

Challenges and Possibilities for Improvement in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Teacher quality is one of the indicators of educational quality in one country. Teacher education as an institution that develops the skills and knowledge of future teachers contributes significantly to teacher quality. Apart from its controversy, PISA results that placed Indonesia at the bottom of the list for over two decades are a wake-up call to improve the quality of teachers. Accordingly, there is an urgent need to improve the quality of teacher education, as suggested in the reviews of national policies for education in Indonesia. The voices of dissatisfaction on the quality of initial teacher education in Indonesia are clear to hear, indicating that graduates of initial teacher education (ITE) are perceived not professional yet for the teaching profession. This paper discusses three challenges that affect the quality of ITE in Indonesia. First, ITE has a low stake selection process for teacher candidates. Second, there is a huge discrepancy of initial teacher education institutions. Third, there has been an oversupply of teacher graduates with diverse abilities and career intentions. This paper argues that the quality of graduates is built on the quality of entrants and institutions. This paper suggests the reformation of the selection process and diminishing the discrepancy in ITE institutions' quality to improve the quality of teacher education graduates in Indonesia.

Keywords: quality of teacher education, ITE, selection process, career intention, Indonesia,

1. Introduction

Teacher quality in Indonesia has been a long-standing issue. When student performance is low, the first person to be criticized is the teacher, then teacher education. Government and policymakers have made several efforts to improve teachers' quality, such as certification programs, teacher professional education (PPG) and teacher professional development such as 'guru penggerak' or teacher as an instructional leader. However, any attempts to improve the quality of in-service teachers may only succeed on the surface level because the chronic problem at the grassroots level has not been resolved, that is, the quality of initial teacher education. If teacher education quality is not improved, candidates who join the teaching profession are likely unprepared to join teaching profession. As a result, the efforts to improve the quality of teachers are unsustainable because of the same old problem, low quality of teacher candidates, and this vicious circle may never end. For that reason, it is imperative to understand the challenges in teacher education and tackled these fundamental issues to improve the quality of teacher education. In this paper, initial teacher education (ITE) or pre-service teacher education refers to a 4-year bachelor degree in teacher

preparation at the university level in Indonesia. Teacher preparation is typically conducted in the Faculty of Teacher Education within universities (FKIP) or the School of Higher Learning of Teacher Education (STKIP).

To understand the quality of teacher education, it is worth discussing the concept of quality. The concept of quality is hard to define, elusive and always be contested (Akiba & LeTendre, 2018). Harvey & Green (1993) introduced one ground-breaking concept that viewed quality as exception, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformative. The most widely adopted approach to evaluate quality in higher education is fitness for purpose (Cheng, 2017; Westerheijden, Hulpiau, & Waeytens, 2007; Wicks & Roethlein, 2009; Woodhouse, 1996). Align with this, the preferred definition of quality and relevance to the higher education system in Indonesia is also fitness for purpose, emphasizing the needs of students (Negara & Benveniste, 2014b). In the teacher education context, quality as fitness for purpose means the ability of ITE to meet the expectation of what student teachers should know and be able to do in the teaching profession. Further, Darling-Hammond (2012) specified the characteristics of good quality of ITE such as a clear vision of good teaching, well-defined standards of professional practice, a strong curriculum, well-supervised clinical experiences, use of

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performance assessment that apply learning to real problems of practice and shared beliefs among school and university. The study also found that candidates in such program feel better prepared and competent, stay in the field longer, and have more positive impacts on student learning.

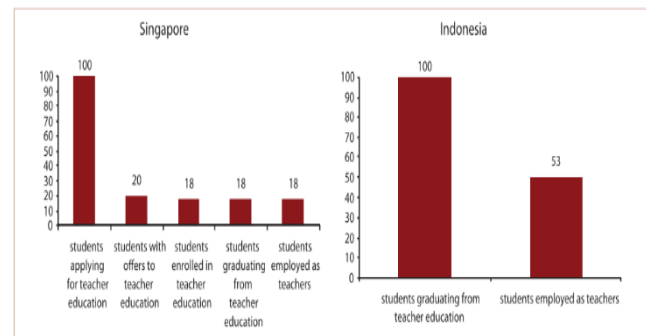
However, the quality of initial teacher education has been critiqued for being too theoretical and disconnected from real world of teaching profession. There have been doubts about the capacity and capability of ITE in producing high-quality teacher candidates. Some ITE graduates might not intend to stay in the teaching field for a longer period and have no significant impact on students learning. These facts suggest that the quality of teacher education in Indonesia is perceived as low. Some challenges such as an ineffective selection process, a huge discrepancy of teacher education institutions, and an oversupply of teacher graduates with diverse abilities and career intentions contribute to Indonesia's low quality of teacher education. Actions need to be taken to overcome the challenges to close the gap between expectations and realities about ITE quality in Indonesia

