Equality And Equity In Indonesian Education: The Consequences Of Decentralization

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Abstract
This paper discussed Indonesian efforts to change the Indonesian educational system from centralization to decentralization. The Indonesian government launched several programmes to support its decentralization policy in education. The programmes were intended to open equal access to education all over Indonesia and minimize the gap among the regions. This paper analysed whether the programmes provided equality and equity to Indonesian citizens in terms of educational access. Finally, this researcher recommended that the Indonesian government gives more attention to the disadvantaged area, for example, poor and remote regions. This may provide equal access to education with good quality in Indonesia. Moreover, the Indonesian central government may allow local authorities to get involved in teacher professionalism programmes. Local authorities may invite successful educators from other regions to learn their successful localized curriculum. Finally, the central government must ensure that local government apply a minimum of 20% of its budgets for education. The funding might help local educational authorities pay teachers' salaries on time as the delay in teacher salaries may affect negatively their work conditions.

Keywords: equality, equity, educational decentralisation,autonomy.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has had a long history of centralized government system since colonization. The new policy of decentralization began in 1999 and has made many changes in policies, including in the education sector. The policy of allowing local authorities to govern themselves is aimed at giving them the freedom to develop their regions. This is in line with the principles of globalization, where, in the era of free markets, individuals are given autonomy to compete to achieve quality. Decentralization is also aimed at encouraging regions to develop, and is considered to have benefits such as efficiency, democracy, accountability, responsiveness to local needs and local empowerment [1]. However, decentralization may create disparity among regions, leading to inequality and inequity in education [2]. This paper provides an exploration of the educational decentralization system in Indonesia and evaluates some of the programs that have been launched to support decentralized education,

particularly local autonomy for local authorities, national school grants and a school-based curriculum. Some recommendations to minimize disparities as consequences of decentralized education are also given.

1. *Educational Decentralization Policies In Indonesia*

Indonesia began decentralization in 1999, the era of reform led by President Bj Habibie. Decentralization is the transfer of decision-making responsibility from central government to local governments such as provinces, municipalities or districts [3]. Autonomy Law 22/1999 [4] defining the decentralization policy was then revised to Autonomy Law 32/2004 [5]. This policy stated that local governments should govern themselves to accelerate public welfare and is the foundation for other decentralization policies in all ministries, including education. Specific educational decentralization policy is stated in Decentralized Education Law 17/2010 [5] on the management and organization of education. Article 2 (Decentralized Education Law 17/2010) [6] states that educational management is to be conducted by central, provincial and district governments and schools. Each provincial government is responsible for the minimum provision of 20 % of its budget for education, increasing the rate of school participation and improving the quality of education in schools by accomplishing minimum standards of education services.

Furthermore, Article 39 (Decentralized Education Law 17/2010) [7] states that schools have the autonomy to manage themselves, initiate school-based management systems, and report to and are accountable to the provincial government. In 2005, to support provincial governments in the decentralization process, the Indonesian Central Government launched a programme of school operation grants, the *Bantuan Operasional Sekolah* (BOS). This policy was based on Article 34 Law 20/2003 on the Education System [8], stating that central and local governments guarantee the implementation of compulsory basic education at primary education level (6 years) and junior secondary school (3 years) without tuition fees. Therefore, as the government guarantees access to basic education, schools receiving the grant may not charge tuition fees. Law 61/2016 [9], which provides the technical guide to the use and liabilities of the BOS, states that the school grant is given to all public and private schools. Therefore, public schools funded by this grant are not allowed to charge students, but private schools are still allowed to set tuition fees to the limit advised by central government.

