



Field Report

When Teachers are Absent: Where do They Go and What is the Impact on Students?

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies on education service delivery, including the *World Development Report 2004* published by the World Bank, have begun to focus on the problem of teacher absenteeism. This report provides an overview of the results of a survey on primary education services in Indonesia, focusing on teacher absentee rates and the impact on student learning processes. This survey is the first detailed study on the phenomena of teacher absenteeism in Indonesia obtained from two unannounced visits to 147 sample schools in October 2002 and March 2003. The survey shows that the teacher absence rate in Indonesia is approximately 19%, which is considerably higher than that of other developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Teacher absence is related to individual and workplace characteristics such as education levels, poverty rates, and the location of schools. We found that teacher absenteeism is statistically significant and negatively correlates with the performance of their students. This report also identifies several relevant and important policy recommendations to reduce the teacher absence rate, such as the adequacy of a school's physical facilities, teacher employment status, and a monitoring system.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The international community believes that primary education is an important strategy for reducing poverty. Yet, as many as 100 million children worldwide do not have access to primary education (UNESCO, 2002). Most of them live in the developing world and the majority are female. In 1984 the Indonesian government made six years of education compulsory, which was expanded in 1994 to nine years of compulsory education, with a target that all children aged 7 to 15 years would receive a basic education. However, efforts to achieve this target have been hindered by many obstacles, such as lack of qualified teachers, adequate school buildings, and textbooks.

This report contains an overview of the survey results on primary education services in Indonesia, focusing on teacher absence rates and its impact on the learning performance of students. This survey was conducted in 10 districts/cities, randomly selected but taking into account the population in four Indonesian regions: Java-Bali, Sumatera, Kalimantan-Sulawesi, and Nusa Tenggara. The survey is the first comprehensive study on the phenomena of teacher absenteeism in Indonesia and was conducted in two unannounced visits to all sampled schools in October 2002 and March 2003. A teacher was considered as absent if at the time of the visit the researcher could not find the sample teacher in the school.

In Indonesia there are two primary educational systems, either administered by the Ministry of National Education (Depdiknas) or the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Depag). Depdiknas regulates Primary Schools (SD) and Middle Schools (SMP) using a general education curriculum. Depag manages Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) and Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) using a mixed curriculum that teaches both general and Moslem-related subjects. This report aims to analyze the results of the survey on the teacher absence phenomena among full-time public primary school teachers.

A similar survey, with the same methodology and timeframe, was conducted in seven other countries: Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Zambia and Uganda. Survey results showed that with a teacher absence rate of 19%, Indonesia ranked third among these eight countries after Uganda (39%) and India (25%). In Indonesia, 45% of these absences were without any clear reason, 36% were either because of illness or official leave, while the remaining 19% were due to the teacher conducting official duties outside of the school, such as attending meetings or participating in a training session.

Teacher attendance lists were not reliable sources of teachers attendance in schools, since only 59% of those present signed the attendance list. Teachers usually sign the attendance list before they go home or at times, sign the list for the full week at once. Absent teachers tend to be males, with a relatively high education level, and as contract/temporary teachers. Other factors contributing to teacher absences were lack of adequate transportation, the absence of the headmaster, lack of toilet facilities, and poor quality of school facilities in general.

Teacher absence rates in schools can have negative effects on student learning processes. This is less of a problem for those living in cities since normally, substitute teachers are always available. However, in rural areas, especially in remote areas, teacher absences may become a more serious problem because substitutes are not always available. Therefore, when a teacher is absent, two classes often have to be merged into a single class or a teacher will have to teach two classes in different rooms, or the teacher is substituted by a senior student. In many cases, students were sent home when their teacher was absent. These have had negative impacts on the students' learning abilities. According to the mathematics and

language tests administered to fourth-grade students in this survey, the scores of rural students were generally lower than that of students from cities. The proportion of rural students receiving a grade below 50% in their math test doubled that of those from urban areas. This figure tripled for the language test.

The learning abilities of the students in general positively correlate with the teachers' tenure. They positively correlate when the teacher per student ratio is less than 1:25, but they become negatively correlated when the ratio is higher than 1:25. Student learning abilities were negatively correlated when their teachers had other outside jobs or if the teachers were female. Female students generally have significantly higher learning abilities than male students. However, this fact could be considered more as a problem than a success, due to the following factors. *First*, the push to increase educational opportunities for female students has indirectly ignored male students. *Second*, students learning at home were normally assigned to their mothers, which cause male students to "lose" the father figure (which is made worse if most of the teachers at the school were female). The results of this survey reveal that the grades of a student's mathematics and language tests were positively correlated with their mother's formal educational background, but they were not correlated with their father's formal educational background.

The above conditions require a response from the government and the community, especially officials from Districts/Cities Department of Education, to conduct an evaluation on education-sector policies. Teacher' welfare needs to be increased and there needs to be special financial incentives for teachers who work in poor remote areas. There needs to be stricter management of monitoring activities in order to prevent corrupt and collusive activities. Teacher placement needs to be properly reexamined and adjusted, both in terms of quality and quantity, and between schools in rural areas and cities. The placement of experienced teachers should not be limited to schools in the cities. In addition, supporting facilities for learning activities need to be allocated more equally between urban and rural areas. Rural schools, especially in poor areas, provide hope for the poor population for a better livelihood for their future generation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APBD	= Local Government Budget
APBN	= National Government Budget
APM	= Net Participation Rate
Balitbang	= Research and Development Department
BPS	= Indonesian Statistics Agency/Statistics Indonesia
Depag	= Ministry of Religious Affairs
Depdiknas	= Ministry of National Education
DFID	= Department for International Development/British Aid
GDN	= Global Development Network
GOI	= Government of Indonesia
HIV/AIDS	= Human Immune-deficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ILO	= International Labor Organization
Inpres	= Presidential Instructions
Kepmenag	= Ministry of Religious Affairs' Decree
Kepmendikbud	= Ministry of Education and Culture's Decree
LSM	= Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs)
MI (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah)	= Islamic Primary School
MTs (Madrasah Tsanawiyah)	= Islamic Lower Secondary School
PDRB	= Local Gross Domestic Product (LGDP)
PGSLA	= Upper Secondary School for Teachers' Training
PNS	= Civil Servants
SD	= Primary School
SLTA	= Upper Secondary School
SLTP	= Lower Secondary School
SMP	= Middle School
UNESCO	= United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UU	= Law
UUD	= Constitution

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Response of the International Community on Primary Education

Chapter 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that primary education should be made available at no charge for all children and their participation should be made compulsory, while secondary education should be made open to all children on the base of achievement. At least during the past few decades, the international community has increasingly realized that the development of primary education could become a primary strategy to reduce global poverty by half within one generation. For instance, the meeting of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in its 2000 meeting in Dakar, Senegal, agreed that at least by the year 2015, all primary-school age children must have a chance to enroll in a primary education institution at no charge, with adequate educational instructions, and with the elimination of all discrimination between male and female students. This is a global commitment. Every country is responsible for achieving these goals within their own borders, and the international community is responsible to make sure that no country lacks the necessary labor and funds to achieve this goal. Such responsibility is highlighted to address the problem of more than 100 million children worldwide who are unable to enjoy primary education. Most of these children live in the developing countries and the majority are female.

If the goal to reduce global poverty is to be achieved, other conditions outside of education must also be improved, such as: improvement of health facilities, provision of clean water and sanitation. In addition, there needs to be investments in technological improvement in various strategic sectors for human development. Finally, successful education development would also depend on appropriate implementation of educational policies, including provision of adequate incentives for teachers.

B. What are the Policies and Conditions of Primary Education in Indonesia?

The political will of the Indonesian government in providing primary education services to its entire people remains strong. Article 31 of the 1945 Indonesian Constitution states that all citizens have the right to primary education and are required to have primary education. It is the government's responsibility to fund this. Through a recent amendment to this article this commitment was strengthened by a requirement that the government must allocate at least 20% of its national budget to the education sector. The same percentage was also mandated for each region in their local government budget to help meet the need of national education. In the new National Educational System passed in 2003 (Law No. 20/2003), it is stated that the 20% minimum requirement does not include teacher education and local education department training needs.

The government provides education services in order to prepare for the future and to improve quality of life and the general welfare of its people. In practice, however, this commitment (especially for primary education) is facing many obstacles, such as difficulties in providing adequate teachers, school buildings, textbooks, and operational funding. As a result, the rights and responsibilities of citizens to receive and participate in primary education has not been fully accomplished. This is more problematic for poor citizens. In various poor and isolated areas they face the biggest obstacles in receiving primary education, and in many cases, have no access to this service at all. Even if primary education services are available, the poor can not afford them or the quality of the provided education is substandard. The low quality of public services, especially primary education services, is usually related to a lack of accountability, low public

participation, and weak government policy (World Bank, 2003). In 2001/2002, the number of Indonesian children aged 7 to 12 years old that were not enrolled in primary school was about 6% of all primary school-age children (1,448,776 children) (Research and Development Bureau, Ministry of National Education, 2003). However, even when the real participation rate at primary school level is considered to be high, UNESCO (2002) categorized Indonesia as a country that has a lower real participation rate. This is because a decrease of the real participation rate by 1% means that more than 240,000 of school-age children between the age of 7 to 12 in Indonesia are no longer enrolled in primary schools.

