

System leadership and transforming education:

A reflection from Indonesia's experience in *Merdeka Belajar* (Emancipated Learning)

IWAN SYAHRIL

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This paper is a collaboration between CSE and Google for Education for the Asia Pacific Leadership Symposia. The Symposia bring together education system leaders from across Asia Pacific to share powerful leadership practices that have high impact in education transformation. The Leadership Papers combine insight into new capabilities for system leadership, analyse innovative strategy, and demonstrate the power of digital to transform learning. They provoke, share and support new thinking and innovation in education.



ISSN 1838-8566 ISBN 978-0-6457476-3-8

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Produced in Australia by Centre for Strategic Education
Mercer House, 82 Jolimont Street, East Melbourne VIC 3002

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The series is intended to encourage discussion of major issues in education. Views expressed by the authors do not necessarily represent views of Centre for Strategic Education. Comments on papers are most welcome.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, many countries have been engaged in the effort to transform their education system. The world is changing and so is the landscape of work and society. This change has been attributed to the rapid advancement of communication and information technology, which has been happening at a dizzying rate. Many experts and leaders have pushed for an effort to reimagine education so as to make it much more relevant in response to the change. However, change is never easy. In fact too often we hear about how, despite much effort being made for educational change, the existing situations remain the same.

Indonesia has taken a number of major initiatives to improve the quality of its education system since the early 2000s. These include

1. the provision of school operational funding to all public and private schools to ensure as many children as possible can get access to education
2. the facilitation of a teacher certification program to improve teacher welfare and quality, and
3. the allocation of 20 per cent of the national budget for education to accelerate education development in all areas across the country.

Despite showing some improvement in access to schooling, a range of evidence revealed that student learning outcomes in Indonesia had not shown significant progress.

In 2019 upon his reelection, President Joko Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, strongly emphasised that the focus of his strategy in national development is on human resources. He made an unconventional choice for the position of minister of education by selecting a young tech entrepreneur, Nadiem Anwar Makarim. Mr Makarim was previously known for his transformational leadership in leading Gojek – Indonesia’s, and arguably Southeast Asia’s, most successful on-demand platform providing access to a wide range of services, including transportation, food delivery and logistics. Perhaps Mr Makarim’s experience in leading innovation and system transformation that touched tens of millions of lives in Indonesia persuaded President Jokowi to trust Mr Makarim to do an impossible task, to transform the world’s fourth largest education system.

more than 300,000 schools voluntarily decided to embark on a new curriculum that emphasises the use of project-based learning.

Fast forward to 2023: Minister Makarim has launched many disruptive innovations to transform the Indonesian education ecosystem, under an umbrella policy known as *Merdeka Belajar*¹ or Emancipated Learning. In the past three years Indonesia has been embarking upon what is probably the most radical transformation of its education system in the past thirty years. For instance, Indonesia has completely transformed the way to assess the educational system, from

using high-stakes standardised, content-based tests, into focusing on foundational competencies (literacy, numeracy) and non-cognitive indicators, such as school climate and inclusivity.

Additionally, more than 300,000 schools voluntarily decided to embark on a new curriculum that emphasises the use of project-based learning. This approach requires teachers, across subjects, to collaborate in designing and implementing project activities with various themes, such as climate change, inter-religious tolerance, entrepreneurship and local diversity, etc. Moreover, for the first time ever, Indonesia has unbundled its higher education by allowing university students to have out-of-campus, real-world experience as part of their university credit-earning activities. Up until now, close to 500,000 university students have taken advantage of this opportunity. They embarked on project-based learning in world-class companies or industries: conducting research in world-class social sectors; teaching in schools in remote areas; learning technology skills from thousands of technology-based national and multinational companies; studying abroad in world-class universities; or studying in a different campus in a different region in Indonesia so they learn more about their country.

One might wonder about the reasons for the massive progress in such a short period of time. In the following section I shall share eight key lessons learned for system leadership, drawn from my own reflection as one of the core leaders working directly for Minister Makarim in transforming the world’s fourth largest education system.