The amount of annual school grant is based on the number of students: 800,000 IDR/ 61.5 USD for every primary school student and 1,000,000 IDR/77 USD for every junior secondary student (Law 16/2016). However, in schools with a student enrolment level lower than 60, the grant is equivalent to that for 60 students. This aims to anticipate the fixed costs that schools must pay, such as electricity bills, water bills and so forth (Law 16/2016). The grant is designed to enhance the quality of education through the provision of books and teaching materials to facilitate more intensive teaching and learning practices, training for teachers to support their professional

development, and the recruitment of specialized teachers for certain subjects such as computer skills and local content [10]. It is expected that the outcome of grants will positively affect school enrolment, encourage transition from primary to secondary school, and result in lower school dropout rates [10].The decentralization policy also gives schools autonomy in curriculum development, allowing them to develop their school-based curriculum, the *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan* (KTSP). The Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) enacted Education Curriculum Law 61/2014 regarding the freedom of all teachers to develop their school-based curriculum based on national standards and the 2013 curriculum.

National standards for teachers for school-based curriculum design are as follows: Law 20/2016 [11]: standards of competence; Law 21/2016 [12]: standards of content; Law 22/2016 [13]: standards of process, and Law 23/2016 [14]: standards of educational assessment. The regulation of process standards, Law 22/2016 [13], expects teachers to create classroom interaction to be interactive, inspiring, fun, challenging and engaging, so that students will be creative and independent. Teachers are also encouraged to use thematic lessons, promote integrated skills, competence-based learning, student-centred activities, project-based practice, technology-based and diverse cultural acknowledgment and engagement. On the basis of the descriptors of process standards, teachers can develop and adjust the content standards with activities that follow the general guidelines of process standards. The involvement of teachers' participation in curriculum development can give them ownership and help them to become more engaged in their teaching. It also can nurture personal and teacher professionalism [15].

2. *Educational Decentralization*

Globalization, the free movement of goods, products, technology, information and people all over the world, creates strong competition through liberalism or free markets. The free market embraces the quality of products [16], which means that the product should meet standards that allows it to compete with others. Consequently, governments must respond quickly to innovation and decentralization; the distribution of power from central government to local authorities is a way to compete in the free market [17]. According to Lauglo [16], decentralization is in line with the principle of liberalism, in which authority is given to individuals, and is also integrated into educational policies. Educational decentralization refers to delegating the authority and responsibility for managing resources from central government to local authorities and schools [18]. This means that central government gives freedom to local authorities to manage education policies in their regions. Freedom is also given to schools to manage their funding to improve the quality of education. Freedom or autonomy will lead to improved quality of education, as local authorities and schools will be self-motivated to become engaged in the education process.

A decentralization concept that offers autonomy has some virtues that support the goal of quality in education, such as democracy, efficiency, accountability, and

responsiveness to local needs. It can also empower communities; improve quality, and the funds can give incentives for teachers in competition [1]. It is democratic, as it can increase participation in school management: the school is governed directly by communities including principals, teachers, parents and elected participants [19]. In this way, community members have a voice in educational practices that include decisions on the curriculum that match their needs and expectations. Decentralization is efficient as it can reduce costs [20]: decision making is by locals and local governments, not higher level of government which is more costly [21]. Also, decentralization with freedom in decision-making can encourage local communities who are in charge of education to be accountable for their actions to local government [22].

These have a close relationship; and local government scrutiny of the quality of education can encourage members of school authorities to improve accountability. Also, decentralization offers flexibility for schools and local government to manage their funding; the local community and school personnel know best how to use the funds based on priority [23]. In this way, decentralization is likely to encourage school services that match teachers' and students' talents and needs and offer equality in opportunity and equity in treatment, particularly for disadvantaged students [17]. Therefore, in other words, decentralization can allow individuals to reach their potential [24], with equal opportunity for all students to develop based on their talents. However, Samoff [25] claimed that decentralization, despite its strengths, potentially increases inequality of education, as the improvement in autonomy of local government leads to lowered intervention by central government. One example given was that of a case study conducted in Tanzania showing that private schools proliferated, but public schools were unable to meet the demands of society, and, additionally, the system of decentralization encouraged central government to reduce its autonomy.