2. Ineffective of Selection Process

The low stake selection process in teacher education in Indonesia affects the quality of ITE entrants. This phenomenon is problematic as teacher education is sometimes seen as an alternative option for high school students to continue higher education without the intention to become teachers. While the high performing countries suggest choosing the best candidates to become teachers (Barber & Mourshed, 2007), ITE in Indonesia might become the last resort for student teachers who are not accepted anywhere to continue higher education. This phenomenon has a potential problem as the ITE role might be shifting from teacher preparation to a general higher education and stepping stones to choose any job. The national entrance test only applies to those who want to study at state universities, covering a small number of institutions. High reputable state and private universities may employ the selection process due to limited spaces, but many other private institutions provide pre-service training without a tight selection process. Private institutions with more available spaces than applicants are likely to accept all the applicants regardless of their capacity in their subject content knowledge as the program runs on the tuition fee.

The selection process in Indonesia is different from high performing countries. Top performing countries, such as Singapore, implement an effective and efficient selection process to ensure only selecting higher-calibre candidates to join ITE and be employed as teachers. That is not the case in Indonesia. A high-stake selection process allows Singapore to select appropriate candidates to join ITE. For instance, out of 100 applicants, only 20 are accepted. As a result, only qualified and interested in the teaching profession join ITE and are employed as teachers. A tight selection process builds the image of teaching as a prestigious profession and teacher education as a high-demand institution. An illustration of comparison is shown

in Figure 1 (World Bank, 2010 p.50).



Source: Singapore data from Barber and Mourshed (2007); Indonesia data based on World Bank staff calculations.

Figure 1. Comparison of Selection Process in Singapore and Indonesia

By comparison, Indonesia employs a relatively easy selection process. Many institutions accept all applicants regardless of their motivation and abilities. This lack of focus on selecting the best candidates is costly for the teaching force since not all graduates are interested in teaching and are employed as teachers. Some ITE graduates choose other kinds of jobs than teaching, while others choose to teach based on flexible time, which provides more opportunities to do other jobs simultaneously. Besides that, not all employed as teachers are highly competent teachers. This practice which has been going on for years weakens Indonesia teaching force in the long run. In addition, this issue also affects the image of teacher education as ITE is perceived as less prestigious because ITE institutions do not have a strict selection process like other faculties such as medicine or engineering.

An ineffective selection process in ITE might be caused by the centralised recruitment system which is administered by government. A possible explanation why this system is still used until the present could be that the entrance exam is intended for all high school graduates in urban, rural and remote areas with a diverse social-economic background to have the same opportunities to enter the state and reputable universities in Indonesia. However, the faculty staff in ITE might wish for the authority to select the best candidates for their department. The better and motivated candidates, the easier it might be for educators to train them to become teachers. When the recruitment which focuses on candidates motivation and abilities is applied, it might be better to be uniform across all ITE institutions. Otherwise, the changes in the recruitment system might cause controversial debate among ITE institutions about why some institutions apply such selection while others do not. Better prepared entrants will promote better teaching and learning at all levels of education (OECD, 2015).

Evidence suggests several problems concerning teacher education quality because of Indonesia's low stake selection process (World Bank, 2010, 2020). First, the number of candidates is oversupplied. The enactment of the Teacher Law in 2005 attracted a high enrollment in teacher training. Certification increased the attractiveness of the

teaching profession after providing certified teachers with a professional allowance amounting to 100% of the basic monthly salary. The World Bank has reported a fivefold increase in students enrolled in teacher training programs between 2005 and 2010, from 200,000 students in 2005 to over 1 million in 2010 (Negara & Benveniste, 2014). However, the increased interest is not followed by the effort to control student intake, causing more candidates to enter teacher education than needed (World Bank, 2010). In anticipation of a possible oversupply of newly graduated teachers, the government has set an annual quota of 40,000 teacher candidates to enroll in teacher education (Chang et al., 2014). Despite the attempt to reduce the number of student intakes, the number of student teachers in ITE is still high. Second, the candidates have diverse abilities in the subject content knowledge. The admission test is not designed for filtering candidates for teacher education. The admission test only evaluates the ability of students to enter higher education without testing specific subjects. General admission test impacts the quality of student intake, as an example, the candidates for English teachers might have low proficiency of English, as their English ability is not tested in the admission process. Third, no screening test may allow the candidates who may not be motivated to become teachers to enter teacher education since it is easy. A study revealed that 'no other choice' is a popular choice for students motivation to join teacher education (Masbirorotni et al., 2020). Another study investigated student teachers motivation (integrative vs instrumental) found a considerably high proportion of students, 145 out of 328 (44%), who did not have a genuine motive to enroll in a teacher education program and commit to becoming a teacher (Suralaga et al., 2020).