A classic problem faced by the primary education system in Indonesia is the lack of teachers, unequal distribution of teachers, and poor quality of teachers. As a result, the learning process is unable to function properly and as a result, quality of student learning is low (ILO, 2004). Teachers play a very important role in primary education and any absence of teachers disrupts the learning process. Therefore, it is important to have substitute teachers. Besides disrupting the learning process, it seems that the economic effects of teacher absences could also be substantial. On the one hand, there are teachers that are paid but who do not perform any work; on the other hand, substitute teachers must also be paid. Finally, teacher absences may create adverse effects on the government budget because in most regions more than half of the local government budget is allocated to pay teacher salaries (Toyamah and Usman, 2004).

C. Literature Review

The question of teacher absence rates, its causes and impacts does not seem to attract much attention from education administrators. Research on this topic in a development context has rarely been implemented. The SMERU team was unable to find any existing research reports on teacher absence in Indonesia, except for several references about this topic from other countries. Because of this, the SMERU Research Institute accepted the offer from the World Bank in conjunction with the Global Development Network (GDN) to collaborate in a study on public service delivery in education and health sectors, with a focus on the absence rates of primary school teachers and medical staff of public health centers (*puskesmas*) in Indonesia.

The existing literature shows that teacher absence rates in developing countries tend to be high. Glewwe, Kremer, and Moulin (1999) show that in a region of Kenya, the teacher absence rate averaged at 28.4%. A report on primary education in India reveals that about one-third of school principals were not present when their schools were visited by the Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) Team (PROBE Team, 1999). Another study in the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Madya Pradesh show that 17% of teachers were absent, and 20% of teachers were present at their schools, but were not present in the classroom (Rao 1999; World Bank, 2001). In the North West Frontier Province in Pakistan, with a large number of schools sampled, the average teacher absence rate was 18% (Ali and Reed, 1994; King, Orazem, and Paterno, 1999). Another study on primary schools in Pakistan found an absent rate of about 10% (Reimers, 1993). A World Bank study in Bangladesh in the mid 1990s showed that “Schools with half of the teachers absent were frequently found and it is very normal to have a school run only by one teacher with more than 100 students in different grades” (World Bank, 1995).

Research in Nicaragua shows that lack of control by the local community over schools is closely related to teacher absences (King and Ozler, 2001). Specifically, it concludes that the Nicaraguan program to increase the independence of school managers and to increase the involvement of parents in their children’s schools have helped increase teacher attendance, with the greatest impact in poor rural villages. Various studies show that teachers suffering from HIV/AIDS were frequently absent, even when their illnesses had not yet reached a

critical stage (World Bank, 2002). A study carried out by DFID on teacher development centers (Fairhurs et al., 1999) show that teacher training has become a reason for high teacher absence rates, because often substitute teachers were not available when participation in training was required. In some teacher absence cases, gender could play a role since conflicts between household affairs and duties at schools have led to higher absence rates for female teachers (El-Sanabiy, 1989).

In developed countries, teachers who are absent are usually replaced by substitute teachers, so the impact of their absence is lower compared to that in developing countries. Unfortunately, there is little literature available on this matter. A study conducted in the State of New York in the United States shows that there is a higher absence rate in schools with more flexible leave policy, while schools with more restrictive leave policies and leave that could be substituted for money, tend to have a lower absence rate (Ehrenberg, Ress, and Ehrenberg 1991). Another study on teacher absence in a wide school district in New York City, the United States, shows that there is a consistency in absences where teachers who were frequently absent in the past are likely to continue to be absent, while those with poor performance are more likely to be absent from classrooms compared to those who have better performance histories (Pitkoff, 1993).

A survey of the literature of various studies on teacher absence concludes that there are very few clear determinants of teacher absences (Norton, 1998). The same study also did not provide any definite conclusions on the impact of teacher absences. For instance, a study conducted by Ehrenberg et al. found that there are no direct impacts between teacher absence rates and student test scores. However, it has to be noted that their research (similar to research in developed countries) only examines reported absences, meaning that if a substitute teacher is listed as working, therefore there is a full-time teacher who was absent. Norton stated that even though it is preferable to have full-time teachers rather than having substitutes, if those who were frequently absent are poorly qualified teachers, then the impact of their absences on student performance would be low. Pitkoff (1993) showed that teacher absence rates tended to be higher in schools which had lower test scores and higher failure rates. This indicates that teacher absences made students learning worse off. This seems to have bigger implications in developing countries where teacher absences are higher in rural villages.

Another study from Pakistan shows that schools with high teacher absence rates tend to increase student promotion rates (from one grade to another) but reduce student advancement rate (from primary to secondary level). The researchers believed that this is because teachers who were frequently absent could not accurately evaluate their student's progress (King, Orazem, and Paterno, 1999). However, this study did not measure the impact of teacher absences on student grade attainment. Another study on primary schools in Pakistan that attempted to examine these aspects failed to show any correlations between teacher absence and student grade attainment (Reimer 1993). Therefore, further detailed studies on this subject are needed. However, the basic assumptions need to be changed to: teacher attendance at school is *not sufficient* to fully determine successful student learning in class. However, we can not deny the fact that teacher attendance is *mandatory* to ensure higher learning success for students.

So far, literature with systematic research using national data to provide a detailed background on teacher absence is limited, not only in developing countries, but also in developed ones. There are insufficient findings to show that teacher attendance is a primary determinant to improve the delivery of education. However, a more comprehensive analysis on why teachers are frequently absent from their schools is needed in order to achieve better outcomes for education.

D. Sources and Rationales for the Study

This paper is based on the results of a survey of primary education service delivery in Indonesia, focusing on teacher absence rates conducted by the SMERU Research Institute and the World Bank, affiliated with the Global Development Network (GDN). Similar surveys have been conducted at the same time in seven other developing countries: Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Uganda, and Zambia. The result of this international study is expected to document primary school teacher absence rates and their relations to individual teacher characteristics, conditions of the community and its institutions, and the education policy at various levels of authority (central/national government and local government) or at the provincial, and district/city level (for countries with a decentralized system).

Specifically, the purpose of this research is to assess the conditions of primary education service delivery in Indonesia, especially in public schools run by the government. Thus, the purposes of this study are as following:

1. As input for education policymakers, both national and international;
2. To provide information to solve various problems in education; and
3. To build the civil society's consciousness of the condition of the delivery of primary education service and efforts to improve it.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: COMBINING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE APPROACHES

A. Sample Selection

This stage begins by collecting secondary data, especially from the Indonesian Statistics Agency (BPS) and the Ministry of Education as a basis to build a sample frame. The data gathered includes the amount of total population, list of villages, and primary school facilities¹ in each district/city. Due to limited time and resources, this research is only focused on primary schools. Next, a sample of districts/cities and schools (consisting of primary schools and primary *madrasah*) were selected using the following steps.

First, Indonesia was divided geographically into several regions based on the number of total population into the following: Java-Bali, Sumatera, Kalimantan-Sulawesi, and Nusa Tenggara. Indonesian provinces that are still suffering from various conflicts (such as Aceh, Central Sulawesi, Maluku, North Maluku, and Papua) were removed from the sample selection process. Then, from each region, a total of five districts and cities were randomly selected, taking into account the population of each district/city (see Table 2.1).

Tabel 2.1. Area and Number of Primary Schools/Madrasah sampled

No.	Province	District/City	Primary Schools/Madrasah	
			Public	Private
1.	Riau	City of Pekanbaru	11	4
2.	Bengkulu	District of Rejang Lebong	12	1
3.	Banten	City of Cilegon	17	4
4.	West Java	City of Bandung	9	3
5.	Central Java	District of Magelang	9	4
6.	Central Java	City of Surakarta	9	4
7.	East Java	City of Pasuruan	14	6
8.	East Java	District of Tuban	10	3
9.	West Nusa Tenggara	District of Central Lombok	10	5
10.	South Sulawesi	District of Gowa	11	2
		Total	111	36

Second, in each district/city, 12 schools were selected and with time remaining, the field researcher can visit additional schools. Specifically for the cities of Cilegon and Pasuruan, the number of additional schools sampled was determined by the number of public health centers in these two cities which were visited at the same time. In these two cities, the number of public health centers were only half of the required samples, therefore, the remaining samples were selected from schools (see Table 2.1). Before choosing sampled schools, we randomly

¹ In Indonesia, there are two types of primary education facilities, which are primary schools and primary *madrasah*. Primary schools are regulated by the Ministry of National Education, using the general curriculum, while primary *madrasah* are regulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, using a mixed (general and Islamic) curriculum (please see the subsection entitled "Primary Education in Indonesia" in Section III).

selected 10 villages in each district/city to be sampled, taking into account the location of these villages (in urban or rural areas). One of the 10 villages is a backup village to anticipate the possibility of a village that is too difficult to reach. In each village sampled, researchers asked the local residents about the location of primary schools/*madrasah* (both public and private) in these villages. They started visiting schools, giving priority to public primary schools/*madrasahs*. To meet the number of samples in each district/city, additional samples were selected from private schools.

Third, in each school sampled, the researcher would request a list of teachers. If a school visited is considered to be large, such as schools with more than 15 teachers, then the researcher would only interview 15 teachers chosen randomly to ensure that survey quality could be maintained despite the limited time and resources. Each school was visited twice, both on an unannounced date. From the 147 primary schools/*madrasah* in the sample, 1,441 teachers were selected in each visit (because this is a panel study, the teacher absence data that were used are taken only from teachers that could be interviewed or whose data were obtained from both visits). If there are teachers whose information was only obtained from one of the visits, then their data are not included in the data set panel.

