

Indonesian Education and the Challenge of Student Drop Out

(February 5, 2009)

Education in Indonesia is under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education of Indonesia (*Departemen Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia, or Depdiknas*). Indonesia recognizes the right to education and supports access to education for citizens aged 7 - 15 (Law No. 20, 2003).

Structurally, the level of education can be divided into three categories: primary, secondary, and tertiary education.

1. Primary education, consists of Kindergarten and Elementary School.
 - a. Indonesian children typically attend kindergarten (*Taman Kanak-kanak, or TK*) from the age of 5 to 7. With more than 49,000 kindergartens, the majority of kindergartens are private schools.
 - b. Children ages 6-12 attend elementary school (*Sekolah Dasar, or SD*). Since this level of education is mandatory, most of the 30,000 elementary schools are public schools.
2. Secondary education, consists of Junior High School, High School, and Vocational School.
 - a. Junior high school (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama, or SMP*) is a 3-year program. After graduation, students can advance to high school or vocational school. Approximately 22,000 junior high schools are operating with a balanced ownership between public and private sector.
 - b. Students studying at high school (*Sekolah Menengah Atas, or SMA and Sekolah Menengah Umum, or SMU*) are prepared to move on to tertiary education. High school is a 3-year program. Approximately 13,000 schools are under this category.
 - c. Vocational school (*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan, or SMK*) is a 3-year program. Students are prepared to be ready to work after graduation. There are about 4,500 vocational schools in Indonesia.
3. Tertiary education refers to post-secondary education which currently totals about 4,000 colleges and universities.

UNESCO statistics show that the number of school-age population in Indonesia in 2005 was 24,855,000. Of this, about 414,000 children (1.6%) were not enrolled at elementary school at all. More importantly, approximately 15% of students who enter elementary school leave school before reaching the final grade (Ai Shoraku, "Educational Movement toward School-based Management in East Asia: Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand," UNESCO, 2008). The Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its concluding observations on Indonesia in 2004 expressed concern on the drop-out issue and recommended effective measures to decrease the drop-out rate ("The Relationship between Education and Child Labor", in www.hrw.org).

The drop-out issue is mostly a financial matter. Tuition fees and other school costs forced some students to drop out of mandatory education (elementary and junior high schools). The other school costs include infrastructure fees, books, supplies, uniforms, shoes, and transportation fees. It is not uncommon that textbooks change yearly, requiring families to purchase new books for each child. Another minor reason for dropping out of school is because parents simply prohibit them from schooling because they have to help parents working to support the household.