

## **Research Idea**

### **Education System during Covid-19 – A Comparative Study in the United States and Indonesia**

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**Abstract:** Every nation-state has a distinctive global policy context that governs and regulates the guidelines based on the prevailing system. Education, as one of the primary aspects of human life, also operates diversely in every nation-state. This paper uses the comparative method to compare education policies between Indonesia and the United States. Specifically, the comparative design in this paper will focus on Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) since Indonesia and the United States are more different in terms of policies and governmental systems.

This paper will assess similarities between the two by highlighting three categories using a head-to-head comparison approach, including the educational reform process in both countries by describing the contextual elements of education reform over time, the actors involved, policies introduced over time, and national culture elements.

This component also points out how Covid-19 alters the education policy and the actions of

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actors and stakeholders. The second comparison point is the impact of Covid-19 on online learning regarding the reformation of the education system using digital devices. E-learning pedagogy as a teaching method during the pandemic will be examined as a remarkable improvement in the education system during Covid-19. Finally, the comparison in the politics of education policymaking in both countries will show the details of the federal role in education in the United States and the national governmental role in Indonesia.

## **Introduction**

Rizvi and Lingard (2009) argue that educational systems worldwide have undergone significant changes over the past two decades. Educational policies have been influenced by the development and reformation in diverse sectors, including political, economic, and social, along with the educational priority amid globalization. Since stakeholders govern and practice New Public Management, the educational policies improve and develop and negatively influence educational reform trajectories in various ways and at different levels.

The remarkable improvement in the education system is that the Internet is expansive to encounter and enhance the educational experience in diverse ways. On the one hand, the Internet offers multitasking platforms and information for students and provides virtual communication between teachers and students in online classes. On the other hand, many challenges in the education system have been ameliorated in governance, autonomy, politics, access, equity, quality, and economics, specifically during Covid-19. Figure 1 depicts how the coronavirus outbreak impacted each level of education in most countries that have

enacted educational policies regarding digital (internet-based) or broadcast (TV-or-radio-based) remote learning (UNICEF, 2020).

The most common action focused on digital instruction, which 42 percent of countries used for pre-primary education, 74 percent for primary education, and 77 percent for upper secondary education (Figure 1). Many countries have also developed broadcast curricula, especially for primary and lower secondary students. Overall, 94 percent of ministries of education analyzed set policies regarding providing at least one form of remote learning that involved digital and broadcast instruction, though only 60 percent provided this type of policy for the pre-primary education level (UNICEF, 2020).

This paper will specifically compare the education system regarding digital learning during Covid-19 in Indonesia and the US. The reformation of the educational system, including teaching methods, will determine the achievement in both countries by formulating policies and addressing the issues during the improvement.

### Head-to-head comparison

#### *Comparison 1: The educational reform process*

The fundamental relations between the national and the subnational levels of government in the US are federal states. Cavalli (2017) points out that federalism in the United States has evolved and altered over time and assumes the future of federalism may be dynamic depending upon the United States Supreme Court's choice to adjudicate cases included in the power distribution in government. Cavalli (2017) contends American political system in the early nineteenth century was individualistic, pragmatic, hardworking, freedom-loving, and dynamic, among other qualities. On July 4,

1776, after the Declaration of Independence was confirmed, the United States Constitution was revered as a document consisting of the framework for a democratic republic. The Constitution is brief, flexible, and open to interpretation and provides both the theoretical and practical government structure (Cavalli, 2017).

The United States education system was highly decentralized from the nineteenth century's substantial schooling and literacy levels (Goldin, 1999). The educational model began in New England school organizations and was adopted by many states. Goldin (1999) affirms that United States literacy rates were incredibly high, and many educational concepts and institutions were adopted from Europe but designed distinctly American ways. Then, school districts became popular in the twentieth century with independent decision-making powers. In 1867, the Office of Education was established and began to collect data on education from the states. The education stages in the United States transform over time by the three transformations of instruction in primary or common school (elementary school), secondary or high school, and tertiary or higher school. All three levels bring different approaches during the period. The first transformation measured the youth through common or elementary school (eighth grade) in the nineteenth century. The second transformation brought most children to secondary or high school in the twentieth century. The third transformation, which is still ongoing, is getting the majority of young adults through four-year higher education.