In addition to the above survey, the research team also conducted a survey on student learning results through written tests on mathematics and Indonesian language to fourth-grade students in each school sampled. In each school, a maximum of 10 students were selected among all fourth-grade students that were present at the time of the survey. In 147 sampled primary schools/*madrasah*, 1,419 fourth-grade students took the test.

B. Data Collection

Data was collected from schools during the two visits and during school sessions. The two visits were conducted on different days and times to insure there were no time variations in the collected information and to see also whether there was any variation in absentee rates during different days or times. The collection of primary data was conducted using questionnaires that were gathered on three levels: school, individual teacher/student, and national level.

At the school level, 406 data variables were collected, among them concerning:

- Facility size, number of teachers, and teacher's names.
- School hours and the time when the visit was conducted.
- Attendance or absence of all the teachers stated in the sample list (identifying those who were present and absent).
- The reasons for absences for different teachers (for those that were absent, we asked the reasons for the absence, such as, for work-related reasons, attending training sessions or meetings, assisting in census-gathering activities, or immunizations).
- The activities performed by each teacher at the time of the visit.
- School's relative remoteness (e.g., distance from paved roads and the distance from the city center).
- Distances from the nearest bank (in some countries teachers have to travel a great distance to collect their salaries from banks, therefore causing their absence from schools).

- The language used by the students (to see the possibility of language differences between teachers and students, relating to teachers' absences).
- Community involvement (e.g., the existence of a parents association, the number of parents attending school meetings, and the number of parents making financial contributions to the school).
- Monitoring and supervision (teachers' monitoring methods and if available, the frequency of the department of education officers' visits to the school).
- Discipline (the number of teachers who were given warnings or were dismissed because of their lack of discipline, and the reasons for being absent).
- The procedures for replacing teachers who were absent (were there any substitute teachers, were the classes merged, or were the students sent home).
- Use of school facilities (data of students who were actually present compared to the student data taken from available archives).
- Schools' finances (sources of teachers' salaries, such as from the government, parents' contribution, or donations from non-profit organizations).
- Educational background of teachers.
- Characteristics (e.g., whether the surveyed school has a library, blackboards, public bathrooms, and electricity).

At the individual teacher level, 112 data variables were collected to see the variation and the causes of teacher absence from schools. A teacher was considered absent if at the time of the visit to schools, the researchers could not find the sampled teacher at the school. Beside this, to receive conformation of the attendance of each sampled teacher (those who would be interviewed) in the school, researchers conducted direct observation by meeting each sampled teachers to ascertain their whereabouts. The interview with sampled teachers was conducted until all were interviewed, before the researchers left the school. The information about the characteristics of absent teachers was obtained from the headmasters or their representatives. Later on, this information was reconfirmed with the absent teachers during the researchers' second visit (provided they were available during the second visit).

The following is collected information relating to teacher absence:

- Distance and transportation means to schools (the distance between teachers' residence and the school and the means of transportation used).
- Linkages with surrounding communities (were the teachers born and raised near the schools where they worked and where their families lived).
- Title/position of the teachers (headmasters, regular teachers, part time teachers, etc.).
- Demographic characteristics of teachers (e.g., age and gender)
- Teachers' ethnic group and mother tongue (compared with those of the local community).

- Training and education related to teachers' job (teachers' education level).
- Teachers' marital status and the number of children they have (including the number of children who attended the school where the teacher works).
- Teachers' extra income/earnings (from other jobs/sources).
- Teachers' tenure and work experiences.
- Salary information (e.g., how teachers received their salaries, do the salaries always arrive on time).
- Teachers' career choice motivation and their job satisfaction at the present.

At the individual students' level, a test and an interview was conducted to obtain information regarding the students learning results. A total of 47 data variables were collected from each student. Two tests were provided: a mathematics test and a language test. The mathematics test intended to assess the students' ability in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The students were given 13 math questions which required completion within 20 minutes. The language test was provided to determine student literacy ability, by dictating four short sentences, which consisted of 36 words and 5 punctuation marks. The sentences were read out twice at a clear and slow pace, then the students were asked to rewrite the sentences within 2 minutes.

The test results were then combined with the previous collected data relating to the background of the students and their parents, which consist of the following:

- Communication between the student's parents and their teachers.
- Parent literacy ability.
- Parent education level.
- Information on whether the students were also enrolled in private lessons or courses outside of the school.

At the national level: this survey was conducted to complement the data collected at the school and individual levels. For this purpose, the following questions on these topics were asked:

- Type of education service providers, their total number, and qualifications.
- Working hours and the types of excuses permitted for absences (including a question on the level of HIV/AIDS infection among teachers).
- Teachers' salaries and allowances, including procedures to receive bonus salaries and promotions, also the level of non-payment salaries.
- Teachers' appointment, placement, and reassignment policies.
- Teachers' participation in school's management.
- Number of private schools and school conditions.

- Teachers' disciplinary violations and dismissal procedures.
- Local involvement (of parents/clients) in school decision-making process (especially regarding employees).
- Conditions of political institutions and competition among political parties/factions.
- Number of teacher associations/unions.

Through this institutional survey researchers collected various information, including official explanations on educational institutions and how these institutions were managed. Researchers conducting the national survey gathered information through both secondary sources and from interviews with officials at the Ministry of Education, related NGOs, and a sub sample of headmasters and teachers from the sampled schools selected during the field visit.

C. Why is a Second Field Survey Needed?

The survey was conducted in 10 districts/cities through two unannounced field visits in October 2002 and March 2003. In the second survey, the research team visited 294 schools and collected abundant information on teacher attendance and absence and the impact on schools and their students. The larger the number of observed cases, the more accurate the estimation of teacher absences would be.

Through the two visits to each school, we could easily find out whether the absence rate was concentrated amongst a certain group of teachers or if there were more variations among them. This information could have different policy implications. For instance, a 20% absence rate could be obtained either because the number of absent teachers were actually 20% of all teachers or because 15% of these absent teachers were those who actually never work as teachers but were listed and paid as teachers, while the other 5% were those who were rarely absent. In this case, the policy implications of these 'disguised teachers' would not have any impact on the other teachers who were seldom absent. On the other hand, if this 20% were spread among some or all teachers, there would be different policy implications involved. Thus, the second field visit could help us to determine which one of the above problems exists in schools and thus, proper policy implications could be determined.

Because most information about the teachers was gathered during the first visit, researchers did not have to obtain a great deal of additional information during the second visit. Nevertheless, the second visit not only increased the accuracy of the estimated absence rate, but was also important for gathering specific individual data of the teachers who were called on during the first visit. By doing this, researchers could obtain a better picture of who the absent teachers were and why they were absent. The accuracy of information would diminish if researchers only surveyed teachers who were never absent. By combining the information from both the individual and school level, and by comparing it with information obtained from national institutions, researchers could get a clearer institutional policy that have substantial implications on the absence rate.

Based on the above descriptions, we can see that the amount of information collected through a study of the delivery of primary education services is both numerous and of various types that can hopefully be used for other working papers. This paper only incorporates some of the survey results closely related to the problem of absenteeism among primary school teachers.

III. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

A. General Primary Education Policy

According to Law No. 20/2003 on the National Educational System, primary education is divided into two parts: 1) primary education, divided further into primary schools (*sekolah dasar (SD)*) or primary *madrasahs (madrasah ibtidaiyah (MI))* that is conducted for six years, and 2) lower secondary education, divided further into: lower secondary schools (*sekolah menengah pertama (SMP)*) and lower secondary *madrasahs (madrasah tsanawiyah (MTs))*, which is conducted for three years. These schools can be operated by both the government and the private sector. For primary education, the government operates 93% of 148,964 primary schools (Depdiknas, 2001) and 7% of 22,799 primary *madrasahs* (Depag, 2002). The focus of this paper is primary education at the primary schools/*madrasahs* level, especially public primary schools (both public primary schools and *Inpres* primary schools). Until now, new operational regulations on primary education is based on Law No. 2, 1989 (see Figure 3.1).

