform (since 2015)
- school bus free of charge (since 2015)
- contract teacher incentive (up to IDR 700,000) since 2001

Community Learning Hours

- To increase parents and community participation by providing conducive environment for school age children to study at home
- Working team in each neighborhood to supervise program implementation

CLH was neglected by the new district head, elected in 2018

District B

Education policies

- Religious extracurricular
- Attendance based contract teacher allowance

Teachers' peer supervision

- Initiated by some principals and school supervisors
- Principals and school supervisor of each sub-district gather every week and visit one of schools in the sub-subdistrict
- Feedback to teachers and host principals

Family Education

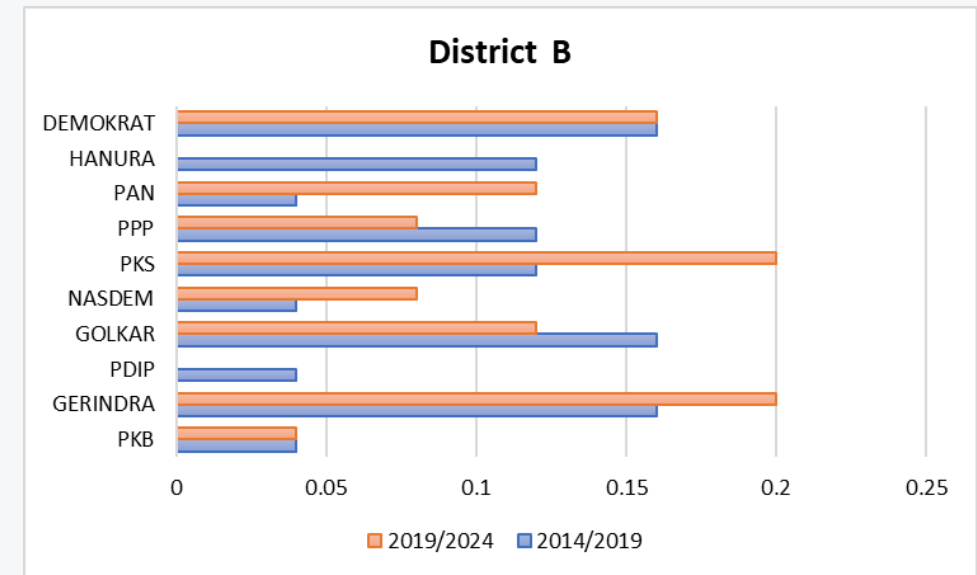
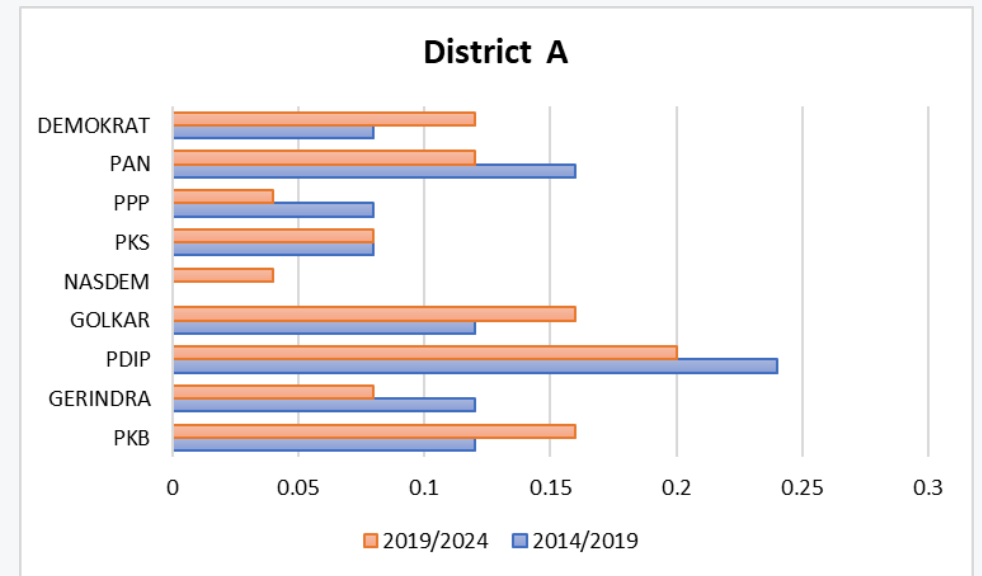
- To increase parents' awareness and knowledge about the importance of assisting their children
- Voluntary classes/sessions in Village offices

Case Selection: Independent and Control Variables

District	A	B
Institutional constraints on the discretionary power of district head	NO	YES
Years of schooling	9.99	11.31
Regional budget for education (<i>APBD Murni</i>)	10.87%	11.36%
GDP per capita	49.53	62.65
Population	132,434	121,028
Poverty	4.94 % (2017)	4.92 % (2018)
Administrative	3 sub-districts	3 sub-districts
Area	20.21 km ²	25.24 km ²
Established since	1918	1938
Middle-class and Aspiring Middle Class (AMC)	9% of the population AMC rate: 51%	8% of the population AMC rate: 51%

Formally similar but informally different political structures

- Both districts A and B had competitive political systems
- Yet, informal 'political' institution played significant roles in District B but not in District A
 - Increased the number of political actors in the system
 - Put some constraints on the power of district heads in District B



From Politics to Bureaucratic Capacity

- In district A, bureaucrats are forced to be loyal, only implement political leader's instructions
- In district B, bureaucrats are empowered to control budget allocation for programs that are in line with the district's needs in education sector and give inputs to the political leaders.

Several conditions contribute to the development of these different capabilities

DISTRICT A

- *Baperjakat* was politically muted by the head district
- Mayors politicized bureaucratic positions → bureaucrats reluctant to innovate
- The pro-education mayor's programs relied in his political bases. Bureaucrats has no opportunity to hands on in this project.

DISTRICT B

- Implemented rule that forbids rotation and demotion before and after election
- More egalitarian relationship between the bureaucracy and district heads
- Bureaucrats have room to innovate and initiate → improve their capability overtime

Leaders-Dependent: The Politics of Quality Education Policies in District A

- Top-down system: The influential role of pro-education leaders in pursuing quality education policies.
"The former mayor paid attention on education since he served as the vice mayor. So, this is not for political purposes, but indeed he showed his consistent concern on improving education."
- Weak bureaucracy in sustaining policies
- Policies change with the change of the political agendas of district heads
 - CLH abandoned due the rise of a new leaders uninterested in education
 - Shifted to policies more oriented to access-broadening

Building Local Initiatives: The Politics of Quality Education Policies in District B

- Open to policy initiatives from local education bureaucracy
 - The peer supervision program was initiated by principals and school supervisors
- Development of local bureaucratic capacity
 - Had more initiatives to improve education
 - Bureaucrats' relative autonomy to sustain good policies

each mayor continues the education policies run by the previous mayor if the evaluation of the program is good. This evaluation does not come from the mayor's subjective opinion, but from the Local Education Agency (LEA) objective evaluation, schools, and community (Senior bureaucrat at LEA)

Conclusion

- In a decentralized system, politics affects education policies in a way that is more subtle than those found in other policies.
- While it may not be sufficient to improve education quality, political reforms aimed at constraining the discretionary power of district heads can be a first crucial step.
- Nevertheless, further research is needed to open the black box of bureaucracy (i.e. under what condition it works to improve public goods provision)

Thank You

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