**THE REASONS FOR THE POOR QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND LOW ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS AT THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF INDONESIA AND UZBEKISTAN**

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**Abstract**

Locating in the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan pays out an enormous portion of its budget and attention to compulsory education in the area. Meanwhile, public education is afflicted by several issues apart from excellence both in the teaching and learning process. However, far in South-East Asia, Indonesia has made dramatic progress on expanding access to education over the last few decades but still, the pupil achievements remain low. The author tried to define the current circumstance of primary education and sought possible solutions for them. Through field surveys and data analysis methods used throughout the investigation. Found data shows that improper infrastructure of government expenditure on education, low salary, and limited quota in pedagogical universities lead to a shortage of teachers in rural areas. The government of Uzbekistan needs further educational reforms in the area of public education, teacher training, and re-training programs, and increasing teachers’ salaries, while the picture is quite dissimilar in Indonesia. School dropouts, shortage of well-qualified teachers, school fees challenge the national education system in the country.

**Keywords:** *public education; academic achievement; poor schooling; Indonesia; Uzbekistan;*

# Introduction

Spending 23.4% of the total budget on primary education does not pay off yet. The academic results excellence is still far from excellence. The government of Uzbekistan is facing major issues such as a shortage of teachers in rural areas, traditional teaching methods, frequently updating textbooks sum up that academic results of the schoolchildren remain low in Uzbekistan.

 The double unlocked country in the heart of Central Asia, the Republic of Uzbekistan is trying to introduce soft skills, like leadership, communication skills in the teaching-learning process in primary schools of the Republic. However, compulsory education suffers much more crucial issues on the way of development of primary education in the country. One of the main outstanding issues in the sphere is an excessive number of pupils in the classrooms. Sometimes, the number reaches 40-45 children, whereas the classroom capacity is designed for 25 individuals, however. It, obviously, troubles the teacher to check up on home tasks and work individually with students. As the population grows, demand for schools increasing dramatically, hence, students must be queued at the Public Service Agency in each region of the country. The government of Uzbekistan has officially granted businessmen the nod to establish private schools.

At the same time, in Indonesia, the quality of education and academic achievements remain low as well. The primary net enrolment rate was 95% in 2012, however (UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2014). Enrolment in secondary school, particularly at the senior level, remains problematic, however. A significant amount of variation in enrolment rates exists across gender, region, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Rammohan and Robertson 2012). The dropouts, the high cost of education, access to school can be elicited as the main causes for poor results in schooling in Indonesia. For Indonesia to meet the Sustainable Development Goals – including ensuring ‘that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education (Unesco and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization 2015), it will be necessary to identify and reduce dropout at all levels of education (Zuilkowski, Samanhudi, and Indriana 2019).