This indicates that decentralization may hinder national distribution and equality and lead to a greater disparity between good schools and disadvantaged schools, and rich regions and disadvantaged regions [2]. Further investigation showed that representatives of marginalized areas in Tanzania preferred to have a more centralized educational system, while central government tried to limit distribution and give more autonomy to locals under a decentralization policy. Similar contradictions between theory and practice in educational decentralization have also been found in some states in the USA particularly in terms of funding [26]. As the funding comes from district taxes, schools in wealthier districts are better funded than poorer ones. This is one example of how decentralization may result in greater inequities in school funding.Besides funding disparity, decentralization may result in inefficiency. Lyons [27] claimed that inefficiency may be found in sub-national levels of government. Zadja [28] cites an example in Russia where the district administrator misused the budget designated for teacher wages; only 40% of the wages budget was paid to them.

Also, taking the smaller institution to its people in decentralization may bring undemocratic and unaccountable issue.

For example, as local people are given a voice in the decentralization policy, there is a danger that the majority group may be better informed, more vocal and more listened to than the minority group [28]. However, it does not mean that centralized administrators are more sensitive to the minority group; this depends on the intentions of those in power [28]. Thus, although the theory of decentralization aims to enhance equality and equity in education, some examples of practice in the field show that it potentially creates disparity and leads to inequality and inequity in education. However, the consequences of decentralization may differ from one country to another. Bray [29] proposes that any disparity arising from decentralization is mainly due to the lack of readiness of the regions and schools, as well as the unequal allocation of resources. The following is an exploration of the concepts of equality and equity and their relationship with decentralization in education.

3. Concepts Of Equality And Equity In Education

The main concept of both equality and equity represents the principle of fairness [30]. However, due to their similarities, these words are often used interchangeably, but although they have similar principles, equality and equity are different concepts [31]. Equality is about sameness, specifically the same chance for an opportunity, the same payment for the same work, the same mark for the same performance and the same access as others [32]. This concept of equality is based on the notion that all humans are equal and are entitled to be treated equally [33]. Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" [34]. The concept of equality involves equality of opportunity, equality of treatment and equality of results [35]. Equality of opportunity refers to the same chance to achieve goals and improve lives [36]; equality of treatment refers to the same treatments given to the same or comparable situations, and different treatments given to different situations [37]; equality of outcome means that people have equal access to outcomes [38]. Specifically, people should not only have equal opportunity and treatment, but they should also have access to benefits from them; this is what is called as equality of outcome.In contrast, equity refers to fairness and justice [35] in the provisions of benefits, by taking into account individuals' situations [39]. Equity involves fairness of opportunity, fairness of treatment, and fairness of results [40].

However, Salomone [32] proposes that the principle of fairness is subjective, as it requires judgement relating to values that people believe; the values of fairness in one particular social group might be different from others. Thus, there may be different interpretations of something being fair or unfair in particular situations. Moreover, equity is not always equal [40]; greater equity does not necessarily mean greater equality, as it may lead to inequality. Therefore, equality may be inequitable, or equity may be unequal. This brief explanation of the concepts of equality and equity is

followed by an exploration of their application in the education sector. Samoff [25] stated that equality in education refers to the sameness of or no discrimination in educational practices and public policy; for example, ensuring that students are not preferentially treated because of their race, wealth, and origin and have equal access to education such as admission, selection and promotion. Farrell [41] noted that equality in education means equality of access to schooling systems regardless of social group. It also means equality of survival, an equal chance to complete education at primary, secondary and higher levels, and equal output, the opportunity to learn the same things. However, Farrell [41] added one more concept: equality of outcome. This refers to the opportunities for people to have similar lives as a result of schooling, for example, equal status, salary, job opportunities and so forth. This concept of equality goes beyond the school system but refers to equality in the labour market [36].