Conversely, Indonesia is a unitary state with a presidential democracy system where one elected official serves as head of state and head of government (Raadschelders and Vogoda-Gadot, 2015). In 1945, the Indonesian

government experienced a massive wave of being an independent country that emerged with the end of the colonial era after World War II. Indonesia struggled to be colonized by the Dutch for over three centuries and Japan for over 3.5 years. Colonialism impacted Indonesia's national and local government system, which coincided with the Dutch governmental system. Accordingly, the education system in Indonesia was influenced by colonial powers by the Netherlands, Japan, and several European countries such as Portugal and Spain. Generally, the schools founded by the Dutch were religious-based and focused on the nobility.

In contrast, the Japanese colonial era provided *Sekolah Rakyat* (people's schools) for primary education, secondary education, and vocational schools for teachers and all indigenous citizens. Following this, Ki Hajar Dewantara and his acquaintances became the pioneers of the education system in the post-colonial era. During the New Order era, when Indonesia was emerging from the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the Indonesian government launched the curriculum of 1994 used by the national education system quarterly with the division into three stages: primary, secondary, and higher education. In 2004, the curriculum changed to a Competency-Based Curriculum, an assessment of students based on a concept of student activity facilitated by teachers per semester. In 2006, it was changed to the Education Unit Level Curriculum, allowing local governments to develop learning methods according to their regions without changing national education standards.

In 2019, since coronavirus cripples all aspects worldwide, the primary consideration is maintaining the education system and supporting students to study comfortably during the pandemic. In response to the

pandemic, the Indonesian government enacted an online education policy based within the country. Similarly, numerous schools and universities in the United States have decided to run the classroom virtually via Zoom and online as the impact of the spreading of Covid-19.

While the US embraces an online education system, advanced technology, and facilities, Indonesia strives with a shortage of devices and uneven internet coverage. Ultimately, some rural areas need to implement the virtual classroom method and online modules system to deal with the online system, including the potential of technology in Indonesia.

### *Comparison 2: The politics of education policymaking*

As one of the world's major Muslim countries, Indonesia runs the law-and-order regime as a bureaucratic-prominent system focused on maintaining political stability in the late twentieth century until moving toward becoming a democratic system (Heady, 2001, as cited in Raadschelders and Vogoda-Gadot, 2015). As a democratic state with 34 provinces as the administrative territory, Indonesia implements decentralization and regional autonomy to balance centralized power to create equality, effectiveness, and accountability in the government process. The national government centralizes the policy system; for example, education policymaking is decided by the national government, while the province and local government will implement the law, which can be referred to as regional regulations according to the conditions of each region. This centralized education system generated the same curriculum, resulting in inequality due to different accessibility and facilities in every part of the archipelago. Nowadays, education policy is monitored by the Ministry of

Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The education system will be reformed over time with the alteration of methods and techniques in the education aspect.

The Constitution of the US differentiates the federal government into three branches, with each type contributing a specific function within the system. Each component has the authority to check up on the other two to ensure every individual or group will have equal power, known as the system of checks and balances. They design and outline proposed laws, confirm, or reject presidential nominations for heads of federal agencies, federal judges, and the Supreme Court, and have the authority to declare war (USA.gov, 2022). Known as a superpower country, the US presidential system prefers decentralization and democracy to efficient citizen control over local government (Denhardt et al., 2014, as cited in Roberts, 2019). The system's centerpiece is elections in which all eligible Americans will have the right to vote. The US embodies a strong state that guarantees citizens' security and protection, both internal and external also can resolve some constraints in diverse aspects. The US political culture contains traditions, values, and customs that influence the political system. Practically, citizens voting in the elections symbolize several principles, including liberty, democracy, equality, and pluralism. The polls also occupy political equality regardless of gender, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation.

Interestingly, while the education system in Indonesia is centralized, the education system in the United States is decentralized, with jurisdiction over federal, state, and local levels due to its history and approach to governance. States have primary authority over education

to make critical decisions about the number of school days, academic content standards, testing, graduation, teacher certification, and many more while passing on some authority to local districts and school boards. At the same time, the federal government plays an influential but limited role (Kober & Rentner, 2020). About 47 percent of public school revenues come from the state level, 45 percent from the local level, and a little more than 8 percent from the federal level. For K-12 schools, only about eight percent of funding comes from the federal government, and fundamental curriculum decisions, educational standards, and requirements for graduation are set at the state and local levels (Team XQ, 2021).