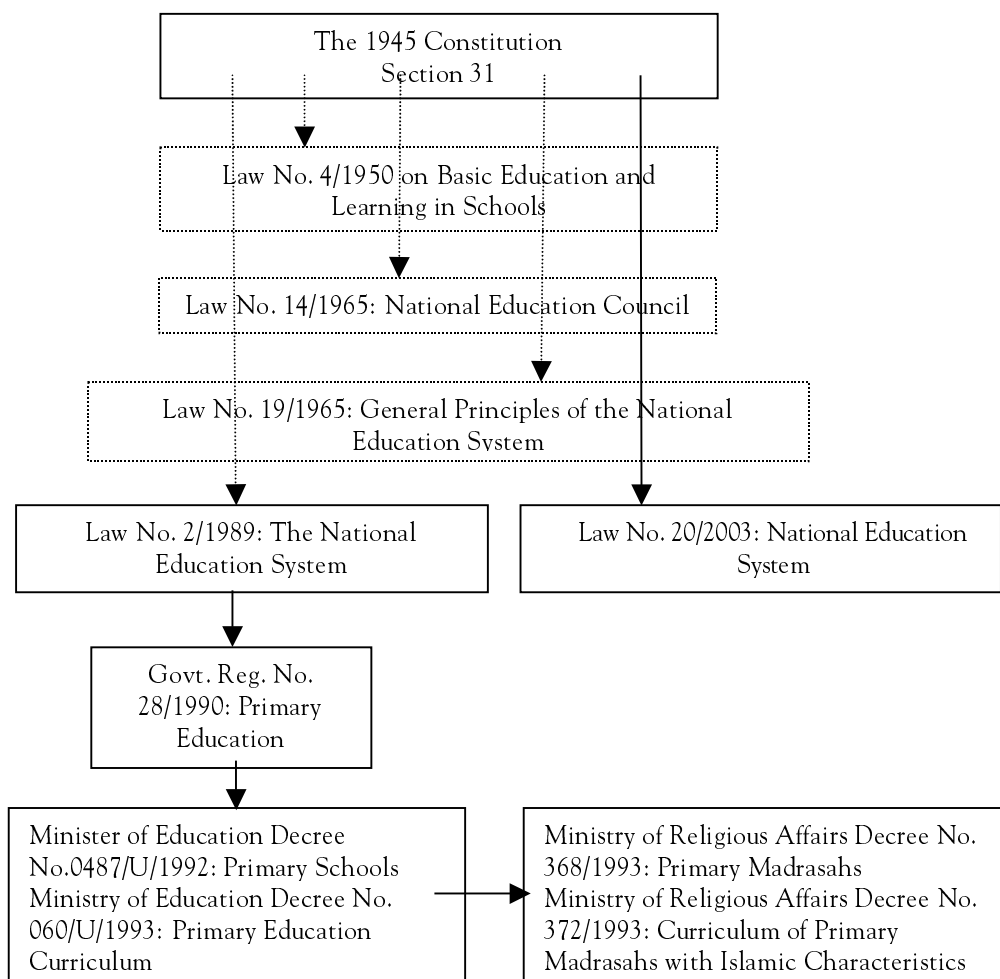


Diagram 3.1. Hierarchy of Laws and Regulations concerning the Management of Public Primary Schools and *Madrasahs*

The learning process in primary schools is carried out using the general curriculum that contains general studies subjects which are regulated by the Ministry of Education. The curriculum of a primary school must at least contain the following subjects: 1) Pancasila (national ideology) education; 2) Religious education; 3) Citizenship education; 4) Indonesian language; 5) Reading and writing; 6) Mathematics, including counting; 7) Introduction to Natural Science and Technology; 8) Geography; 9) Indonesian and General History; 10) Handcraft and Arts; 11) Sports and Health Education; and 12) Drawing.² Primary *madrasahs* use a mixed curriculum, which besides comprising of general studies subjects taught in regular primary schools, also offers Islamic studies subject, which are regulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Islamic studies for primary *madrasah* students are divided into five sub-fields: 1) *Koran-Hadits*; 2) *aqidah-akhlak*; 3) *fiqih*; 4) Islamic cultural history; dan 5) Arabic language.

The existence of these two forms of education create two different primary education standards. Among them is the tendency for *Madrasah* students to show low quality and low learning results in general studies subjects. This results from the MI requirement to teach two different curriculums, resulting in a higher study load for *madrasah* students as they are required to learn all general education subjects required by the Ministry of Education and also all Islamic studies subjects required by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Differences between primary schools and *madrasahs* could also be seen from the differences in the quality of administration and management of these schools (SMERU, 2003). Ironically, most of the government's financial support for schools were directed to primary schools, even though many *madrasahs* still have poor administration management and most of their students are from low-income families which should be more eligible to receive higher levels of assistance.

There are two important facts about education and poverty in Indonesia. *First*, 87% of the poor have obtained only some forms of primary or lower education. *Second*, 62% of poor citizens are under 30 years of age (ILO, 2004). This strong correlation between education and poverty demands assurances that there should be maximum opportunities and access for the poor to pursue quality education and training that are relevant to their needs. In 1984, the government started a six-year compulsory primary education program for all Indonesians. This program was combined with major a program for the construction of primary school buildings throughout Indonesia³ and was considered to be very successful. This was reflected by the fact that by 1988 about 96% of all children aged between 7 to 12 years were enrolled in primary schools/*madrasahs* (GOI, 1997/98). In 1994, the compulsory education program was expanded to nine years. The goal of this program was that by 1998 all children aged between 7 to 15 years would be enrolled in primary and lower secondary schools/*madrasahs*. However, due to the 1997 economic crisis, this target was postponed until 2009.

B. High Quality and Relevant Primary Education

Based on the 2000/2001 National Education Statistics (Balitbang, Depdiknas, 2003) there are 1,128,475 primary school teachers in Indonesia, which is about 25% of the total number of civil servants (PNS). Primary school teaching staff consist of the headmaster, grade teachers, and subject teachers. In general, most primary schools used grade teachers, except in the subjects of religious education and sports and health teachers. If the number of available

² Section II of this report to establish the learning abilities of primary school's students, we have administered a test for fourth-grade students in the subjects of mathematics and reading (especially in writing abilities).

³ This program was executed through the Presidential Instruction on Primary School Construction Program, commonly known as the Primary School *Inpres* Program. It was created in 1973. Schools that were built using the funds from this program were called *Inpres* Primary Schools.

teachers were compared with the total number of classrooms available, it is estimated that there is still a shortage of 236,500 grade teachers. The shortages of headmasters, religious teachers, and sports and health teachers are estimated at 2,900; 3,900; and 75,800 teachers respectively. In addition, based on the minimum education background (teachers with at least a Diploma-2⁴), about 54% of all teachers (about 607,900 teachers) were formally unqualified to teach (see Table 3.1). In 2003, teacher shortage has expanded to about 427,903, while the Ministry of Education could only appoint 190,714 assistant/part-time teachers on a contract basis. Even if the physical support facilities for education (e.g., textbooks or school buildings) are sufficient, these are meaningless if they are not supported by an adequate number of qualified teachers who are fully dedicated to their profession.

Table 3.1. Percentage of Teachers Based on Highest Education Level

Highest level of Completed Education (with Degrees/Diploma)	Percentage
Lower Secondary School	0,87
Non vocational Upper Secondary School	5,62
Vocational Upper Secondary School	44,51
Certificate Program for Lower Secondary School Teachers /Diploma-1	2,88
Certificate Program for Upper Secondary School Teachers/Diploma-2	36,77
Associate Degrees	2,25
Bachelor Degrees (S-1)	7,08
Master's Degrees (S-2)	0,03
Total	100,00

Source: Balitbang, Depdiknas, 2003

Related to the above problems, the Indonesian education system is in need of a major overhaul. Recently, President Megawati Soekarnoputri stated that “The community needs to change its paradigm for the future of its children. It is not necessary for all Indonesian children to become university graduates” (*Media Indonesia*, 23 December 2003). In fact, such a paradigm change should not be based on community needs, instead it should come from government policy, especially from government officials responsible for education policies. The current education system is biased towards those who intend to continue their education to higher or tertiary education levels. Since primary education, students are given theoretical subjects that would become the basis of university-level study. School curriculums do not place adequate emphasis on practical/technical skills such as literacy and counting (reading, writing, and arithmetic) as a basis for expanding individual talents in the real world. If there are any primary school graduates successful in expanding their technical skills and then able to use these skills to support their livelihood, many would assume that this was achieved through their natural talents in these skills, not through schooling.

In practice, most Indonesian students, especially those from low income backgrounds, are more likely to discontinue their education after completing primary school. Very few Indonesian students are fortunate enough to obtain higher education or university degrees⁵. Therefore, it can be predicted that most students able to graduate from universities were able

⁴ Diploma-2 can be obtained by upper secondary school graduates after they have enrolled in a teaching certification program for two years.

⁵ The result of a Susenas analysis (2002) shows that 59% of Indonesians aged 15 years and older do not graduate from lower secondary schools and 10% of them have never received any formal education at all.

to do so because they have “sufficient funding to do so,” not “because of the talents they have.” This means that many students that have the potential to become university graduates were not able to accomplish this because they do not have adequate funding to continue their education, and some of them have to leave school before they are able to finish their primary education.

What is the message behind the above facts? Considering that up to now the highest level of education obtainable by most Indonesian students is only primary level, meaning that our education paradigm must be changed. Primary education curriculum must put more emphasis on technical/practical knowledge as the basis of skills that are needed by the community. Thus, the majority of primary education graduates would be expected to acquire practical skills and the capacity to expand their talents. Another important change needed in the education paradigm is an overhaul in teacher management, including provision of an incentive system as the primary instrument to motivate teachers so that their functions and roles remain constructive to the learning process at schools. This system should cover teacher rights and responsibilities.

C. Excused Absences for Teachers: Regular Leave and Sick Leave

In general, the leave regulations for civil servants also apply to most teachers, except the annual leave that is equal to 12 working days. Civil servants in schools that have regular breaks are not eligible for regular leave. To receive permission of leave or sick leave, a teacher must submit written permission to an assigned government official. After receiving this permission, the teacher can then receive official leave with regular pay (see Government Regulation No. 24/1976 on Civil Servants Leave, Director of the National Civil Service Agency Decree No. 01/SE/1977 on the Permission and Granting of Civil Servants leave, on the Civil Servant Regulations Serial No. II, published by the National Civil Service Agency).

Sabbatical leave: Civil servants (teachers) who have been working in the civil service continuously for six years are entitled to a three month sabbatical leave. This leave can be postponed by a superior official for up to two years in the case of urgent official business or duties.

Sick leave: Teachers who have been sick for more than 1 to 2 days must inform their supervisors. If the teacher is sick for between 2 to 14 days, they have to inform their supervisors in writing with a reference letter from a doctor attached. If the sickness is expected to last for more than 14 days, they have to provide a written leave request with a reference letter from a doctor that has been sanctioned by the Ministry of Health. If granted, this leave is valid for up to one year, with the possibility of a six month extension. After recovery, they must pass a teaching skills and abilities test, and if they were not able to pass this test, or are still ill after one and a half years of sick leave, then they receive an honorable discharge from their position.