Therefore, the author of this paper believes that equality in education focuses on access or opportunity, survival and output, but excludes equality of outcome.Equity in education refers to justice and fairness of actions in the educational context [42], specifically, justice in the provision of special treatment and support for disadvantaged students [25]. Paradoxically, such special treatment may lead to inequality, as the principle of sameness of equality may not be applied; therefore, the principle of justice in equity may involve inequality [43]. For example, if girls are discouraged by mathematics and science subjects, special measures may be used to encourage them to select these subjects. In this way, special attention is given to girls to achieve equitable education, but results in unequal treatment for boys and girls. However, although these two terms are different, they are interrelated, as equity is equality in an educational context that takes into account students' differences, social and academic background and family lives [43]. Espinoza [36] offered a summary of the three goals of equity: 'equity for equal needs, equity for equal potential and equity for equal achievement'. Espinoza further stated that equity and equality are considered crucial in education for several reasons: education can enhance an individual's life, as it is a key factor in employment. It is also a non-economic factor: poor health, reduced longevity and unequal results of education such as school failures and dropouts may lead to the risk of dependency, delinquency and crime. All of these will be at a heavy cost for governments (*ibid*).

There are indicators and strategies to provide equality and equity in education, for example, those published by The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland [44]. These are equality of opportunity in education; access to school that can be measured through attendance; participation; choice of schools; access to subjects that include a wide range of curriculum and extracurricular activities; access to facilities that comprise physical access; access to facilities and materials, and access to support that covers teachers, home and community support. In 2008, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [45] developed indicators of equity that can benefit disadvantaged students. These were eliminating grade repetition; managing

school choice to avoid segregation and inequities; providing funding for students' and schools' needs; designing equivalent secondary schools relevant to students' needs and ensuring the completion of students' mandatory education. These indicators of equality and equity in education will be used in this essay to evaluate decentralization policy and practice in Indonesia.

4. Consequences Of The Decentralization Policy On Equity And Equality In Indonesia

Some programs have been launched by the Indonesian government in support of decentralization, such as local autonomy, school operation grants and a school-based curriculum. The following evaluates whether these programs are equable and equitable for students in the school system.

a. Local autonomy

Law 17/2010 on the management and organization of education [45] stated that local governments are responsible for the management of their educational system and the provision of a minimum of 20% of the local budget for education. It also includes responsibility for teachers' salaries. However, the majority of districts allocate more than the compulsory 20% for education, with some even spending 30% to 40% of total funds for education [46]. This response of budget allocation higher than the twenty percent required indicates that decentralization leads to flexibility for local governments to manage their funds to suit their priorities [23]. This may lead to higher bursaries for disadvantaged schools or for students from poor families; thus, local autonomy can support equity as flexibility can promote fairness of opportunity, particularly for students in disadvantaged districts [28].However, in practice, this local autonomy creates provincial and district disparities. Theoretically, although it can ensure that the funds are allocated on the basis of district needs and priorities, disparities of wealth among regions mean that some can allocate a higher budget for education. In contrast, some poor or newly-formed districts cannot afford even the obligatory minimum twenty percent [46]. Furthermore, every district has its own autonomy in managing resources, but disadvantaged districts distant from the centre may be less able to manage. For example, from 2010 to 2013, large numbers of certified teachers were not paid, as local authorities had not allocated appropriate funds in the local [46].

This confirms what has been said by Bray [24] that the disparity in regions might be determined by lack of readiness of local authorities. This incompetence will lead to inequality for educators as they do not have the certification allowance they should receive [47].Furthermore, teachers in remote areas, for example in the Regency of Probolinggo, face other challenges such as lack of resources and facilities and inadequate teacher training [48].This has encouraged some schools to ask for support from parents for the improvement of school facilities, even though most families in that remote area live in poverty and should not be burdened with requests for financial support [48].Although there is no obligation for parents to donate to schools, these

challenges create an even greater disparity in society; people in wealthy regions with good standards of living do not spend their money on school facilities, while people in poor communities or remote regions are asked to do so [48]. In addition, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports that this lack of funding affects the numbers of teachers in rural schools and disadvantaged areas [46]; principals there have reported a greater shortage of teachers than in advantaged schools or in urban areas. It is proposed that this is related to the lack of capacity of disadvantaged or rural areas in resources and management. This reality shows that local autonomy policy may give bad impact to disadvantaged regions as the regions may not be able to provide equal access to facilities and access to support, particularly teachers, to students in their areas [44]. To conclude, local autonomy can create inequality for disadvantaged regions as they lack resources [2].