Eight key lessons learned for system leadership

Lesson 1: Clarity of purpose from top leadership

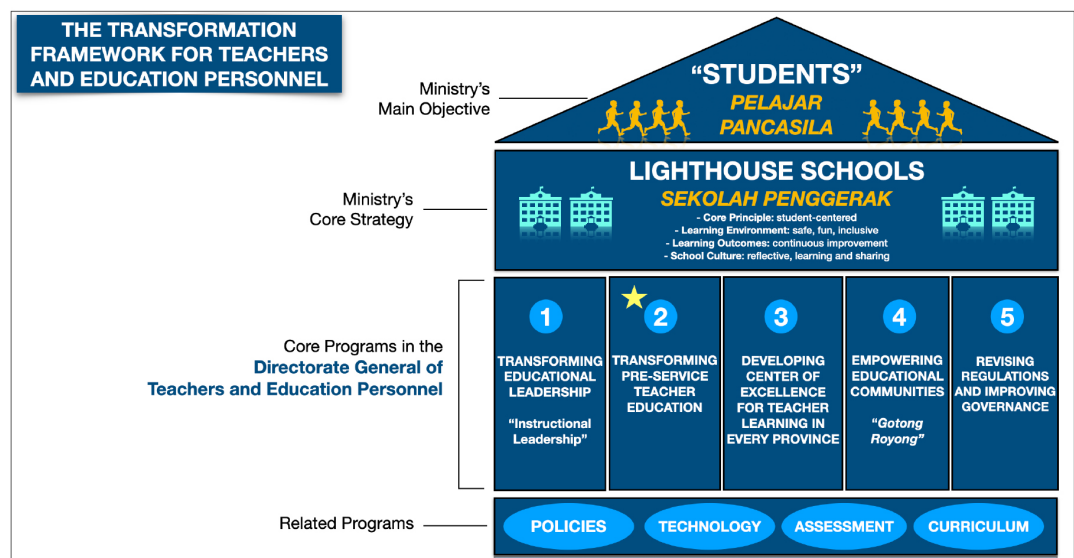
Since the very beginning, the minister exhibited a very strong disposition towards students. He often explained that the improvement of student learning is the ultimate outcome of all our policies and programs. Whenever faced with difficult or dilemmatic situations in decision making, the minister always shows his inclination towards the option that has more benefits for students and their learning.

Communicating this core purpose is key to ensuring all stakeholders understand the direction of the education transformation. We are communicating this both to the internal ministry's staff and also to the external stakeholders. In my role as director general, I created a simple visual of transformation framework (see Figure 1) that is used by my staff as a reference to

make sense of the overall work that we are doing as a team. In this framework it is made explicit that all programs should lead to an improvement to student learning outcomes. Moreover, in my public speaking and engagement, I found out that it is very important to start with the 'why' of the transformation, which centres on students and their learning. The call to action seems to be embraced by many stakeholders when we put an emphasis on this core purpose.

I believe having a clarity of purpose has given our education system transformation not only a sense of direction but also a soul to fight for a common cause. When people understand and agree with the 'why', they will be more likely to take ownership of the transformation. When that happens, system transformation is no longer a government's policy, but has become a grassroots movement.

Figure 1. The transformation framework communicated within the Directorate General of Teachers and Education Personnel (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, Indonesia, 2020)



Lesson 2: Make bold decisions early and commit to them

At the beginning of his tenure, Minister Makarim held intensive discussions with his internal team and external stakeholders. It was concluded that there were a number of deeply-rooted policies that were clearly no longer relevant to the challenges of the current and future world. It was not easy to change these policies because they had a lot of staunch supporters, including some of the country's prominent leaders. However, without hesitation, the minister made bold decisions by changing these policies during his first three months in office, despite the risk of having to face significant pressure from many stakeholders.

The most significant one was to remove the *Ujian Nasional* (National Exam), which consisted of high-stakes standardised tests on a few subjects, namely Indonesian language, mathematics and English. For almost two decades, many critics in Indonesia had pointed out that the high-stakes exams resulted in the type of learning that relied on drilling and rote memorisation, rather than deep and meaningful learning. Teachers spent most of their instructional time to 'teach-for-the-test', instead of growing the whole child. It also created a discrimination among subjects taught in school. More school resources and time were allocated to subjects that were tested in the high-stakes tests. On the other hand, very few resources were allocated for other subjects. Moreover, there were massive cheating practices – even involving educators, because they were very afraid of having their students fail the national exam, which meant failing to graduate. Even high-performing students could fail the high-stakes tests because of the intense pressure not to fail.