Miscarriage leave: Teachers suffering from miscarriages are entitled to leave of up to 1.5 months.

Maternity leave: Teachers who are giving birth are entitled to three-months leave from one month before and two months after they give birth (for their first three children). For the birth of the fourth (or subsequent) child, the teacher will only receive unpaid leave.

Family emergency leave: Teachers are entitled to family emergency leave for up to two months. Family emergencies are defined by the regulation that includes major illnesses or the death of parents (father or mother), spouse (husband or wife), children, siblings, or in-laws. Family emergency also includes a teacher’s first marriage.

Unpaid leave (without government pay): Even though this is not a right, teachers have the opportunity to request unpaid leaves. This leave can be granted for up to three years and is renewable for another year. This leave is given to civil servants that have worked in the civil service for five consecutive years. Civil servants receiving unpaid leave are not entitled to receive their salaries, effective from the first month they begin their leave, and all the facilities they receive from the government must be returned to their supervisors. Unpaid leave can only be approved by a decree from a superior official, after receiving permission from the Director of the National Civil Service Agency.

D. Teacher Income

Teachers, including headmasters who are civil servants, receive the following income (in cash): 1) basic salary; 2) spouse allowance; 3) child allowance; 4) special allowances for high-ranking government positions; 5) educational position allowance; and 6) pension. The amount of these incomes are as follows: 1) basic salary is in accordance with civil service grade and year of service; 2) spouse allowance is 10% of the basic salary; 3) child allowance is 2% of basic salary per child (up to the third child), and 4) special allowances are set up according to the prevailing regulations.

Beside this, teachers also receive non-cash benefits in the form of health care benefit and a defined benefit pension. Teachers who are entitled to a pension are those with civil servant status. The pension is received every month after the teacher has entered retirement. To be eligible for full pension according to pension regulations, the teacher must be at least 50 years of age and have a minimum of 20 years working in the civil service. They can submit an application for early retirement. The mandatory retirement age for teachers is 60 years of age. The maximum amount of pension received by beneficiaries is 75% of their final basic salary. For instance, a teacher with the highest civil service grade (IV/e grade) with 30 years in the civil service would earn a basic salary of Rp1.760.400 per month, and are entitled to a pension of Rp1.320.300 per month or about US\$155 per month (Government Regulation No. 11/2003).⁶

E. Financial Incentives for Teachers

To encourage an increase in teacher attendance, a cash incentive program for teachers is available. The program consist of two parts, which are: overtime teaching pay and substitute teaching pay. Overtime teaching is determined by subtracting actual teaching time from required teaching time. The overtime teaching pay is set at Rp 2,000 per hour. Teachers must teach for 24 hours each week. For example, if a teacher taught for 42 hours in a week, then he/she has 18 hours of overtime teaching. The teacher is entitled to overtime pay of 18 hours x Rp 2,000 x 4 weeks = Rp 120,000 per month. The overtime incentive is positive motivation to increase teacher attendance at school, because it is given based on the teachers' daily duties at school. Thus, its administration must be clear, strict, transparent, and accountable with an adequate incentive amount to meet teacher's daily needs. Overtime teaching pay of Rp 2,000 per hours seems to be insufficient and inadequate to encourage high attendance rates among teachers. According to Ki Supriyoko (2004)⁷, an education expert, nowadays many teachers

⁶ Government Regulation No. 11/2003 on the Amendment to the Government Regulation No. 7/1977 on the Regulation of Civil Servants Salaries, which has been amended several times, last time by the Government Regulation No. 26/2001.

⁷ Ki Supriyoko, a Professor at the Sarjanawiyata Taman Siswa University, Yogyakarta, is also the Vice President of the Pan-Pacific Association of Private Education (PAPE), headquartered in Tokyo, Japan.

served their students for only a few hours in the classrooms. Outside the classrooms, they seem to have no obligation to teach their students.

Beside overtime teaching pay there is also a substitute teaching pay set by the headmaster. Assigning substitute teachers is usually conducted in rotation among the teachers who have the duty and responsibility to insure a smooth learning process. These duties include preventing disturbances from outside the school.

There is also a non-cash incentive program to encourage higher teacher attendance. However, attendance rates are merely one eligibility factor for teacher to receive such incentives. Examples of non-cash incentives include: medals/awards and the chance to participate in educational studies in other Indonesian regions or overseas. Teacher participation in educational studies are regulated by the Directorate General of Primary and Lower Secondary Education of the Ministry of National Education. Teachers with outstanding achievements are recommended by their headmasters to the local Department of Education. Then, the local Department of Education submits this recommendation to the Ministry of National Education, which makes their selection based on this recommendation.

F. Disciplinary Sanctions and Dismissal of Teachers

The disciplinary sanctions afforded to teachers include: formal warning, suspension of salary, permanent demotion of grade and salary, transfer to another school, and temporary dismissal/non-active status. The ranking of sanctions are as follows: a) light disciplinary sanctions (e.g., verbal warning, formal written warning, and written statement of unsatisfactory performance); b) moderate disciplinary sanctions (e.g., postponement of regular salary increased for a maximum of one year, postponement of promotion for a maximum of one year, and; c) heavy disciplinary sanctions (e.g., demotion to a lower rank for a maximum of one year, dismissal from position, honorable dismissal not by own request as a civil servant, dishonorable dismissal from the civil service).

Dismissal of civil servants may be initiated by the following: 1) individual's own request; 2) reached the retirement age; 3) restructuring of the given public agency; 4) found guilty of a violation/criminal activity/misconduct; 5) found to be physically and mentally incompetent; 6) left duties without prior permission; 7) declared dead or missing, and 8) other causes, for instance, failure to return to duty after completing unpaid leave.

The procedures to be followed to dismiss a teacher who is frequently absent is as follows: 1) give verbal warnings; 2) give written warnings if the teacher is absent for more than one month without any good reason; 3) suspension; and 4) if the teacher still violates absentee regulations, be dismissed. Previously, the authority to dismiss a teacher was in the hands of the Ministry of National Education. However, since the implementation of national decentralization policy in January 1, 2001, this authority rests in the hands of the Regent's Head/Major.

IV. WHERE DO THEY GO?: ANALYZING THE REASONS WHY TEACHERS ARE ABSENT

Through two field visits, SMERU has conducted 2,854 observations on teacher attendance. More than 1,400 primary school/madrasah teachers (both public and private) were interviewed twice. The result was that approximately 27% of respondents were considered “absent,” meaning they could not be found and interviewed when the researchers visited their schools. However, not all of these absent teachers could be recorded in the absence list, because among these teachers were a number who could not be categorized as teachers as defined by this study. The following is the method by which we adjust the number of these teachers.

First, teachers who were reported by their headmasters (or their representatives) as having retired, moved, or working in a different work shift, were excluded from our analysis. While the researchers have selected their sample based on the teachers who were declared to be present at the school during their visits, there is no way to verify these lists independently. By removing teachers under the above category from our analysis, the number of absent teachers are lowered. This method is used both for the first and second visits. By excluding these teachers, about one-third of the teachers who were declared absent were removed from our analysis. However, teachers who were not assigned to a school during the first visit, but were assigned to the school during the second visit (i.e., new teachers) are still included in our analysis.

Second, we only included full-time teachers in our analysis. This step is important because previously, all teachers who were reported to “work in a different shift” (i.e., part-time teachers) have been removed from our analysis. Through these steps, the number of observations in our analysis was reduced to 2,390 observations.

Third, since this study is related to an international survey that focused on public/government-managed schools, our analysis was limited mostly to public school teachers.

A. Absence Rates and Their Rationales

Before excluding private primary school teachers (including private *madrasahs*) from our analysis, it might be worthwhile to compare the absence rates of public and private primary school teachers. The analysis shows that the difference between the two groups is very minimal – 19% for public primary school teachers and 18% for private primary school teachers – and that they were not statistically significant. This small difference might be surprising to some, because many have assumed that due to higher financial and managerial governance and accountability of private schools, along with the higher quality of education services delivered by them, private school teachers’ attendance would be much higher than that of public school teachers. This assumption was not proven valid in this study.

We found that teacher absence rates for primary public school teachers in Indonesia is about 19%, 18% (168 people) during the first visit and 20% (179 people) during the second visit. All of the teachers who were absent during the first visit were present during the second visit. This means that the teachers who were absent during the first visit and the second visit were coming from different groups of teachers.

However, a 19% absence rate is considered to be higher compared to other developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Table 4.1 showed the absence rates from each

of the eight countries where similar studies were conducted during the same time period, using the same methodology. We found that Indonesia ranked third out of eight countries, after Uganda and India.

Table 4.1. Comparative Teachers' Absence Rate

Countries	Percentage
Bangladesh	16
Ecuador	15
India	25
Indonesia	19
Papua New Guinea	15
Peru	11
Zambia	17
Uganda	39

Source: GDN Workshop, 2004.

What are the rationales for teacher absences? Table 4.2 shows the rationales for absences given by headmasters (or their representatives) for the teachers working in their school facilities. About 37% of the absent teachers were reported as sick or as absent with leave, 19% were reported as performing official duties outside of school, about 26% were reported as arriving late, leaving early, absent without leave/permission, etc. Finally, about 18% of the absent teachers had unknown/unclear excuses. Usually, they were reported as present by the headmasters (or their representatives), but researchers were not able to locate them at their school.