**Background**

**Education in Indonesia**

The Indonesian education sector is the cornerstone for the development of the nation. In Indonesia, schools are overseen by both the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Zuilkowski, Samanhudi, and Indriana 2019). In 2012, more than 18% of government expenditure was devoted to education, a higher rate than the regional average (Unesco and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation 2015). Indonesian youth are required by law to attend primary and lower-secondary school (ages 7–15) (Unesco and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation 2015). These regulations have not resulted in universal enrolment, however. More than 1 in 10 Indonesian students do not complete primary school, and the national gross enrolment ratio in lower-secondary is 89% (Unesco and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation 2015). Research suggests that a portion of this regional variation is due to political conflict at the subnational level, which results in the uneven implementation of free education policies in some areas (Rosser and Sulistiyanto 2013). In Indonesia, formal fees have been prohibited for primary schools since 1977 and at junior secondary schools since 1994 (Zuilkowski, Samanhudi, and Indriana 2019). However, formal and informal user fees continue to be required (Rosser and Joshi 2013). Schools and individual teachers may levy fees to cover building renovations, uniforms, teaching materials, and photocopying, among other things (Aspinall, van Klinken, and Widoyoko 2013). The lack of learning improvement between samples is surprising given the changes in the education system that occurred between 2000 and 2014. This includes implementing decentralisation in 2001 to allow districts more flexibility with introducing innovative education policies and adjusting policy to reflect local context; the 2002 amendment to the Constitution that required 20% of the budget be devoted to education expenditures—resulting in a threefold increase in real education budget; and the 2005 teacher certification policy as a way to improve teacher quality (Beatty et al. 2018). Almost half of the Indonesian parents reported paying uniform fees, while 14% paid book fees (Zuilkowski, Samanhudi, and Indriana 2019). There is little enforcement of the government’s free basic education policy, as many people benefit from the current system, from teachers to high-level bureaucrats (Aspinall, van Klinken, and Widoyoko 2013). For lower-secondary school students, fees can be 750,000 to one million Indonesian rupiah per year (US$57–76) and up to five million rupiahs (US$382) for upper-secondary school (Zuilkowski, Samanhudi, and Indriana 2019). These charges may not cause any difficulties for well-financed families, but for those who live in rural areas and whose parents work in farms or informal sectors, they cannot afford such expenses. Limited access to education in rural areas has contributed to increased urbanisation as families relocate to cities to acquire better education (Sukasni and Efendy 2017). It is obvious, that education contributes to the development of human capital. Based on the Human Development Index (HDI) which was released in 2016 Indonesia’s HDI value for 2014 is 0.684—which put the country in the medium human development category—positioning it at 110 out of 188 countries and territories. Between 1980 and 2014, Indonesia’s HDI value increased from 0.474 to 0.684, an increase of 44.3 percent or an average annual increase of about 1.08 percent (Sukasni and Efendy 2017). It is fact that in Indonesia education has not been well developed yet as the quality of graduates is still low. Besides that Indonesia lacks well-trained teachers in most of the neglected areas of the country. Many teachers are still afraid to be creative and innovative in teaching activities, they have always pursued the curriculum targets, as it is the only sacred handbook for the teachers, whereas the implementation of the learning experience a variety of different situations in each semester and annually (Sukasni and Efendy 2017). The government of Indonesia is creating new policies and programs in Teacher Education to enhance teacher competence and quality. To address the poor performance of Indonesian students on international tests, the GOI (Government of Indonesia) enacted the Teacher Law in 2005 aimed at providing a much-needed incentive for teachers to improve their qualifications and professional skills. Nadiem Makarim, the Minister of education and culture of the Republic of Indonesia, is trying to improve the quality of teachers and education in the republic by devising a new education roadmap to make Indonesia a developed country in 2045. Nadiem Makarim said during the Educating the Nation webinar in Jakarta August 13th 2020:

“The strategy for how to develop the next generation of leaders and the most productive members of society always stems from the education system. This is the highest return on investment that a country can make to actually [improve] the quality and productivity of its labor force and economy.

**Education in Uzbekistan**

Locating in the heart of Central Asia, the Republic of Uzbekistan was colonized by the Soviet Union for 70 years. Over that period, the educational standards have fallen, academic achievements were low, funding was insufficient, Russian was the only language for communication, textbooks, the teaching-learning process was also in the same language. After the independence, in 1991, the Republic of Uzbekistan started to handle it and reform the public education system. In 2017, after the Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to the power, several educational reforms have been done. Such as, the 12-year program changed into 11-years after the previous policy was failed. Uzbekistan educational system includes preschool training (preprimary-from three to six years old), general secondary education (from 6 to 15 years old), secondary vocational education (from 15 to 18 years old), higher education (undergraduate and graduate from 18 years old).