As a replacement, a new form of assessment was introduced, called *Asesmen Nasional* (National Assessment). It is a survey-based assessment focusing on literacy, numeracy and non-cognitive indicators such as school climate and inclusivity. Instead of targeting and punishing students, this assessment is used as a system evaluation. The data is collected using a computer-based system, from representatives of students, teachers and principals. The results of the *Asesmen Nasional* are displayed on a national digital platform accessible to every school and local government. This platform has started to help various stakeholders to understand what really matters for their system improvement. More and more schools and local governments are using the data to identify areas that urgently need intervention to improve the quality of student learning. Consequently, the education planning and budgeting will also be based on the analysis of this data.

By making bold decisions early, not only were we able to communicate the direction of the transformation, but we also built a foundation for other policies or programs that needed more time to develop. The decision to discontinue the high-stakes national exam laid the foundation for the development of the new form of assessment (*Asesmen Nasional*) with a new emphasis on foundational learning and character development.

After we conducted *Asesmen Nasional*, we introduced a digital platform displaying results of *Asesmen Nasional*, to be used as a tool for reflection, planning and budgeting, with a focus on student learning. We have now seen early signs of improvement of how schools and local government do their planning and allocate resources. More importantly, more and more stakeholders understand better that resources should be spent more on what matters most, which is for student learning improvement.

The vision and decision, since the beginning of Minister Makarim's tenure in 2019, to focus on foundational competencies and non-cognitive aspects, has made Indonesia more ready to face post-COVID challenges. Many reports made it clear that in order to recover, countries need to focus on foundational competencies, especially literacy and numeracy. Indonesia made this decision before the COVID pandemic and this has made the ecosystem more resilient, both during the pandemic and hopefully beyond.

Another recommendation for learning recovery post-COVID is to pay attention to the most marginalised population. With the data from *Asesmen Nasional*, we are now able to locate which schools or regions suffer learning loss the hardest, and provide a more targeted intervention to them. For instance, we sent more than 15,000,000 high-quality, curated and age-appropriate story books to early childhood centres and elementary schools with the lowest literacy achievement. We also

trained principals, teachers and librarians in these schools about how to engage students in reading. Additionally, we sent more than 90,000 trained university students to help the teachers to improve the quality of literacy and numeracy, mostly in schools that are at the lowest literacy level.

All of these actions can only happen because of the bold decisions that were made very early by the minister. Thus, one key lesson here is that when we know that old policies are obviously no longer relevant, we need to make bold decisions early and commit to them.

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Lesson 3: Focus on key human capital to be the next generation of leaders

Prior to working for Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (MoECRT) I was a teacher education and policy scholar. My line of inquiry centres around teacher learning and teacher change. I understand that meaningful change in education transformation is very difficult to achieve. Yet I have seen perhaps the most transformative change in teacher learning in one of *Merdeka Belajar's* flagship programs called *Pendidikan Guru Penggerak* (PGP), or Master Teachers Program.

PGP is a school leadership training program. The goal is to create a new generation of Indonesian school leaders with a strong disposition towards students. Previously focusing more on administrative duties, the new emphasis in school leadership is on becoming leaders of learning, playing the role of instructional leaders. Each school leader is expected to be a coach or mentor for other educators, especially those in their own schools, on how to teach using a student-centred philosophy. As school leaders, they have to put students and their learning first and foremost in decision making. We believe that investing in creating school leaders with a transformed mindset is very important, because they have direct influence in day-to-day school operations. They will become the change agents on the ground, who lead the fight for students and their learning. Currently there are more than 50,000 *Guru Penggerak* (Master Teachers), and more and more of the *Guru Penggerak* have been assigned as new principals and school supervisors.