Table 4.2. Headmasters' Rationale for Absent Full-time Teachers.

Rationale	N	Percentage
1. Ill	45	13,0
2. Absent with leave/permission	82	23,6
3. Performing other official duties related to teaching	56	16,1
4. Performing other official duties unrelated to teaching	9	2,6
5. Arrived at the school late	21	6,1
6. Left the school early	23	6,6
7. Didn't know	24	6,9
8. Absent without leave/permission	10	2,9
9. Others	13	3,7
10. No rationales given	64	18,4
<i>Total</i>	<i>347</i>	<i>100,0</i>

Two reasons considered acceptable for absence and could not be determined by the headmasters themselves include illness or excused/official leave. These types of absences are considered teachers' rights as civil servants. Thus, headmasters could not refuse absence requests due to teachers' illnesses or leave requests, although they could ask teachers to postpone their leave in the case of urgent official duties that require them present at their school. From this survey, we found from 127 out of 1,837 observations (about one-third of all absence reasons) were caused by these two rationales.

Thus, if we relate these numbers to the prevailing official leave rules and regulations (see the previous section) then we might underestimate the number of teachers who were absent due to

these two rationales. This is because often, headmasters easily grant leave requests from teachers for attending other activities not stated in the official leave regulations (e.g., to attend wedding ceremonies, *selamatan*, and funerals of friends/neighbors, including to accompany friends/neighbors who are taking religious pilgrimages to Mecca).

Compared with these two rationales, teacher absences due to other rationales/excuses listed in Table 4.2 (rationales no. 3 to no. 10), can cause problems that disrupt the learning process in schools. For instance, 12,7% of all absences could not be explained satisfactorily by headmasters or their representatives. They could be broken down into “arrived at the school late” or “left the school early.” These absences do not necessarily create negative impacts on the learning process, as long as the teachers do not become absent for the entire day. This occurred to some of the teachers encountered by the research team, even though they were declared to be absent or had left the school after being interviewed by the researchers.

About 18,7% of the absent teachers were absent because they performed official school duties outside of the school (see Table 4.2). Possible negative impacts of these absences could be minimized because generally their absences would have to be known in advance by school officials. Thus, headmasters could arrange or assign other teachers to substitute them. One could argue that in some cases, teachers should be given more chances to perform official duties outside of schools, such as participating in training or educational activities regarding school management/teaching. By participating in these activities, it is hoped that teachers would develop better thinking, vision, subject knowledge, new teaching and problem-solving skills that would improve the quality of their schools.

However, these activities should be accomplished under a clear human resource development strategy. Without such a strategy, the results could erode the mission of education to promote better behavior, values, and intellectuality, among students. For instance, Ki Supriyoko (2004) has stated that many teacher training institutions only offer “second-class” training for teachers who wished to obtain university degrees. Often, these institutions granted degrees to teachers while only requiring them to attend a small amount of in-class instructions. In some cases, there are teachers who could pass their final exam even though they only attended their class twice in a semester. In fact, there are teachers that passed their final exams even though they never attend classes at all. Also, some teachers earned their degrees through distance learning and were never present in any real classrooms. As a result, there are many teachers who obtained university degrees, but in practice, they do not increase their knowledge and vision at all.

B. The Accuracy of Official Teacher Attendance Lists

We have discussed the teachers who were declared present in their schools by headmasters (or their representatives), but were not witnessed or interviewed by researchers. Table 4.3 shows a comparison between teacher attendance according to their headmasters (or their representatives), based on the school’s attendance list, with researchers own observations at the schools visited.

Headmasters or their representatives were very accurate in reporting teacher absences. From the 1,522 teachers who were reported present, only 63 teachers (4%) could not be located by researchers on school grounds. However, this number could lower teacher absence rates compared with the rate found by researchers in their observation at schools’ visited. If we use the absence rate from the accounts of headmasters (or their representatives), the absent rate would go down to about 16,9% of all teachers in the sample, while the absent rate calculated from researchers’ observation is about 19% of all teachers in the sample.

Table 4.3. Teacher Absence Rate Based on Information Sources

Information Sources	N	Percentage
<i>Headmasters or Their Representatives</i>		
• Present	1522	83,1
• Absent	309	16,9
<i>Attendance's List</i>		
• Signed the list	1055	58,8
• Did not sign the list	717	40,0
• Not listed in the attendance list	6	0,3
• Don't know	16	0,9
<i>Researchers' Observation</i>		
• Present	1477	81,0
• Absent	347	19,0

On the other hand, if we rely solely on the attendance list to determine teacher absence, then the absence rate would increase significantly, since only about 59% of all sampled teachers who were declared to be present by headmasters (or their representatives) signed the attendance list. Completion of attendance lists in many schools were not strictly observed. Many of the teachers who were reported to be present by headmasters (or their representatives) are more likely to sign the attendance list before they left the school on that day. The researchers even found some schools where the teachers signed the attendance list once per week and schools that could not show an attendance list, even though the government has provided all schools in Indonesia with teacher attendance lists. In addition, most of the unexplained absences found at schools would be listed as due to illness or official leave in the attendance list, which in turn would be reported by the schools to the office or officials that supervise their operations. Thus, we could not rely on the attendance list as accurate evidence of teacher attendance.⁸

C. Absence Rates by Districts/Cities

Even though the national absence rate is 19% of all teachers sampled, there is a big discrepancy found in the absence rate of teachers from each district/city surveyed. Table 4.4 shows that the lowest district-level absence rate (7,4%) is found in the District of Magelang (Central Java), while the highest district-level absence rate (33,5%) – about 4,5 times higher than the lowest district-level absence rate is found in the City of Pekanbaru (Riau Province, Sumatera). There are two interesting facts that could be observed from Table 4.4.

First, there is no evidence that larger district/city budget allocation to the education sector would result in higher attendance rates. In 2001, the City of Pekanbaru allocated Rp5,342 billion to the education sector - almost 2,5 times that of the District of Magelang - which allocates Rp 2,112 billion for the education sector.⁹

⁸ Ehrenberg et al. (1991) used the attendance lists from 700 schools in the State of New York to see the impact of teachers' absences on student test scores. If teacher attendance lists in Indonesia could be relied upon as a source to measure teacher absences, then studies of teacher absences at Indonesian schools could be carried out more easily and efficiently.

⁹ In Fiscal Year 2001, routine and development expenditures in the education sector at the District of Magelang is Rp2,112 billion, while the City of Pekanbaru allocated Rp5,342 billion (Local Government Budget of the District of Magelang and the City of Pekanbaru for FY 2001). The differences in wealth of

Table 4.4. Teacher Absence Rate by Districts/Cities

Districts/Cities	Absence Rate	N
Java		
City of Cilegon	18,1%	277
City of Bandung	27,1%	144
Magelang	7,4%	135
City of Surakarta	16,0%	187
City of Pasuruan	11,8%	238
Tuban	22,9%	153
Sumatera		
Rejang Lebong	18,8%	197
City of Pekanbaru	33,5%	161
Nusa Tenggara		
Lombok Tengah	17,7%	153
Sulawesi		
Gowa	20,7%	179
<i>Average</i>	19,0%	1,824

Second, there is no clear relationship between the development level of a region and teacher absences in these regions. Many have thought that since Java is the most advanced island in Indonesia, it would have a lower absence rate. In practice, this was not the case. Even though Java has the two lowest absence rates in the sample, it also has the second and third-highest absence rates in the sample (see Table 4.4 for details). This indicates that the absence rate is more clearly associated with the education policy implemented in each province and district/city, which were decentralized since 2001.

However, the impact of decentralization policy on education service delivery still requires further analysis, since according to SMERU's analyses (2000, 2002a, 2002b), implementation of decentralization policy in Indonesia has not created any measurable impacts in schools. In other words, after three years under decentralization, the quality of education service delivery at schools remains unchanged (has not improved, but also has not become worse)¹⁰. Decentralization also has not changed the physical conditions of school buildings.

these two regions could also be seen in the local per capita income (PDRB) in the District of Magelang and the City of Pekanbaru (Rp2,545,000 and Rp5,470,000, respectively). (Per Capita Income of Districts/Cities of Indonesia; BPS, 2000).

¹⁰ Previously, many experts were concerned that by implementing a full and complete decentralization policy (*big bang decentralization*), the quantity and quality of public services, including in the education sector, will collapse and decline significantly.