Uzbekistan’s education spending as a share of GDP is one of the highest in the world. Government education spending amounted to 5.4 percent of GDP in 2017 and 5.9 percent in 2018, more than in Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkey, countries with similar incomes, regional peers, and the OECD (Izvorski et al. 2019). About a third of the government budget is dedicated to education, an amount little changed over the last decade. Even relative to the consolidated government expenditures that are twice as large as the government budget, education outlays amount to about 15 percent of total spending, more than the average for Europe and Central Asia and the OECD (Izvorski et al. 2019). In Uzbekistan, girls and boys are legally considered equal and study in the same classes and schools. Schools are open to all ethnic groups, and minorities in schools are rarely an issue (Shaturaev 2014). In the country, the academic year starts on 2 September or the first working day of September. The academic year ends in June for secondary schools and in July for higher education (Shaturaev 2014).

The level of children’s enrollment in general secondary education in Uzbekistan is quite high. According to the State Statistics Committee, the gross enrollment ratio of school-age children (7-15) at general education institutions has varied between 98-99% from 2000 through 2011 and remains stable within that range (Ministry of Public Education 2017).

 Uzbek Government ensures equal educational opportunities for ethnic groups living in the country to choose the language of training; the Government provides textbooks, prepares teachers for the schools where instruction is given in a language of certain ethnic groups (World Education Forum 2015). The Government of Uzbekistan stresses that there’s an urgent need to strengthen the professionalism and capacity of teachers and educational managers to install knowledge in learners, and in particular to foster their independent thinking skills (Ministry of Public Education 2017).

**Research questions**

As specified by the official sources, the Republic of Uzbekistan spends 43 percent of its budget on education (Izvorski et al. 2019), however, the quality of education and academic results are still ground-level compare to other developing countries. In Indonesia, the share of education-related spending among total government expenditures tripled between 2000 and 2013, with education becoming the second largest area of spending after government administration (Sari 2019). Nevertheless, both countries’ educational indicators, in terms of excellence of education and literary rate, are low. This study tries to explore the reasons behind the poor quality of education and low academic achievements at primary schools of Indonesia and Uzbekistan. In this qualitative study, therefore, the author addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the core reasons for the poor quality of education in the country?
2. What are the causes of low academic achievements at school?

**Methodology**

***Sites***

The author selected two sites to maximise richness and accuracy of data, in which to conduct fieldwork – Bandung city, West Java in the Republic of Indonesia, and Tashkent city, Republic of Uzbekistan. In Bandung, SDN Banjarsari was chosen for observation, meanwhile, primary school #291 in Tashkent city was an investigation spot of the research. There are some resemblances between the educational systems of Indonesia and Uzbekistan, both countries direct one-third of their total budget for the development of education. In total, two (2) primary schools have been chosen for comparison as they have similarities in resourcing, access, and issues in compulsory education.

***Data collection and research instrument***

Throughout the research, two stages of data collection; interviews, and analysis of available data. The first stage involved interviews, as the aim of the study to identify the core reasons for poor academic results in primary education of both countries. On account of the Covid-19 pandemic over the world, the interviews were carried out online. The semi-structured interview technique was employed that this style of interviewing allowed the researcher to use both a structured approach as well as a one-on-one style was conducted to answer the research questions. For both sides, school teachers and principals were the main participants of the interview investigation. Over 24 personnel of primary schools were officially interviewed, however, 6 teachers, from both sides, agreed only for an informal discussion. The Bahasa Indonesia and Uzbek language were used for interviews. The themes explored included: what is or are the core reason(s) for poor academic results; why government investments in education do not pay off; what is/are your recommendation for enhancing the quality of education and the academic results at the primary education level. The interview data were analysed by using Atlas.ti software (version 8.4) to cooperate within the analysis of the data.