b.   **School-operation grant**

The effect of this grant on school enrolment in Indonesia has been significant; the rate of participation of primary schools in 2013–2014 was 93.30%, indicating that Indonesia is now close to giving universal access to primary education. There was also a significant increase in participation of junior high schools from 58.6% in 2001 to 76. 5% in 2013 [10]. This means that the school operation grant that gives free access to basic education in Indonesia has promoted greater equity in education, in line with the vision of the World Declaration on Education for All, that of 'universalising access and promoting equity. The school grant has universalized access to basic education for all children and may also promote equity, as children, particularly those from disadvantaged families or remote areas, can now have the same access to education as other children. In this way, they have equal opportunity in education [41].Similarly, this grant policy meets the dimensions of equity in education as stated by Field, Kuczera, and Pont [49], namely fairness and inclusion. *Fairness* means that personal and social circumstances, such as gender, economic status and ethnic origin do not hamper an individual's access to education, while *inclusion* means that there is a minimum standard of education for all.

The school grant ensures fairness: all Indonesian students have a basic education without tuition fees, which may be barriers for disadvantaged children. Also, as schools get grants so that they can improve facilities and services, there should be an improvement in education standards. Thus, open access to quality education should now be available to all children in Indonesia.However, open access has not yet been entirely achieved, as students are still obliged to pay for books and uniforms in some regencies [50]. This may hinder children from disadvantaged families from access. According to a 2013 report by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) [51], 2.4% of children of primary school age do not attend any school because of poor family economic circumstances. Therefore, there is still inequity of access for children to basic education in Indonesia despite the provision of school grants. This is not only influenced by personal circumstances, but also by broader

contexts, for example, geography and district factors [10]. In 2013, the rate of enrolment for primary schools in urban areas was 98.5%, whereas in rural areas it was 96.8%.

The disparity is even greater at secondary school level: 85.7 % of children attend secondary school in urban areas while the only 74.4% attend in rural areas, a gap of more than 10% [51]. This indicates that children in rural areas have more limited access to education than children in urban areas, and the management of school grants needs to improve to facilitate children in disadvantaged areas. The disparity is also greater between wealthy and disadvantaged regions. The former can allocate the full 20% of their budget for education, or even top up local funds by 30 % to 40% to give additional income for schools, while poor newly-formed districts are unable even to allocate 20%. Lastly, children who live in remote areas have limited access to education because of the scarcity and high cost of transportation [51]. To conclude, this school grant program is equable as it gives students the same access to school [44]. Nevertheless, it is not equitable as all students get the same amount of school grant; disadvantaged students should get more provision of grant to support their learning resources [52] so that they have equal opportunity to achieve.

c. **School-based Curriculum**

The devolution of authority in educational decentralization in Indonesia is also reflected in the school-based curriculum. Indonesian education officials encourage teachers to craft their creative teaching strategies by using national curriculum guidelines and allocating twenty percent of subject matter to local values [53]. However, national curriculum and local content adjustment representing centralization and decentralization respectively show dual and contradictory roles of government. Daun [54] claims that on the one hand, the state should provide mass education for the country and achieve competitiveness in education by maintaining national standards such as assessment and the curriculum, namely, centralization. On the other hand, the state has now restructured policy to encourage decentralization for schooling to encourage equal access to education or equity, student participation and increased diversity [54]. Jansen [55] argues, however, that the state still controls education, particularly the curriculum, as this contains its objectives, norms, values, and direction. Avalos-Bevan [56] argues that control over the curriculum is because of the need to improve standards linked to global economic competitiveness [57].

This means that the state encourages quality of education in order to prepare its citizens for global competition, as education can affect its economy. For example, education can help individuals into work, thus addressing the problem of unemployment, which is a concern for any state. In Indonesia, some regions have adjusted their unique community context to their curriculum. For example, a school in Bali decided to include tourism in its curriculum, while a school in Java created lessons on agriculture. In this way, teachers upheld the quality of learning by following national standards of competence, content and process designed by central government.