### *Comparison 3: The impact of Covid on online learning*

The Covid-19 outbreak drastically altered how students were educated. Society must exercise enormous self-control to stay at home during the COVID-19 outbreak. The advice to avoid crowded locations, shutdowns, quarantines, and specific health-recommended activities forces policymakers to race on educational decisions to seek online learning as the best response. Moustakas and Robrade (2022) explain that in distance learning, e-learning became the primary method of instruction for many education institutions during the global COVID-19 pandemic, with one global survey indicating that 85 percent of universities used e-learning as their teaching model. Ananga (2020) affirms that online and e-learning have become the preferred modes due to the flexibility they offer concerning space and time by permitting advanced interactions between instructors and learners and ease of access to learning resources during the crisis of coronavirus. E-learning as online education is the self-paced or real-time delivery of training

and education over the internet to an end-user device.

According to e-learning statistics (2022), the percentage of students in the United States equipped with digital learning tools is about 45 percent of elementary students, 64 percent of middle school students, and 63 percent of high school students. Administrators stated that up to 70 percent of online classes could be taken without orientation. Most families in the US used online educational tools to assist their children in finishing the academic year from home during the coronavirus outbreak. It is seen in Figure 2 that better-income households with children used internet resources at a greater rate than lower-income households.

For example, 85.8 percent of individuals with children in families with an income of \$100,000 or more reported using Internet resources for distance learning. In comparison, only 65.8 percent of individuals in households with less than \$50,000 and 76.5 percent of adults with \$50,000-\$99,000 stated their children used internet resources. On the other hand, low-income houses reported consuming paper materials brought home from school at a higher rate than high-income households (Kevin, 2020).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is a transformation of certain in-person classes into online classes. The Indonesian government designed some methods to facilitate learning, especially in rural areas, by creating WhatsApp groups, Google Suite for education, the Ruang Guru program (teacher's room application), and Zoom meetings (Atsani, 2020). Accordingly, concerning the situation and conditions during the pandemic, teachers or lecturers must be critical in choosing learning media use in the learning process based on

their needs. Figure 3 depicts an online learning survey during the pandemic in Indonesia.

A percentage of 42 respondents were satisfied with using online learning media, whereas 58 percent were dissatisfied with the use of online learning media. Although earlier data suggest that 58 percent of respondents are eager to use online learning, fewer than half are satisfied with online media usage. There are various reasons, including teachers unfamiliar with distance learning, providing facilities and digital devices, quotas utilized when adopting online learning, and less favorable ambient circumstances while using online learning media (Simatupang et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, there are challenges in fully adopting such good practices or models, even under normal circumstances. E-learning is generally more time-consuming for the instructor, for instance, increased preparation time, managing questions outside of the online course setting, and grading online material (Moustakas & Robrade, 2022). Another issue is that Covid-19 impactst the students' mental health. A survey of 12,033 students on seven US campuses asked whether mental health impaired their academic performance for more than six days in the previous four weeks. Students reported that their mental health negatively impacted their academic performance by 30.5% from March through May 2020 (C&EN, 2021)

Compared to the US, the Indonesian government faces various obstacles to implementing the virtual classroom method, including the potential of technology. In contrast, schools in rural areas cannot implement the online system. Figure 4 illustrates Indonesia's provinces that have embraced online learning, with just 1 percent using in-person classes nationally.



According to the statistics, five provinces have not adopted online learning: Aceh Province (almost 20 percent), Papua Province and Maluku Province (nearly 15 percent), North Sumatra Province (almost 10 percent), and West Papua Province (almost 5 percent). Since practicing e-learning during Covid-19, the primary cause is that many schools have the insufficient infrastructure and lack technological readiness and access to the online library, literature sources, and lecture materials. Furthermore, the students who do not have mobile phones or laptops will attend manual learning, where the teachers deliver materials and assignments to the student's houses, or students will go to the teacher's house. It mostly happens in the Eastern part of the country.

In terms of funding in education, each nation offered education funding to sustain the new strategy during the pandemic. The US government invested more than \$263 billion in the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) in March 2020 to prevent, plan for, and react to the coronavirus's effect on education for the nation's students (US Department of Education, 2023). Some of the department's obstacles are oversight, surveillance, the accuracy of data, and reporting (US Department of Education, 2020). In comparison, the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology reallocated a budget of IDR 405 billion or \$27 million for Covid-19 operations. The funding has been adjusted to support the capacity-building initiative for 13 Teaching Hospitals and 13 Medical Faculties to become Covid-19 Test Centers (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2020)

## Conclusion

Since the global policy context of Indonesia and the US is quite different, the education system additionally demonstrates distinctions. The remarkable point is that the US embraces a decentralized education system that allows federal, state, and local governments to enact their education laws. Conversely, the Indonesian education system is more centralized, forcing province and local governments to implement the same education regulations.

