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STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE INDONESIA'S TEACHER RECRUITMENT PROCESS

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OVERVIEW

Indonesia has a teacher quality problem. The most apparent proximate to the problem can be measured by [teachers' absenteeism](#), inability to master subject matter, lack of pedagogical mastery, and the overall view of the teaching and learning process as simply part of rote learning. But the more serious impact is also apparent in Indonesia's [flat](#) and worsening learning profiles, stagnating PISA scores, reports of [under-skilled teachers](#), and industry concerns on Indonesia's talent pool as one of the country's drawback. All of which anchor Indonesia from becoming globally competitive.

Tackling Indonesia's teacher quality is a tangible way to lift the country's learning profile. Policies to improve teacher performance range from [increasing teachers' wages](#), instituting [certification programmes](#) to better teacher readiness, deepening community participation in school management, and [expanding](#) pre-service teacher training as well as bridging experienced teachers with inexperienced teachers for ongoing development.

Yet, regardless of the performance of these policies, they are quotidian by nature. The Ministry of Education and Culture's (MoEC) reliance on improving efficiency or mentoring channels do not address the underlying problem of the quality teaching—i.e. how does MoEC ensure that Indonesia's teachers are selected and recruited for the right reasons?

Teachers are currently hired by top-down civil servant recruitment process. As a result, [teaching quality is not prioritised in the recruitment process](#) because teachers are assessed as civil servants rather than as professional educators. This brief will therefore assess three strategies MoEC may take to ensure that local governments lead the teacher recruitment process so that teachers are selected and recruited for their teaching excellence to serve local needs.

1. Make teacher recruitment process transparent for the public by publishing data on school-level teacher vacancies.

There is a [mismatch](#) between supply and demand of teachers. Graduate teachers often congregate in major cities, resulting in teacher surplus in certain areas and deficit in others. Furthermore, teachers are not easily deployed to plug gaps in areas with urgent needs because teacher distribution is regulated by rigid, top-down process based on civil servant quotas (which favour metropolitan areas) rather than accommodating real local needs. As a result, schools and local governments often depend on informal teacher recruitment as a shortcut to lobbying the central government for more teachers.

The best course of action for MoEC is to publish timely school-level teacher vacancy data. The root of uneven teacher distribution is the lack of public accountability. Knowledge on teacher vacancies are privy only to local and central government bureaucrats and administrators. Thus, teacher candidates have little choice in how they can apply for open positions beside going through the national civil service recruitment or weathering the uncertainties of honorary teacher recruitment process.

Publishing teacher vacancy numbers may be moot on two points. First, MoEC has already published the number of teachers in Indonesia. Second, contract teachers are not registered and thus may make it difficult for MoEC to tally. These counterarguments are misplaced because the total number of teachers do not necessarily equate to in-depth data on schools' growth and how teachers are distributed.

The aim is to establish MoEC as *the* gatekeeper to the teaching profession. Publicly accessible and timely data on teacher vacancies would allow MoEC to focus on monitoring ebbs and flows of schools' growth throughout the country. It would let the public understand which districts are in urgent need of teachers, thus potentially easing the distribution problem.

2. Set time limit to the contract teacher position by leveraging the contract-based government employees (PPPK) scheme as a probation period.

Indonesia's teachers are divided into tenured civil servants and contract positions, thus creating a difficult catch-22 situation for the government. Reliance on contract teachers as a flexible workforce exposes the profession to [political capture](#) and lax standardisation over teaching quality as there is no institutional guarantee on how well individuals can teach before they are hired as a teacher. But granting full tenure for all working teachers in Indonesia is not fiscally possible and may set a bad precedent for individuals to expect civil service employment without proper screening.

However, banning contract teachers outright will not immediately improve teacher quality. It would only shift responsibility from central to local governments even though the latter does not have the legal, financial, and institutional capacity to coordinate a nationwide response to this issue. Furthermore, the ban would exacerbate political debate on teacher wellbeing. Teachers' unions, for example, have been campaigning for contract teachers' pay and career certainty. Endorsing the ban may discourage the public and civil society to work with MoEC on future reforms.