The PGP program was carefully designed involving various stakeholders, especially practitioners and practice-oriented teacher educators and education experts with a strong understanding of the complexities of teacher learning in diverse regional contexts and challenges in Indonesia. The ministry also collaborated with the country's leading human resource agency in developing the PGP assessment system, which is based on new competencies that we had previously defined for transformative leadership.

From my observation, the following are typical characteristics of *Guru Penggerak*.

1. **Problem solvers.** When faced with difficult problems or situations, *Guru Penggerak* do not feel powerless. Instead, they are more inclined to find possible solutions with the resources they have around them. They are not afraid to try new ideas and, if it still does not work, they will try a different idea until they can solve the problems.
2. **Collaborative.** In solving problems, *Guru Penggerak* tend to involve their peers or other relevant stakeholders. There is a strong sense of togetherness among *Guru Penggerak*. They help each other with a strong sense of solidarity.
3. **Egalitarian.** The PGP program is situated within 548 regional local governments in Indonesia. In general there are about 20–50 teachers in one PGP regional group. These teachers come from different levels and types of schooling: early childhood education, elementary education, secondary education, special needs schools and vocational schools. I never found any resistance among *Guru Penggerak* to studying together, despite their different school levels/types. This is very rare to find, because what usually happens is that teachers tend to study with peers from the same level of schooling. Teachers from a higher level of schooling tend to look down on teachers from lower levels. During my dialogues with *Guru Penggerak*, they often shared that they really appreciate the opportunities to learn from teachers from different levels and/or types of schooling. Moreover, *Guru Penggerak* also break the feudalistic culture in which age and job ranks usually define who has the bigger authority in social and professional interactions. In the PGP program sometimes the younger educators are the coaches or facilitators, and it does not seem to affect the group dynamics in the PGP program.
4. **Student-centred.** Despite participating in many training sessions previously, many *Guru Penggerak* shared that they did not have a strongly student-centred disposition. The PGP program changed them fundamentally. Many *Guru Penggerak* shared with me that they were very emotional when they learned about student-centred philosophy at the beginning of their PGP program, and to me it felt like a deep and powerful confession. I consider this moment as the most fundamental change during the PGP program because this kind of realisation is key to the rest of the *Guru Penggerak's* learning. The disposition towards students is the most important value, in which educators make sense of their professional purpose and their work, both as teachers and as school leaders.
5. **Lifelong learners.** The length of the PGP program is six to nine months. At the beginning, many *Guru Penggerak* felt that the program would be too long and they were unsure whether they would be able to complete it. Interestingly, after completing the PGP program,

Guru Penggerak usually felt that time had run so fast that they wanted to learn more. The strong desire to learn is very obvious among *Guru Penggerak*. They created many initiatives among themselves, both online and offline, in which teachers can take turns to learn and share with each other, especially in facilitating various strategies for student-centred learning.

6. **Resilient.** There was a major challenge before the PGP program started. We were hit by COVID-19, a global pandemic, in March 2020. The ministry had to change most of our implementation plan including making a 70 per cent component of the program to be implemented online. We were very worried because back then we were very concerned about our teachers' ability in using digital technology in learning. We were unsure whether the PGP program might not yield the expected results. However, our concerns were proven wrong. *Guru Penggerak* showed resilience and perseverance. Despite common struggles with the use of digital technology tools, especially during the COVID pandemic, they did not give up. They tried to find solutions and kept going. By the end of the PGP program, *Guru Penggerak* have become used to using digital tools for learning.

The PGP program seemed to be working very well. Various leaders of local government in Indonesia have praised the quality of *Guru Penggerak* because they help local governments to empower their communities and to lead change in their education ecosystem. With their can-do attitude, their desire to learn, their courage to try new ideas and their passion to help others, *Guru Penggerak* have inspired other educators to be engaged in the *Merdeka*

Belajar movement. Our main task now is to accelerate the assignment of all *Guru Penggerak* to be school leaders and school supervisors. We believe that when we have education leaders with this new mindset in our huge and complex education ecosystem, system transformation will be much easier, because they will be the ones who will work tirelessly to make learning meaningful and joyful for all learners.

Lesson 4: It's the community!