The educational reform process in Indonesia and the US has been transforming with different historical approaches. Indonesia's education system is influenced by colonialism, improving gradually to an upgrade framework within the country. The US educational system also has colonial influence in its evolution, yet more flexible with advanced academic concepts and institutions. The distinction between history and actions is a strategy for producing the appropriate outcomes in each country's educational system.

As the coronavirus challenges the education system in both countries, e-learning pedagogy offers the most significant positive impact on learning methods for teachers and students. While the US facilitates e-learning all over the states along with the accessibility of technology and education facilities, the Indonesian e-learning method still witnesses many challenges regarding the lack of infrastructure and accessibility to the online library and literature. Digital inequality, such as access to computers and the internet, has been commonly observed in lower-income families less likely than higher-income households to have internet connectivity and computer availability.

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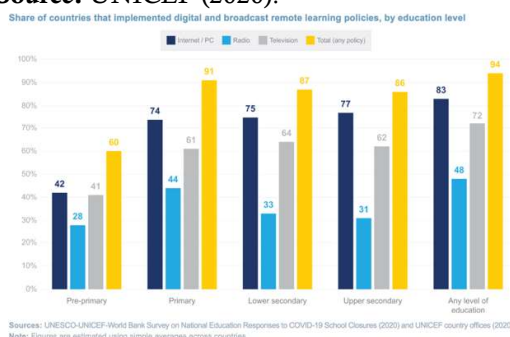
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## Appendix

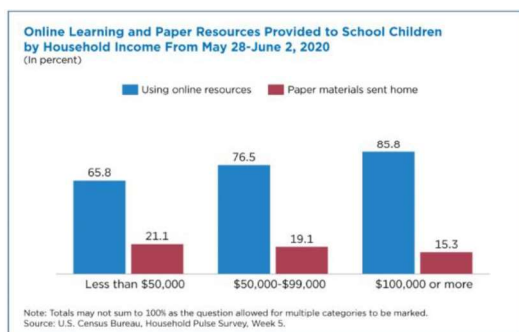
**Figure 1:** Share of countries that implemented digital and broadcast remote learning policies by education level.

**Source:** UNICEF (2020).



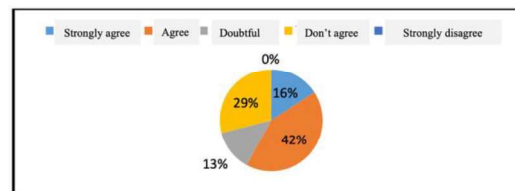
**Figure 2:** Online learning and paper resources provided to school children by Household Income from May 28-June 2, 2020.

**Source:** United States Census Bureau (2020).



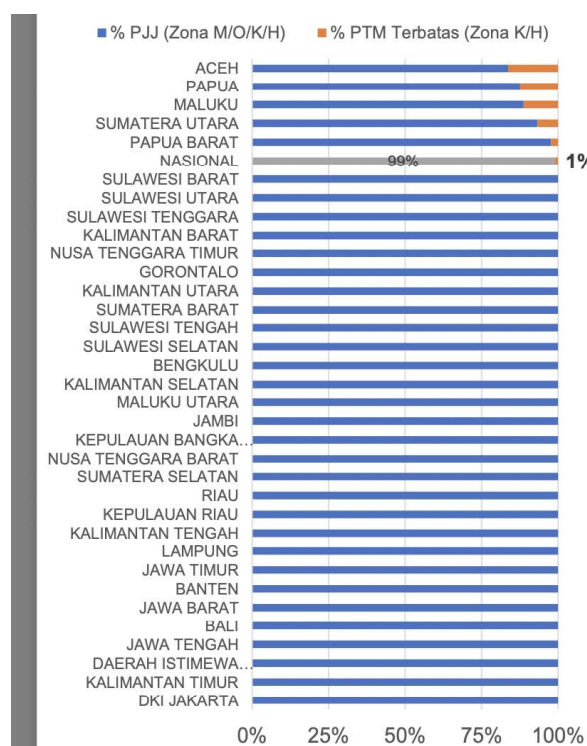
**Figure 3:** Utilizing Online Learning Media.

**Source:** Simatupang, N., Sitohang, S. R., Situmorang, A. P., Simatupang, I. M. (2020). *Efektivitas Pelaksanaan Pengajaran Online Pada Masa Pandemi Covid-19 Dengan Metode Survey Sederhana*. Jurnal Dinamika Pendidikan. Vol.13, No.2.



**Figure 4:** Online Learning by August 2021

**Source:** Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2021)



PJJ: Online learning

PTM Terbatas: limited in-person learning