**Results and Discussions**

**Research question 1: *What are the core reasons for the poor quality of education in the country?***

The head of the department of Teacher training and re-training of the Ministry of Public Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Makhmudov Miraziz, claimed that currently, 501.000 teachers educating schoolchildren in 10090 primary schools in the Republic of Uzbekistan. GOU expends 24.4% of the state budget on education, most of which is squandered on training and retraining of teachers. He said ‘We still face multiple issues on enhancing the quality of public education: insufficient funding, inefficient and ineffective financing system, corruption, outdated curriculum, and student assessments, shortage of well-qualified teachers, and antiquated teacher training and re-training programmes.’ In Uzbekistan, school lecturers once in every five (5) years have to go through a so-called national certification programme. It is a part of the teacher training policy. The teachers spend a month at the in-service training centres to enhance their knowledge and experience, and at the end, they have to submit their qualifying work on an independent topic. A deeper analysis shows that final qualifying works can be purchased by teachers in a ready-made form. ‘However, no one cares about plagiarism. Corruption starts at in-service training centres’ says Makhmudov Miraziz.

 Another crucial issue is the quality of textbooks. School textbooks are updated every 2-3 years. Firstly, school lecturers are unaware of the innovations introduced in the newly published textbooks and secondly, parents have to buy them that have been updated up to 3 times during the 9-year school year. The Education Center under the Ministry of Public Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which is responsible for updating and publishing school textbooks, keeps only pedagogues who have come for in-service training up-to-date about changes and new teaching methods. This means that the school instructor has to wait 5 years to become familiar with the new teaching methods, formulas in the updated book. In the Covid-19 pandemic period, the Ministry of Public Education switched into online training and re-training regime. The author himself, personally, took part in the preparation and shooting of online video lessons for school pupils which were broadcasted through local TV channels. Besides, including the author, master class video lessons have been formulated and upload on a newly established online platform for school teachers. Most tutors still use a traditional method of teaching as it was inherited from the Soviet Union.

In contrast, education is the foundation of the development of the nation in Indonesia. Since the quality of education is closely associated with the classification of human resources, currently Indonesia's human resources are imperfect, however, it has enormous natural resources and boosting economic indicators. The GOI has done massive endeavours on enhancing the quality of education, tremendous improvements in teacher qualification and certification. Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia, unlike in Uzbekistan, provides several grants for pedagogue upgrading and, teacher certification programmes. As Indonesia has widespread territory, in most of the neglected areas there is still a shortage of teachers. In some cases, the math teacher, for instance, has to substitute Bahasa (Indonesian language), the teacher. These cases might be met outside of Jawa island, mostly in Papua and Kalimantan islands. Teachers sometimes have a propensity to call rote learning, learning components are in short supply. In the Republic of Indonesia as well, there are cases when the funds allocated for education do not reach the required places likewise in Uzbekistan.

Preserving the quality of education is a costly strive that demands expenditures on quality textbooks, school items, teaching materials, and teacher training programmes. According to approximate levels of public spending on education in Indonesia, the low quality of education seems to be connected with inadequate spending on education.

**Research question 2: *What are the causes of low academic achievements at school?***

Gaining almost 100% literacy rate, both for male and female school children aged 15 and above, Uzbekistan is still lacking in academic results in schooling. The interview participants, school educators at Bektemir district of Tashkent city, claimed that the number of pupils is 2 times or even 3 times more than the classroom capacity is designed. Hence, this causes poor consequences in schooling, as there is no enough time to work individually with ones who have some obstacles in mastering. An English teacher of the school Dildora Turakulova said, “There are 43 pupils in the class. I, honestly, cannot afford to check home tasks of each pupil, if I do so then I will run out the time, and a new topic will be left for the next lesson, and lesson exercises cannot be completely done”. This leads to knowledge retardation, hence, parents want their children to stay at school after the lessons, and attend extracurricular activities, such as math and reading. No doubt, extracurricular activities are not sponsored by the school, no state support and the government does not pay extra, except monthly wages only. The school principal says, ‘Every teacher must run the extracurricular activities for young learners”. The families and teachers themselves as well, confirmed that there is nothing free. At least, they have to pay around 30.000 sums (approximately US$3) for each lesson, the cost depends on the quality of the tutor and the subject itself. There are various types of the social spectrum in the community. Most of the families cannot afford those payments. So, their children are excluded from additional training.