One may wonder why the PGP program, our new school leadership training program, is working. How can PGP graduates from various parts of Indonesia exhibit similar characteristics? From my observation it is not about the individual brilliance of the trainers or facilitators that makes the PGP program work, but it is about the community.

PGP training is managed based on regional local governments. In each local government there is at least one group or more. Each group consists of participants, one coach and one learning facilitator. This group usually forms a strong bond within their group and with other groups in their region. They become a learning community during six to nine months of PGP training. PGP participants often mention that their regional group(s) have become a family-like ecosystem. They feel that they can rely on, support, and trust each other, which helps them a lot when they have to deal with the most difficult circumstances during the program.

Learning from PGP, in mid-2022 we decided to use Professional Learning Community (PLC) as one of the key strategies in the implementation of our new national curriculum, which is called *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Emancipated Curriculum).

Currently the adoption of *Kurikulum Merdeka* is voluntary, yet more than 80 per cent of the total 320,000 schools in Indonesia have already decided to adopt it. Instead of relying on the usual top-down, cascading teacher training model in the curriculum implementation, we use PLC as the core teacher learning strategy. Each school that chooses to use *Kurikulum Merdeka* has to form a PLC in their own school. They are also encouraged to form or to be engaged in PLCs outside their school. Using a special digital platform for teachers called *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* (PMM), all teachers and their PLCs can use the PMM content to study together. They can look into sample modules and/or lesson plans on this platform, including

one consistent finding has convinced us that we are on the right track: students consistently reported that they feel learning is now becoming more meaningful, engaging and enjoyable

those shared by other teachers. The platform also offers professional development activities to help teachers learn the skills needed to implement *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Moreover, the platform has also become a hub for online PLCs; as of June 2023, there are already more than 20,000 online PLCs on *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*.

By promoting PLCs, we redefine what expertise means and where it is situated. Previously, expertise was exclusively owned by university professors with strong theoretical and conceptual framework but lack of the contextual relevance faced by teachers. We now believe that many practitioners actually have ‘wisdoms of practice’ and, in many contexts, this is what teachers really need in their professional learning. PLC, with the help of digital technology, has changed this landscape. Despite some understandable struggles to change, more and more teachers and schools now feel empowered to try new ideas in the new curriculum

implementation. Most of all, one consistent finding has convinced us that we are on the right track: students consistently reported that they feel learning is now becoming more meaningful, engaging and enjoyable when using *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

Lesson 5: Digital technology as key accelerator

As I emphasised earlier, Indonesia has the world’s fourth largest education system. It has more than 300,000 schools with 50,000,000 students and more than 3,000,000 teachers spread across more than 17,000 islands. In order to scale up its ambitious agendas in education system transformation, Indonesia has no option but to use technology. Thus, we embarked on one of the largest digital transformations in government that the country has ever seen.

There are at least three key strategies that the Indonesian MoECRT has used in its approach in utilising digital technology, which are: design and purpose alignment, top-talent recruitment and a user-centric approach. First, it should be made clear that the ultimate purpose of building technology products is not for the sake of using digital technology but to improve the quality of student learning. Digital platforms are intended to help teachers teach the students better and to help administrators simplify administrative duties so they can have more time for students and their learning.

Second, we understand that without having the right people, change is impossible. In the past three years, MoECRT recruited hundreds of millennial talents who left their technology companies to join the ministry’s technology team. They are software engineers, product managers, designers and data scientists, who work

closely with the ministry's leadership team, participating as 'thought partners' in policy and product design from the beginning.

Focusing on a few selected but very strategic targets will increase our chance of success.

Third, we have used a user-centric approach in building technology products. We ensure that we listen directly to teachers, principals and students in the most remote regions of the country, so we build products that are user-friendly and useful enough to be adopted by millions of educators. We believe that the most effective digital platforms unleash the human potential in societies, instead of replacing them. In Indonesia, we envision a bold new future in education, where digitisation unleashes the spirit of collaboration on a scale never before imagined.

Lesson 6: Do not boil the ocean!