Accordingly, the national curriculum can offer equal opportunities, particularly access to subjects that meet the quality of the national standard, no matter in which school students learn [44]; this means that national curriculum is equable. A school-based curriculum that adopts local values will be relevant to students' contexts and needs and will increase levels of completion; therefore, this decentralized curriculum is equitable [10].

However, in practice, Indonesian teachers have shown little interest in developing the curriculum [53]. Educators do not always adopt the autonomous role designated by central government but prefer to wait for their superior's instruction to carry out curriculum revisions. This means that there is a mismatch between the expectations of central authorities and local realities. This mismatch was somewhat minimized with the introduction of teacher professional development programs, although Surakhmad [58] reported that these were still inadequate to enable teachers to respond to the national curriculum. The situation is even more acute in remote or rural areas; the distance, far from local government, affects the frequency of supervisory visits, educators lack in-service training, and there is poor teacher engagement [3].

This lack of training has created variation in interpretations of central government guidelines that result in confusion and chaotic implementation at the local level [59]. Furthermore, a lack of knowledge of how to develop their own school-based curriculum means that educators retain their old teaching materials and practices that emphasize mastery of basic knowledge, where students simply memorize facts and content [60]. However, despite this lack of training in some local areas, some other local authorities, such as Bali and Banten, have had positive responses to the school-based curriculum by localising it and giving directives to teachers [61]. The local authorities claim that the decentralized curriculum allows them to take quick decisions, as they do not need to wait for a response from the Ministry of Education. They also believe that, as locals, they know what best suits students in their area [62]. Therefore, decentralization facilitates both effective education and the needs of local communities [1]; decentralized curriculum development is equitable as it matches to students' need and this will lead to completion of students' basic education [52]. Nevertheless, local authorities should be proactive to facilitate teachers through trainings to have more practices in their own curriculum development.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Indonesian government has made positive efforts to change its educational system from centralization to decentralization. Some programs also have been launched to support decentralization; these are intended to open equal access all students in education and minimize disparity, particularly for disadvantaged students. However, in reality some practices do not match expectations. Therefore, this paper offers some recommendations for future improvements to the policy of decentralized education.

Firstly, more support needs to be given to disadvantaged areas such as rural and remote regions [25]. These have the least attention from both central and local government in terms of resources, supervision and training, although they need most attention because of their disadvantaged geographical position and low levels of community income. Support could be in the form of the provision of higher school grants for each student, transport bursaries for students and teachers, and the provision of learning facilities similar to those in urban areas. In this way, the government can provide equity or equal opportunity for students to access quality in education, thus ending the disparity between urban and rural schools. Implementation of these measures would mean that rural students have access to achievement equal to their urban peers [46].

Secondly, local governments must be active and responsive in engaging teachers through the provision of professional development programs. Inviting experts to conduct training can help teachers to incorporate the national curriculum into their teaching practice. Local authorities can also invite educators from other regions that have successful localized their curriculum so that teachers can learn directly learn from their peers' experiences. Furthermore, training is not only about lecturing and sharing, but also how educators put the knowledge they gain into practice. Bjork found that Indonesian educators are lack of practices in translating the national curriculum and local content into their lesson plans [53]. Through practice, they will be exposed to developing their lesson plans creatively to encourage students to reach a higher order of thinking, and not merely learn the basic concepts that rely on memorizing facts. In this way, disparity among schools and regions in terms of quality of local curriculum can be minimized.

Finally, central government must ensure that the minimum of 20% of local government budget is allocated for education. Furthermore, there needs to be improvement in supervision of the allocation of funding so that educators are paid on time. Any delay in paying teachers' salaries will affect their work conditions, resulting possibly in absenteeism and teachers taking on extra jobs. This will also negatively affect students' participation [10]. Low participation any one district will have a negative effect on the future availability of an educated workforce, with consequent unemployment and reduced life chances for individuals [31].

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