DEVELOPING LITERACY

A Case for Indonesia

Indonesia Assessed

Adult Literacy

A 2016 survey measured the literacy levels of 15 to 65 year-olds around the world. While the OECD average was 268, Indonesia scored significantly lower at 200, being the lowest scoring country in literacy. Indonesia also had the largest percentage of adults (69.3%) below Level 1 proficiency, the lowest level at which adults can only master short and simple texts[12].

Child & Youth Literacy

The 2006 and 2011 PIRLS for fourth graders revealed that Indonesia scored 41st and 42nd out of 45 countries, respectively, while in the 2009 PISA 15-year-olds ranked 57th out of 65 countries in reading[8].

Early Child Literacy

The 2014 EGRA measuring basic reading skills revealed that 5.9% of second graders could not read any words with nearly half of students reading fluently with at least 80% comprehension[8]. However, rural areas and fewer years of pre-school significantly lowered results, signaling the variation present within the national data[8].

The global state of literacy

Globally, over 250 million children at primary school age are unable to read, write or count at the lowest learning standards[1]. Results from reading assessments around the world have revealed that—despite the general boost in enrollment rates[2]—a majority of students in many low-income countries are unable to read any words in their language of instruction within the first few years of schooling[3]. Yet literacy, and lack thereof, has a clear impact on societies and countries beyond in-school performance. Developing an adequate level of literacy in the early childhood years plays a key role in the later educational success of children as well as overall economic productivity and growth[2]. Thus, development in early childhood literacy becomes a key education target, especially for developing countries.

What is so important about literacy?

At its most basic level, literacy can be understood as the ability to decode the written word and comprehend what is decoded[4], reading at a level of fluency and with a stock of vocabulary that aids this comprehension[2]. Knowing how to read and write are basic skills that a child needs to perform well in as well as out of school. They allow a child to absorb information and knowledge and provide the means to becoming an engaging citizen and increasing economic growth in a country[3]—a 10 percent increase in the share of children attaining basic literacy can raise a country's annual growth rate by 0.3 percent[5]. Studies have also

Testing first graders

In October 2016, Yayasan Tunas Aksara adapted the EGRA to test the basic literacy skills of grade 1 students in Jakarta, Indonesia. The test consisted of a series of subtasks measuring reading, writing, and comprehension skills. Data was collected from:

- 240 grade 1 students in 5 schools with children from poorer backgrounds

Literacy trends

On average, grade 1 students could read half of a connected text, with nearly one third unable to read any words and only 40% able to read sufficiently (≥ 80%). Only 30% could sufficiently comprehend the text with over a third showing no comprehension.

Those with pre-primary schooling scored slightly higher in most subtasks than those without and two years marginally increased scores compared to just one year.

Disadvantaged children were much less likely to score above the 80% benchmark, both those with one and two years of pre-school, but a second year increased the percentage of disadvantaged students reading sufficiently (≥ 80%).

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revealed that targeting disadvantaged children, especially in their first 5 years of life[6], provides higher rates of return in addition to reducing long-term inequality[7]. It remains, however, that many children in developing countries are not being taught the basic literacy skills that bring these economic and social benefits.

Why develop literacy in Indonesia?

Indonesia possesses the fourth-largest education system in the world with more than 50 million students and 2.6 million teachers[8]. With an education system of this size, Indonesia has the ability to extensively impact the schooling and literacy of millions of children from a young age. While primary school enrollment nearly reached global rates, secondary and pre-primary school enrollment rates sat well below average[9]. Over 40 percent of children had never attended PAUD (early childhood education) in 2010 and those that did often only attended for one year or were more likely to be among the richest 20 percent of households[10].

While increased school enrollment rates illustrate improved access to education, without an accompanying increase in quality children who are able to attend school will not be learning at the right levels. In Indonesia, the quality of primary education had a mere rating of 4.11 out of 7[11]. This low level of educational quality has to some extent been influenced by low teacher qualifications. In 2009, a mere 30 percent of Indonesia's teachers met the minimum degree qualification set by the 2003 Education Law[8]. Raising literacy levels in Indonesia will mean raising the standards at which students are taught and teachers are trained.

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