As a teacher education and policy scholar, I was trained to consider all elements of a system transformation. Scholars usually have the luxury of time to deep dive into one or a few aspects of those elements and to conduct inquiry on specific questions, relying on the body of knowledge built by other scholars and, finally, using the data sets to come to a conclusion and recommendations for further research. As policymakers, unfortunately, we do not have such luxury. Policymakers need to deal with all elements at once, and they often have to make decisions based on limited understanding and resources. Policymakers often cannot afford to wait for all elements to be ideal before moving forward. They have to deal with incomplete puzzles, limited resources (budget, manpower and capacity), fragile political dynamics in central and local governments, and the constant pressure of time.

Since the very beginning, the minister always reminds us, 'Do not boil the ocean!' We have to strategically identify and choose selected elements in the system that can have a multiplier effect. Focusing on a few selected but very strategic targets will increase our chance of success. Moreover, with limited resources, especially in terms of budget and human capacity, we need to be smart in how to use them well.

Deciding upon areas and/or targets to focus on requires honest dialogues between core leadership in the ministry and related staff members. One example is our core strategy in the educators' capacity building for change. Instead of 'boiling the ocean' by targeting all educators, we decided to focus on selecting change leaders through *Pendidikan Guru Penggerak* (PGP), or Master Teachers Program, and make them as the new generation of school principals and supervisors. We believe that these educators will then transform and empower their school community to work towards the vision of education system transformation. In other words, we are creating change leaders in the ecosystem. Thus, as noted earlier, transformation is no longer a government's program, but rather has become a grassroots movement, led by these change leaders on the ground who will empower other educators and education stakeholders in their community.

Lesson 7: Transform the internal organisation

Transforming human capital requires human capital, especially for the scale and the complexity of Indonesia. We will not be able to do massive and disruptive system transformation without transforming the internal ministry organisation at the same time. We believe that having transformed internal staff in Indonesia's MoECRT

who have the belief and ownership in the vision of *Merdeka Belajar* is indeed very important for the sustainability of the system transformation in the long run.

There are at least four strategies that we have applied for transforming the internal organisation. First, all top leaders need to be very careful in selecting their core team members. This is indeed the most critical decision. Oftentimes this requires removing toxic or unreliable staff, revising the organisational structure, or dismantling a dysfunctional team. A leader must have a vision about what types of talent they will be needing in leading system transformation. Finding these people is not easy and needs to be done carefully. For me the main criteria are integrity, work purpose and the desire to learn and work collaboratively.

Second, leaders need to create an egalitarian working environment, in which leadership is shared or distributed. In my case, I created a cross-unit working group. Each working group has a number of staff assigned as coordinators, who will lead the planning, implementation and evaluation of a specific program or policy agenda. These coordinators are usually selected based on quality and competency, instead of merely seniority. Thus, a leadership role is no longer limited within working groups in each unit but can be expanded to cross-unit working groups. As a result, many more young change agents can assume leadership roles and lead program implementation in a collaborative fashion.

Third, internal staff need to be challenged to continue to grow. In my directorate general, we have provided many professional learning opportunities on areas such as leadership, project management, communication skills, especially for leaders and emerging change agents. We formed small learning groups and asked them to work together to solve one most-pressing problem. The result is

not only a greater understanding about the problems that we have to deal with, but also a stronger bonding among the internal staff working towards a shared mission purpose.

Finally, we cultivate a new culture of open communication. Leaders need to create a safe environment for all staff to voice their opinions and address issues in an egalitarian fashion. Moreover, leaders need to explicitly invite opinions that are different from or even opposite to theirs, and to act fairly when those opinions turn out to be the better ones. In fact, it was the minister himself who set the tone of open communication from the very beginning of his tenure. When Minister Makarim started this new culture in leadership meetings, it was very disruptive. Previously when a minister had an opinion, it was already considered a non-negotiable instruction. In Indonesia's MoECRT now, it is becoming a norm rather than an exception that all staff, regardless of their rank, can speak up and voice their opinions, even when these are different from the minister's. Lower ranking staff can talk, give opinions and recommendations. As a result, the culture of communication within the ministry is becoming more democratic and open.