The fact that some student teachers are not motivated to become teachers should not be overlooked. Taking for granted that all student teachers joining teacher education want to become teachers seem like turning a blind eye to this phenomenon. Understanding this phenomenon but compromising the importance of motivation for practicality has a significant consequence in the long run. It makes a bigger challenge for educators to train unmotivated student teachers and impacts ITE graduates' quality and career intention. A vast literature has emphasized the importance of taking motivation and passion for teaching as consideration for teacher candidates in Indonesia and broader context (Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Rosyid, 2017; Surya, 2016); nevertheless, motivation is not explored in the admission process in Indonesia and still regarded as 'the missing ingredient in teacher education (Lamb & Wyatt, 2019).

3. A discrepancy in the Quality of ITE Institutions

The second problem is the significant discrepancies in the quality of teacher education institutions. For instance, by 2020, Indonesia has 422 teacher education institutions, 41 public or state universities and 382 privates. On average, of all 422 teacher education institutions in Indonesia, there are only less than 10% ITE with high accreditation and

around 90% of them ranging from average and low accreditation (World Bank, 2020). The vast disparity of teacher education is visible between state and private institutions. It is also clearly seen between regions as many ITE in remote districts are accredited C or unaccredited. Besides that, apart from accreditation, there is no specific body that conducts systematic monitoring or evaluation to determine the effectiveness of teacher education (OECD, 2015). Most of the teacher trainings operate independently, determine the outcomes that they believe are most important, with little coordination between them over materials and approaches. Regardless of the discrepancy in the quality of ITE institutions, every year, all these institutions graduate prospective teachers. However, it seems that there have been concerns about the capacity of ITE to develop the excellent quality of teachers. The government regulation confirms in Teacher Law 14/2005 that teaching and teacher certification apply for all university graduates, not only ITE graduates even though the number of ITE graduates are already high.

The discrepancy in ITE quality happened since the implementation of Teacher Law followed by certification policy (Negara & Benveniste, 2014). The attractiveness of civil servants salary and certification payment increased the student enrollment in ITE, resulting in the high demand for teacher education institutions. This demand encouraged the openings of many other private teacher education institutions (many of which are low quality) (World Bank, 2020). The low quality of ITE institutions influences the quality of graduates. The dissatisfaction and disbelief on the competencies of ITE graduates from certain institutions might be manifested in the teacher recruitment process. Sometimes the job vacancy is limited for candidates from highly accredited ITE as the graduates from average or low level of accredited ITE are perceived less competent.

One of the possible reasons for the discrepancy in ITE is because of the different curriculum and programs from one institution to another. The Indonesian Qualification Framework (IQF) is a reference for curriculum in higher education institutions following Presidential Regulation Number 8 Of 2012 and the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 73 of 2013 (Insani et al., 2017). All the existing study programs in universities throughout Indonesia have to comply with the regulations and develop their curriculum based on IQF. IQF is an instrument for levelling Indonesia's human resources' framework qualifications and competence with the descriptors that combine job competence and learning outcomes composed by the ongoing development of knowledge, technologies, and art cultivation of nation character building. All Indonesian higher education must officially base their learning outcomes on the IQF descriptors. However, although the standardized learning outcomes are nationwide for each study program, the microelements of the documented curriculum, including the content of the curriculum for courses, are designed by each university (Latif, 2017; Rohmah, 2017; Susilo, 2015; Wahyuningrum, 2017). It means that every teacher education has various courses,

lengths structures, and assessment procedures. The length and structure of fieldwork, such as observation and practicum teaching, also depend on each institution's policies (Azkiyah & Mukminin, 2017). These differences potentially impact the discrepancy on the quality as every ITE institution has different program and practices. Typically, the ITE curriculum in Indonesia is not research-based. Research training is very limited in scope. It is mainly research method courses for preparing students to write their mini final thesis rather than giving them fundamental foundations to research their professional development in the teaching profession.

