

Short overview on education practices and policies in Indonesia and in the US: how do they work?*

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Education is a conscious effort particularly made to prepare students gain lots of knowledge and skills to play significant roles in community lives now and in the future times. Those significant roles may be varied from person to person and community to community depending on the capability and the need of each. In this sophisticated era, everyone has the same right to pursue education at any levels they may wish to take and contribute to community development. Any attempts are always made to support and facilitate those noble ideas so that better quality of lives may be obtained.

Government as the nation's representative is the primary subject of any efforts made to bring its people to prosperity. It has the authority to facilitate and provide wider opportunities for people regardless their races, sexes, social and cultural backgrounds, and origins to take education and lead them to better lives. Well-organized and quality policies as well as highly-trusted regulations will be the important keys of any governments to realize the dream to educate and civilize their people and also stand up the nation's dignity.

This paper is a response paper on which I attempt to provide short overview on the practices and policies of education in two different countries namely Indonesia and

the United States (US). These two countries have already established partnerships for years and made significant improvement in enhancing the education quality of their generation. The strengthening Indonesia-U.S. partnership has led to several important education initiatives as officials from both countries have expressed the conviction that education is the base upon which future understanding and cooperation will be built. In this paper, I focus on some concerns and efforts made by governments in both countries in providing education for their citizens. How the public react to the government policies is also shortly described here.

It is always interesting to learn how the US government works hard in preparing and providing education for its people through public schooling. Public schooling has goals which include moral instruction, shaping behavior, and transmitting knowledge (Spring: 2008, p.184). Those noble values of education have become the concerns of the US government from the past until current times to be successfully achieved. Thus, in this context, making people understand of certain information or knowledge is not only the concern that education aims to target but also arising people awareness of moral values and behave accordingly in the society. Various attempts have then been made to meet the challenge and demands of education the public.

The US government provides very large opportunities for its citizens to take education both in public and private schools. Public schools are government's schools which do not charge any tuition from students, just the opposite of the private ones which charge their students some tuition. In response to public need, in the 1999's, three versions of school choice emerged: voucher schools, privately managed schools, and charter schools (Ravitch. D, 2010). This emergence shows high commitment of the

government to open wider access of education for its people with diverse choices. As known in the US, children are required in most states to attend school from age six or seven (generally kindergarten or first grade) until they are eighteen (generally are twelfth grade, the end of high school). Both children and parents have many choices regarding the school they want to enroll as mentioned above. Even, under the public school choice organized by government, parents of students are free to choose any public school in their district or in the state (Spring, 2008). To my understanding, this policy means a lot to parents as they may have personal interest and willingness to take their children to certain school outside their home stay district. Thus, no restrictions means wider chances to grant best education for every US child.

Similar to that in the US, education in Indonesia has also become the main concern of the government. National education, likewise it is known, has been prioritized by the government to produce high quality and well-educated generation that serve the nation development. The national education goals already exist as revealed in the Law 20/2003 on National Education System which states that national education aims at the development of students' potentials to become a man who believes in God the Almighty, have certain characters: high-minded, healthy, knowledgeable, creative, independent, and become a democratic and responsible citizen for the welfare of the people and homeland. This statement implies that Indonesian government has to provide its citizens, from the west to the east Indonesian regions, proper education which functions not only transferring knowledge and information but also developing citizens' characters as well as instilling moral and religious values for the public welfare. That is why education nowadays has a big portion on developing

students' characters that will effect greatly on the development of nation's civilization. On its implementation, I find that Indonesian Language, Civics, *Pancasila* (five principles) are instances of subject matters taught in schools that significantly contribute to achieve this goal.

Considering its significances, education in all regions in Indonesia has always been developed from time to time particularly at primary levels. The fulfillment of rights for quality primary education is an indicator of justice and equity of development results as well as human investment needed to support sustainable national development (MONE, 2010). This MONE's statement implies that education acts as a part of basic human need and citizenry rights, and thus it is compulsory for the government to fulfill this need.

Realizing its vital roles in education, the Indonesian government since a few years ago had initiated a program of '*WAJIB BELAJAR 9 TAHUN (nine-year-compulsory education)*' which requires Indonesian children to take education in primary level from grade one until six (elementary school) and continue to grade seven until nine (junior high school). This policy – as the one implemented in the US, supported by many concerned parties on its execution, has great effects to redevelop the public paradigm of the importance of education. If the US government requires its children to attend schools of primary until senior high level, similarly, the Indonesian government also executes the same policy. Both countries have perceived primary education as the basic need every citizen needs to gain. A slight difference occurs in that the US government requires longer education until the senior high level whereas the Indonesian government's policy is still limited to the junior high level. To my concerns,

the education funding seems to be the consideration that is taken into account in executing this policy. This makes sense as the number of Indonesian children who are to take education is larger than the one in the US. Meanwhile, bigger amount of funding provided by the federal state in US, when compared to that in Indonesia, also another reason why the countries take different policies.

The education decentralization in the US and Indonesia is also another matter that I think very interesting to discuss. The US educational system is the prominence of decentralization, in which central government is giving broad autonomy to the government under it, namely the state and local government (district) to concern on the education. Every state has authority to develop its education with attempts of regardless races, sexes and social status. This might be mirrored on the movie of Little Rock High School which provides equal education for the Black and White in the region, i.e. Arkansas. Although the US has no centralized education, there is a formula that applies nationally i.e. educational objectives. By developing patterns of decentralization, the education is managed based on the aspirations and needs of the people of state and local government. In this context, most of educational authorities and responsibilities are subjected to the state or local government. The central government by its Department of Federal Education acts to monitor how the education runs.

Indonesia, like many other developing nations in Asia, is currently riding a decentralization wave (Bjork, 2006). The passage of Law No. 22/1999 on Regional Government and Law No. 25/1999 on the Fiscal Balance between the Central Government and Regions were the initiations to reconfigure the authority frameworks after centralization ran for years, particularly during the new order era (1966-1998).

During this era, authority became steadily more concentrated in the capital (Bjork, 2006). Thus, all educational policies were made by central government to be executed by all educational institutions in the nation. Lesmana.M, Riza. R (2009) portrayed how school officials in the past had to obey the government regulation not to open a class unless 10 students were admitted. Penalty might be given for those breaking the rule regardless high public' motivation to have education.

The stream of decentralization, however had invited reactions from the public such as school officials, teachers and parents. Though they were given broader authority, many still found it difficult to deal with the newly initiated policy due to many constraints. Taken for an instance was a misunderstanding of local content curriculum and misinterpretation of parental responsibility in educational decentralization past time in which many schools perceived that parents' participations were already mirrored when they provided financial contributions instead of active participation in school discussion or meeting as described by Bjork (2006).

Educational practice of decentralization needs high concerns and efforts on its implementation. One of which is on teacher recruitment that should also be decentralized to give schools the right to hire teachers who best meet their school's need and fit their expectation (Zulfikar, T, 2009). Others deal with the system and evaluation as well as continuous assessment of practices.

In conclusion, the educational practices and policies in the US and Indonesia have the same purposes to provide wider access of education and invite active public involvement in educating their generation.

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