Lesson 8: Build a professional communication team

The speed and amount of information that one has to face in our current world is really massive. It is a very noisy environment. For public policy context, this requires the government to have the ability to craft policy messages strategically, in order to help better policy sense-making for related stakeholders, and to ensure successful policy implementation. Otherwise, even the best policies could end up as disasters – and I learned this the hard way.

When I was first appointed as Director General of Teachers and Education Personnel, I led the design of a transformative program called *Program Organisasi Penggerak* (POP), or Empowering Organisation program. Through this program we intended to curate civil society organisations that had good track records in facilitating professional development programs for educators, and assign them to train teachers and principals in the country's most challenging regions. Interested organisations sent proposals detailing their professional learning design to help educators improve student learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy and non-cognitive indicators such as school climate and inclusivity.

A good communication strategy is as important as a good policy to ensure a successful policy implementation, especially when the policy is meant to disrupt status quo.

In addition to helping solve the learning crisis problem, the goal of POP was to spark a collective action, a movement within the ecosystem among all interested stakeholders for a common purpose in the education system transformation.

The program hoped to send a strong signal that 'we are in it together'. This was the first

time the ministry of education created a collaborative program with civil society organisations focusing on problem solving. Previously, the political affiliations and proximities were more likely to influence whether or not the ministry of education forged partnerships with civil society organisations. To ensure the ministry's impartiality, MoECRT even hired a highly credible organisation as the evaluators of the proposals in the selection process.

However, we did not control the narrative of the program well enough. As a result, triggered by the issue of a cabinet reshuffle, the opposition group heavily attacked the ministry, using the issue of the POP

program. Our responses and explanation in multiple forums – ranging from the ones in television stations and newspapers, to parliament meetings – were suddenly seen as defensive acts, while we were simply clarifying the misconceptions. Although we finally succeeded in neutralising the political attack, we endured a few months of political battles that distracted the focus of most of the core leadership team from doing the transformation work.

My main take away from this experience is that system transformation is situated within a very vulnerable political context. A good communication strategy is as important as a good policy to ensure a successful policy implementation, especially when the policy is meant to disrupt the status quo. System leadership needs to have a good strategic communication team whose function is not only to create content about policies and programs, but also to assess and manage potential issues and risks, and to handle and mitigate crises.

Closing

The speed of change is always slower than the speed of politics. Change requires sustained and consistent iterative engagement towards the ultimate mission purpose. When we aim for meaningful change, it usually requires paradigm shift and even greater commitment to stay consistent for a prolonged period of time. However, politics and the political cycle often come too fast. Indonesia is going to hold a presidential election in 2024, and a new president will be elected, since President Joko Widodo has already been elected twice. There is a possibility of a new leadership team in MoECRT.

Time will tell whether the new president will elect the right person to continue leading the education system transformation in Indonesia. What we know now is that there is a sense of movement from the very top leadership, internal ministry, regional government and schools, educators and grassroots levels. We hope that the *Merdeka Belajar* movement is strong enough to compel the next ministry's leadership to continue the current direction of change because what we are fighting for is not for a certain regime, but for students and the future of our nation.

Endnote

1. *Merdeka Belajar* is the name of the umbrella policy in Indonesia's education system transformation under current Education Minister, Nadiem Anwar Makarim.



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About the author

Iwan Syahril is currently Director General of Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Republic of Indonesia. He has had more than 27 years working as practitioner, scholar, and policymaker. In the past three years, he has been engaged in creating and implementing transformative policies for more than 300 thousand schools and three million teachers and school leaders, inspiring them to be continuously engaged in learning about teaching, so they can reach, inspire, and unleash the potential of every student. Indonesia has about 53 million students spread in an archipelago consisting of more than 17 thousand islands.

About the paper

The author explores work that has been undertaken in Indonesia to transform the whole education system to better meet the needs of Indonesia's young people and the nation. He shares eight key lessons learned from this work, drawing from his own reflection as one of the core leaders working directly for Indonesia's Education Minister, Nadiem Anwar Makarim, in transforming the world's fourth largest education system. He discusses factors including the need for clarity of purpose, bold early decision making and commitment, a focus on key human capital, the roles of community and digital community, selecting specific elements in the system, transforming the internal organisation, and building a professional communications team.