D. Correlation of Absence Rates with Individual Teacher Characteristics

Table 4.5 describes more detailed individual backgrounds related to teacher absences, such as the following:

- Female teachers significantly tend to have a lower absence rate compared with male teachers. While some have predicted that conflicts between female teachers' households and school duties would lead them to have a higher absence rate, as have been found in the Middle East and North America (El-Sanabiy, 1989). However, this study does not show that this trend is found in Indonesia. This is somewhat surprising because originally it was expected that since Indonesia shares the same characteristics as the countries surveyed by El-Sanabiy (specifically, they all have the same social values about the role of women as prescribed by the same religion (Islam)), then Indonesia would have the similar trends as these other countries.
- Teachers with low formal education levels tend to have lower absence rates. On the other hand, those with higher formal education levels tend to have higher absence rates. This might be caused by the possible higher opportunities for teachers with high formal education levels to obtain extra jobs outside of teaching, especially when they live in cities.
- Teachers' civil servants status strongly correlates with teachers' absence rate. Originally, it was predicted that part-time/contract teachers with no civil servant status would have lower absence rates, so that they would have better evaluation results that would enable them to be promoted as full-time civil servants. However, on the contrary we found that part-time/contract teachers have higher absence rates compared with teachers with full-time civil servant status. The following are the possible causes for this trend. *First*, part-time/contract teachers have lower salaries compared with full-time teachers, so it is more likely that they would have to work in other places in order to earn sufficient income for their livelihoods. Part-time/contract teachers' salaries ranged from Rp50,000 – Rp450,000/month, while full-time civil servants teachers were paid Rp782,000 to Rp955,000/month. *Second*, even though work experience as part-time/contract teachers is a plus, they will have to follow the regular civil servants' recruitment and examination procedures like other applicants (with no teaching experiences) when there are openings for full-time civil servant positions.
- Teachers at schools that were located near the local Department of Education's office tended to have a lower absence rate compared to those from areas further away from the local Department of Education's office. These schools tended to be located in poor or even remote areas, and in general were located in rural villages. The primary reasons for absences in these areas were due to difficult transportation conditions and lack of supervision from the local Department of Education's office. There are many teachers in the villages who live further away from the schools where they work. At the same time, public transportation is almost nonexistent and road conditions are often very poor, even when accessed by motorbikes (especially during the rainy season) (see graph 4.1). These conditions were made worse by lack of supervision from the local Department of Education's office, which encourages teachers in villages to become more lax in attending their duties. In addition, they do not receive special benefits/treatments for serving in the villages and receive the same salaries/benefits as teachers serving in the cities. The government does not provide special incentive schemes to encourage teachers to become more willing to serve in remote rural villages.

**Table 4.5. Correlation Between Teacher Absence Rates
with Individual and School Characteristics**

Characteristics	Absence Rates	N
Female	17,9	1171
Male	21,1	653
Married	18,6	1671
Unmarried	17,5	137
Primary school graduates or less (dropped out from primary school)	0,0	6
Lower secondary school graduates	4,1	97
Upper secondary school graduates	17,2	501
Received certificates (D1/D2/D3)	21,9	949
University graduates (BA/S-1)	16,3	264
Full-time civil servant teachers	18,2	1673
Part-time/contract teachers	27,8	151
Born inside the province worked	18,2	1494
Born outside of the province worked	19,7	314
Place of residence is far from the school	20,3	433
Place of residence is close to the school	17,5	1357
Headmasters were absent	22,2	532
Headmasters were present	17,0	1168
Close to the local Department of Education's office	16,3	1332
Far from the local Department of Education's office	26,4	492
Close to paved roads	19,0	1732
Far from paved roads	19,6	92
Schools have public bathroom	18,4	1711
Schools do not have public bathroom	29,2	113
Schools have electricity	18,4	1576
Schools do not have electricity	23,0	248
Several grades being taught in one classroom	36,4	121
Each grades have their own classrooms	17,8	1703
There have been inspections done recently	19,7	1148
There have not been any inspections done for a long time	17,9	676
There have been meetings of the school committee/PTA done recently	18,8	581
There have not been any meetings of the school committee/PTA done for a long time	19,2	1243

Table 4.5 also provides an overview of several schools' characteristics related to teacher absences, for instances:

- In schools where headmasters were absent more frequently, the teachers were also more likely to be absent, compared with schools where headmasters were present regularly.
- Teacher absence rates in schools that do not have public bathroom facilities were significantly higher compared with schools that had such facilities. Public bathrooms are considered a basic public good (since people could not perform “hygiene” activities in public places). Thus, in schools with no public bathroom facilities, teachers have to travel some distance if there is a need for them to use such facilities, thus disrupting the learning process.



Photograph 4.1. The Road to School: During the Dry Season, These Roads are Difficult to Access, Let Alone during the Rainy Season.

- Teacher absences from schools that do not have adequate number of classrooms for all of their grades (thus, have to merge some grades into a single classroom) are higher compared to schools that can place each grade in their own classroom. This indicates that teacher absences tend to be higher in schools with poorer physical support facilities.
- Teachers in schools that were recently inspected by their local Department of Education officials have similar absence rates than those that have not been inspected by such officials. Thus, inspection activities do not have any significant effects in influencing teacher attendance one way or the other. This may be related to many anecdotal stories that inspection activities are carried out to “find faults” at schools, not to “guide” them. In such cases, bribes are often used to stop inspectors from finding such faults. These stories have been heard frequently in most Indonesian regions for years so that many schools simply bribe inspectors whenever they visit them. The question is, are these only anecdotal stories or could they be proven quantitatively?

V. WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON STUDENTS?: REVEALING THE COST OF TEACHER ABSENTEEISM

There is a shortage of teachers in Indonesia. Moreover, teacher distribution is also unequal, especially between schools in urban and rural areas. This disparity does not only relate to the number of teachers available, but also the quality of the teachers. In rural schools, especially those in remote places, there are more young inexperienced teachers or teachers who are transferred to rural areas as a form of punishment. Moreover, a number of local departments of education use this form of punishment to refrain teachers from being absent, although teaching quality depends heavily on the teachers' knowledge and motivation (Surakhmad, 2004). Thus, the policy of assigning young teachers to remote areas and using recruitment to remote areas as a form of punishment means the teaching process in schools in remote areas remains inadequate. Coupled with the fact that most poor people live in these areas, this policy provides another obstacle for the poor to escape poverty. This means that school development in poor and remote areas needs special policy in order to ensure that subsequent generations living in those areas can escape poverty.

Since teacher distribution usually favors urban schools, teacher absence is more problematic in rural areas. There are enough, or even surplus, teachers in urban schools, so an absent teachers can easily be replaced. Such is not the case in rural areas. An absent teacher can force a class to continue without acceptable supervision or even discontinue a class. During the survey, SMERU researchers came across classes that were taught by senior students (Figure 5.1)



Photograph 5.1. When Teachers are Absent: Students Teaching Students

In this survey, the researchers administered mathematics and language tests to fourth grade students. The math test was administered to evaluate students' ability in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, while the language test was given to examine students' writing ability. In general the scores were quite good, since the majority of students achieved a score of above 50 (in a 0-100 range), for both tests (Table 5.1). However, when observed in greater detail, there was a disparity between urban and rural schools. Students in rural schools performed significantly worse than students in urban schools. The percentage of students in rural areas who received a math score

of less than or equal to 50 was almost twice the number of students in urban areas. For language tests, the percentage was even three times higher (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. Mathematics and Language Test Scores among Students in Urban and Rural Areas

	Mathematics Score		Language Score	
	≤ 50	> 50	≤ 50	> 50
Urban	13%	87%	4%	96%
Rural	22%	78%	13%	87%

Figure 5.2 shows four samples of the language test results among students in rural schools. Since writing subjects are provided since first grade, fourth grade students should have adequate experience. However, the survey showed that several students could not even write a single word. The language test consisted of dictating four sentences twice and then letting the students write the sentences down. The sentences were (in Bahasa Indonesia):

Mengapa tanaman menjadi kering tanpa air?

Manusia membutuhkan makanan dan air supaya menjadi kuat dan sehat, begitu juga tanaman.

Tanaman hijau menggunakan air untuk membuat makanannya.

Tanaman yang tidak mendapat air akan layu dan menjadi kering.

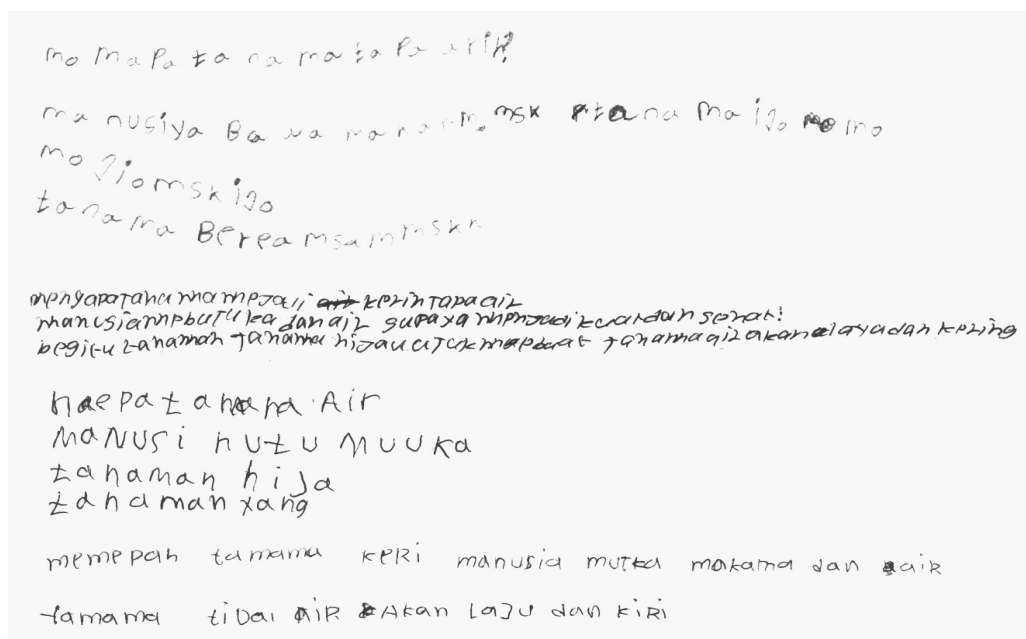


Figure 5.2. Four Samples of Language Test Results on Fourth Grade Students

Students' success does not only depend on adequate number and quality of teachers. However, students at schools where teachers are lacking both in number and quality are hard pressed to achieve their full potential. Table 5.2 shows the relationship between students' test scores and teacher absence. In general there is a tendency that schools whose teacher absence rate is high have low performing students. Further calculation shows that teacher absence has a negative

and significant relationship with mathematics scores and a negative but insignificant relationship with language scores.