MoEC's imperative is to ensure career certainty to the teaching profession. The aim of this recommendation is not to do away with the contract teaching position completely. It is politically impossible to do so given the entrenched social and political support for contract teachers throughout the country. Instead, MoEC should aim is to incorporate contract teaching positions, through the PPPK scheme, as a probationary period prior to civil service tenure.

The moratorium on civil service hiring due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the [recently instituted PPPK scheme](#) have given MoEC a unique opportunity to complete this transition. To make sure the PPPK works in the long run, there are two follow-ups to be done.

First, MoEC needs to make explicit that the PPPK scheme is performance-based. The PPPK scheme was introduced to address short term teacher shortages throughout the country. And the insistence for all teachers outside of the official civil service tenure to be hired under the PPPK is apt to address the legal ambiguity of the contract teacher. But streamlining the entry point alone is not enough.

MoEC must introduce a set of performance criteria to make sure that teachers perform in their job. In doing so, the PPPK scheme has the potential to become a [benchmark](#) for professional performance to maintain and promote high achievers to tenure.

Second, negotiate with local governments so that the transition is carried out in uniform. The issue with contract teacher employment is rife with politicking between stakeholders, and the new PPPK scheme may invite open-ended questions on recruitment standards based on the [perceived need for an equal and just recognition](#) of teachers' service. And instead of accommodating the politics of teacher recruitment, MoEC should take the administrative lead by ensuring performance indicators are met when schools request for tailored assistance and financial support.

3. Develop a living national teacher professional standard for local governments to use under MoEC's supervision.

Indonesia's teachers are burdened by criteria of excellence that are disconnected from the realities of the profession. Start with the [2005 Teacher Law](#). It states that a good teacher must satisfy pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competencies. A teacher must be of 'good character' to fulfil the personality competency, for example. Another example is that a teacher should be able to develop content creatively.

However, the Law does not stipulate exactly how to define the goodness of one's character or one's creativity during recruitment process. More importantly, there is only one set of hiring standards without differentiating standards for graduate (i.e., candidate), novice, or experienced teachers. Vague regulations and laws invite multitude of interpretation that provides politically acquiescent points in the public but not of practical use in the recruitment process.

MoEC's aim here is twofold. First, it should develop a set of continuously updated professional guidelines that defines the skills of an excellent teacher. The existing professional guideline developed in 2007, Regulation of the Minister of National Education (Permendiknas) No. 16/2007, is inadequate because it is too prescriptive on teachers' competencies without being explicit in how to measure teachers' skills and performance. For example, under section Teacher Competence Standard, sub section Social Competence, primary school teachers are asked to be ["inclusive" and "objective"](#) to every student, but there are no benchmarks to measure what this professional behaviour would look like in classrooms.

Strategies to Improve Indonesia's Teacher Recruitment Process

The key is to translate existing regulations with the current teaching profession to ensure the country has a measurable baseline of what constitute good teaching. Ideally MoEC develops a measurable, explicit, and development-based standard of performance that bind all teachers as professional educators. To contrast the 2007 Regulation, the Australian teacher professional standard, under the Professional Knowledge domain, stipulates exactly how teachers can [implement inclusive classroom strategies](#) at different stages of their career.

Second, liaise with stakeholders to align their perspective with MoEC's teacher standard framework. There is a history of public criticism that MoEC has introduced new regulations without consulting or explaining to the public regarding its intentions and justifications to their new policies.

MoEC should open itself and engage with the public regarding the incoming teaching professional standard framework. The key is to balance institutional leadership while refraining from unilateral policy implementation. MoEC can do well by disseminating and consulting with key stakeholders (e.g., local governments, teacher unions, universities) to inform them of the reform.

This policy note is collated from working paper of RISE Programme in Indonesia “*The Struggle to Recruit Good Teachers in Indonesia: Institutional and Social Dysfunctions*”. The working paper can be downloaded here <http://bit.ly/RISE-workingpaper3>.