In most, urban schools, electronic study diaries have been established for parents’ convenience. They can access e-diaries and read comments on the child’s learning outcomes. On one hand, it helps to track pupils' learning outcomes, but on the other hand, it leads to corruption. Economically well-off families try to bribe, to artificially improve their child’s grades. As a consequence, overcrowding in the classroom, early bribery in primary schools, payments for extracurricular activities can be elicited as the major factors for the low academic achievements in primary schooling in Uzbekistan.

In Indonesia, the picture is quite different. School dropouts, various payments for textbooks, uniforms, and other costs for required items for schooling are the main causes of poor academic outcomes. During the interviews, the school teachers of SDN Banjarsari reported that families have to pay 100.000 rupiah (US$7.10) per textbook. There is a tradition in Indonesian school that on Fridays, pupils have to wear traditional *Batik* shirts both males and females. Besides, on other days of the week, there are special uniforms designed by each school. Sometimes, parents have to choose one of their children to keep schooling, the other ones have to leave the school due to the financial resources of the families who are unable to muster school tuition.

The school principal spoke of some sad circumstances that he came across in the classrooms. He also told about corporal punishments during the lessons. Some school instructors have a cruel attitude towards children. Schoolmasters, sometimes, order those pupils to stand in the corner of the classroom for not wearing uniforms. Meanwhile, there are still supportive teachers who help students mastering school topics after class training. Mathematics teacher of SDN Banjarsari, Hartanti Pungas Baya claimed that there are many poor families unable to afford school expenses for their children: ‘There are a lot of academically talented children in our school, but because of poor economic circumstances, they have to drop out of school to earn money to support their families financially.’ ‘The dropout rate for males outnumbers the females’ she added.

**Conclusion**

Education has and will continue to play a significant role in development. First, it increases an individual's internal potential, self-respect, and self-esteem. Second, it makes an individual a better prospect for employment. Third and most importantly, an educated individual gives more back to society. Unfortunately, the results of education and training are less directly connected to revenue for immediate business growth, which is why the government tends to cut educational budgets. By the end of primary school, students in Uzbekistan were able to identify or recall simple and more obvious information and complete set-out uncomplicated tasks. However, students struggled to identify, interpret and evaluate more complicated information, solve complex mathematical problems and respond to questions that required reasoning and application. Girls performed better than boys in reading comprehension but similarly in mathematics and science. Children in urban areas performed better than those in rural areas in mathematics and science but not in reading comprehension. Children who had access to books and were immersed in a culture of reading and learning at home performed better on every test compared with children lacking access to reading aids. Having the physical infrastructure at home to enable study (e.g., a desk) also enhanced learning. Better test scores were achieved by those students whose families had provided them with early learning and literacy experiences, for example, by reading books, telling stories, and singing lullabies to them. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, schoolchildren who felt supported by their family, and who were either rewarded or reprimanded for their school performance, also achieved higher scores. Children who had attended a preschool before starting primary school performed better than those who had not. Furthermore, those children who were educated in the same language as spoken at home performed much better than children whose school and home languages differed. The author believes that future drives of both countries will face excellent education which is of vital importance in their future lives very soon as both countries are paying more attention than other aspects of the government development program.

**Recommendations**

***Suggestions and solutions elicited issues to improve primary education in both countries***

* Reform the curriculum, the methods, and practices used in teaching in a primary school in Uzbekistan.
* Apply the new national learning achievement survey regularly to review education system quality.
* Reform the development of the teacher workforce.
* Expand preschool education to maximize school readiness and learning in primary school.
* Create in schools a friendly and enabling environment for learning through initiatives such as the Child-Friendly Schools initiative.
* Focus on the school community, including parents and families, to create greater awareness of and accountability for learning outcomes.
* Improve the resources and achievements of low-performing schools.
* Strengthen the education sector’s monitoring and evaluation system through continuous and comprehensive evaluations, so that planning and programming are more evidence-based.

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