The calculation suggests that in contrast to learning mathematics, learning language skills do not need special guidance from teachers. Students can learn writing by imitation, and most parents can teach their children reading and writing. On the other hand, students require specific teacher guidance in acquiring mathematics skills, especially understanding the logical process. In this regard, many parents in Indonesia do not have the ability to teach such knowledge. Although Table 5.2 proves that teachers are an important factor, it also shows that teachers alone are not enough to guarantee a student's success.

Table 5.2. The Relationship between Teacher Absence Rate and Student Performance

Average	Dissection of Mathematics Scores		Correlation Coefficient	Significance
	First Half	Second Half		
Mathematics Score	59.5	80.5	-0.1682	0.079
Absence Rate (%)	20.4	18.9		
Average	Dissection of Language Scores			
	First Half	Second Half		
Language Score	74.6	94.0	-0.0634	0.5105
Absence Rate (%)	20.4	18.8		

Table 5.3 shows that there are teacher factors which are very important in ensuring success. Tenure has a positive and significant correlation with students' math performance but insignificant to language performance. It means the longer the average tenure or the more experienced the teachers, mathematics performance will be higher. Similarly, the table also shows that the higher the student per teacher ratio in a school the better mathematics performance. However, this increase in performance stops at a ratio of 25:1. At ratios higher than 25, mathematics performance starts to decline. This shows that the current policy of a student teacher ratio of 25:1 is correct. Unfortunately, there are still many schools where the ratio is still too low or too high.

The proportion of teachers with additional jobs is another variable that has a negative and significant correlation with mathematics performance (Table 5.3). It means that as more teachers engage in other work, the worse the mathematics performance of students in that school. In Indonesia, the 'other work' is usually teaching at another school. Although teaching at other schools may seem helpful in tackling the problem of teacher shortage, in practice this has not been the case as teachers only agree to teach at other schools in order to increase their income without regards to other aspects of teaching. This causes teacher fatigue, which leads to frequent absence, which eventually destroys the quality of education in many schools. This information leads one to think that teachers should not be allowed to engage in multiple jobs, namely teaching in multiple schools, *provided* that income from teaching at one school is adequate. Teachers assigned to a school must work full time in that school and nowhere else.

Table 5.3. Correlation of School Characteristics with Mathematics and Language Tests

Variable	Mathematics	Words
Teacher absence rate	Negative	Insignificant
Teacher tenure squared	Positive	Insignificant
Student teacher ratio	Positive	Insignificant
Student teacher ratio squared	Negative	Insignificant
Proportion of teachers with other jobs	Negative	Insignificant
Teacher meetings in the last 6 months	Positive	Positive
Proportion of female teachers	Negative	Insignificant

Schools that had conducted teacher meetings in the last six months have students that perform significantly better, both on math or language tests, while the proportion of female teachers has a negative and significant relationship to math scores. However, Table 5.4 shows markedly different information regarding females, in that they perform significantly better in both tests. This result mirrors results from other countries, where it has been documented that boys are lagging behind girls (Buckingham, 2003). This trend should be regarded more as a problem than as an indicator of the success in putting girls through school. It is possible that efforts to increase the participation of girls in schools have shifted the focus of education to girls and away from boys, instead of focusing on both.

Mother's education is another variable that is positive and significant for both tests. Table 5.4 shows that students whose mothers had at least a high school education performed significantly better than students whose mother has less than high school education. In contrast, the father's level of education was not a significant factor in student performance. This makes sense since in Indonesia mothers play a more significant role in raising children.

Table 5.4. Additional Correlation between Mathematics and Language Scores of Fourth Grade Students.

Variables	Mathematics	Language
Girls	Positive	Positive
Mother finished high school or better	Positive	Positive
Mother tongue not Bahasa Indonesia	Insignificant	Negative
School has a playground	Negative	Negative

Another variable that impacts negatively on language test results is mother tongue and language of instruction at school. Table 5.4 shows that students in schools in communities whose mother tongue is not Bahasa Indonesia perform worse in language test. This illustrates the importance of the teachers' ability in speaking local languages.

The last variable that has a negative and significant influence on both math and language tests is the availability of a playground. This result needs further investigation because studies have shown the positive effects of physical activity on children. However, play should be limited too reduce tiredness and fatigue which can affect concentration levels.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper reports the results of a teacher absenteeism survey and its impact on student performance in public primary schools. This kind of survey is still rare in Indonesia, and was conducted on two unannounced visits in October 2002 and March 2003.

This report is written with a consideration that teachers hold a position as spearheads in learning activities, especially at the primary level. If a teacher is absent and there is no replacement, then learning will be disrupted. Besides this, economically, teacher absence wastes the educational budget because teacher salaries in many regions constitute a large part of the civil budget. Thus, it is important to gain an understanding of teacher absence and its causes so steps can be taken to reduce teacher absence.

Among the eight developing countries that participated in similar surveys, Indonesia is ranked third at 19%, after Uganda and India with 39% and 25% respectively. Peru has the lowest absence rate with 11%. Teacher absence in Indonesia has achieved a worrying level not because of its relatively high rate, but because 45% of absences were for unacceptable reasons. Moreover, 36% of the absentees were those who were sick or on official leave, and the rest were due to official duties.

Absence rates in each district are markedly different from other districts. The lowest rate is in Magelang with 7.4% and the highest in 33.5% in Pekanbaru. There are two interesting things to note here. First, the educational budget is not an important factor in increasing teacher attendance. Pekanbaru is a relatively wealthy capital of the Province of Riau, and it has the highest absence rate, while Magelang is one of the poorer districts in Central Java and it has the lowest absence rate. Second, the level of development of an area also has no relationship with teacher absence. Java, as the most developed island in Indonesia, should have a relatively low absence rate, but the facts beg to differ. Although the districts with the lowest and second lowest absence rates are in Java, the districts with the second and third highest absence rates are also in Java.

Analysis of different individual teacher and school characteristics show that they have a correlation with teacher absence. Some of these include:

- The increasing proportion of female teachers in general may reduce absence rates because female teachers have a lower absence rate. However, their ability should be improved since the survey also showed that there is a negative and significant correlation between female teachers and student mathematics performance.
- The policy of hiring contract teachers should be evaluated because contract teachers have a much higher absence rate than permanent teachers. Contract teachers' absence could be due to the fact that they are paid very low salaries. If the local government can increase their salary to the level closer to permanent teachers, they should appoint the teachers as permanent teachers.
- Although teachers with lower levels of formal education have a significantly lower absence rate, reverting the hiring policy to teachers with low levels of education should be avoided because it will impact on learning activities. In addition, teachers with low levels of education should be given further training.

- There is an indication that school facilities have an impact on teacher performance. This report shows that schools with toilets have lower teacher absence rates. A similar phenomenon occurs in schools where each class is located in a different room. This shows that development and maintenance of school facilities is important.
- Inspections should be managed as a means for training, not a method to assess violations. Although this survey did not show the relationship between inspections and absence rates, schools whose principals were absent have higher absence rates. This also indicates it may be necessary to install supervisors at schools.

Teacher attendance by itself is not enough to ensure success for students, but teacher absence has a negative impact on students. Simple calculations show that there is a negative correlation between teacher absence rates and math and language test results on fourth grade students, which means schools with high teacher absence rates have students with lower scores. Although the correlation is only significant on math tests, this fact serves as an early sign of the importance of reducing teacher absence to increase student performance.

On a broad level, educational policies that pertain to teachers have caused a discrepancy of teachers between urban and rural areas, both in number and in quality. The impact of this policy is illustrated by the fact that student performance in rural schools is significantly worse than student performance in urban schools. This should serve as a warning about the importance of assigning teachers proportionally between rural and urban areas. In addition, rural schools should receive extra benefits because schools in these areas are especially important as means for children to escape poverty. This is the reason why the government should provide special incentive schemes for teachers who are willing to teach in rural areas.

Calculations on several teacher and school variables show the relationship between these variables and math and language tests scores. Several conclusions can be gathered, including:

- Knowledge of mathematics requires more intensive guidance than language knowledge. Analysis shows that absence rates and experience of teachers have significant impacts (negative for absence and positive for experience) on math scores but not on writing scores.
- Student per teacher ratio of 25:1 is ideal in a classroom, at least for mathematics courses. An increase in the ratio up to 25:1 is positive for students, but a ratio any higher than 25:1 is detrimental.
- Teachers with additional employment, including teaching at multiple schools, tend to be detrimental to student performance. This survey shows a negative relationship between the proportions of teachers with additional employment to math performance. Basically, teachers engage in additional employment because of the lack of income. This study highlights the need of a policy that integrates two things: increasing teacher welfare, and increasing the number and distribution of teachers. When the policy is implemented properly, the next step is to prohibit teachers from engaging additional employment, including teaching in multiple schools.
- Although the superiority of girls can be seen as a success, it can also be taken as a problem. The intensity of the movement to increase female participation in schools may have put boys in a disadvantaged position. Another problem that needs to be taken into account is the relatively minor role of fathers in the early education of children. This

has resulted in the insignificance of father education to determine student performance, while mothers' education is a significant variable.

In closing, this report only describes a small portion of educational problems in Indonesia, and the results from this report still need to be researched further. There are still many problems that are not yet sufficiently understood, thus further investigations should be conducted.

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