Another possible reason is because of some issues in the ITE curriculum. Firstly, the distribution of subjects is not only for the content and pedagogical knowledge but also other unrelated, various subjects, in which some of them are compulsory subjects from the university. Students are overloaded with materials irrelevant to their needs, and many ITE subjects are much more theoretical (Fahriany, 2014; Nielsen, 2003). Secondly, concerning the diverse ability of the student intake, the development of subject content knowledge starts from the basics. As an example, the development of English skills of student teachers in the English Department starts from reading I, II, III, IV, and so do the other English skills. Suppose that the intake student teachers are better in their English proficiency, then the repetition of subjects to build content knowledge from basic skills would be unnecessary. Then the curriculum could be more focused on their pedagogical content knowledge and teaching practices. As Kosnik & Beck (2008) argued, there should be priorities to certain critical aspects of teaching because so much material and lack of focus and 'cohesion' across the various components of teacher education leads to feeling unprepared. Thirdly, a long-standing issue in ITE, the gap between theories and practice. Azkiyah & Mukminin (2017) argued that teaching quality is low due to the lack of practice provided by ITE. Teaching practicum is perceived as the most beneficial and effective program in ITE (Sulistiyo, 2015). However, the practicum implementation, shortened into a month or two after PPG is launched, is more like a formality rather than a serious attempt to build teacher competency. The argument that treating practicum as an introduction and for student teachers to have a more comprehensive package in PPG is problematic. Not all ITE graduates join PPG, but they could still be hired to be teachers when they graduate because certification, although preferred, is not compulsory requirement for working at schools. It means that some ITE graduates might join the teaching profession without enough teaching practices.

4. Graduates with Low Competencies and Lack of Interest in Teaching Profession

The issues with the quality of entrants and education institutions led to the third challenge: the quality of graduates. Every year, all teacher education institutions keep on graduating teachers regardless of their differences in quality. Being aware of the discrepancy in ITE,

sometimes employers are more interested in recruiting new teachers from state or reputable private universities. This phenomenon seems to confirm the disbelief in the quality of graduates from certain types of teacher education institutions (World Bank, 2020). The quality of graduates from average and low accredited ITE institutions seems questionable. Concerning many institutions under this category, the generalization that most ITE graduates are not qualified is inevitable. Besides competencies of ITE graduates that are perceived low, interest in joining the teaching profession is also low. A study about student teacher's motivation to join teacher education showed that only a small group of students (13.59%) intended to focus on teaching without having a second job, while those who planned to become teachers also planned to have second job, suggesting that teaching is perceived as an option rather than career priority (Suryani, 2017, 2020; Suryani et al., 2016).

Teaching job is perceived unattractive because secured positions such as civil servant teachers are limited, similarly with private teachers in highly reputable schools in big cities. That leaves a significant portion of in-service teachers with part-time positions or contract teachers. As an illustration, the data from the Ministry of Education reports that by 2020, out of 937,228 teachers, non-civil servants, 728,461 are contract teachers (employed on a short term basis, paid on an hourly basis) or part-time teachers (Ministry of Education, 2021). Many of them are struggling with their lives due to low pay and being uncertain about their future. Given this fact, many student teachers consider teaching as the last option if they could not have a better job or choose it because of its flexible time. Most student teachers are attracted to the teaching profession only because of the prospects of being certified teachers as civil servants or permanent teachers in reputable private schools.

Another reason why teaching job perceived unattractive is because teaching job is perceived as high demand and low payment. This notion seems counterproductive with the previous statement mentioning that many students are attracted to join teacher education since certification policy was applied. These different views may happen because contract teachers are higher in proportion than the limited number of civil servants. In other words, a teaching job as an attractive job applies only to civil servants because the differences between contract teachers and civil servants are significant. Contract teachers are employed temporarily or on a short term basis, paid on an hourly basis with the incentives vary depending on the capability of the schools which hired them. Many of them received much less than a civil servant income (could be 1/4 of it). As a result, many teachers have to find a second job, often in a low-status occupation such as tricycle driver, motorcycle taxi driver, and street vendors (Jalal et al., 2009).

The phenomenon of teachers with side jobs might raise some teacher quality issues, such as absenteeism, ineffective teaching performance, lack of professional development, and low student achievement. The problem is not about teacher's having a job besides teaching, but about teachers' focus and motivation when they view teaching as a side job. An unmotivated teacher might cause teachers'

high turnover rate and low retention rate, leading to disruption in teaching. The students might suffer from the changing of teachers. Besides that, students might not learn the lesson at the optimum level. The teachers who have other kinds of jobs could not focus or have much time for preparation, evaluation, or professional development, resulting in poor quality of teachers. With the teachers' poor performance, it is not very likely to have a better incentive. The low salary makes the teaching have low status and less attractive for top students to choose teaching as their career intention. As a result, many students who enroll at ITE might not be strong academically, which affects the quality of ITE and its graduates. Sometimes, the best graduates of ITE might not choose to teach as the priority of career intention if they could not become civil servants or permanent private teachers in reputable schools. Top graduates might choose another career path that pays them better, leaving the teaching job for those who might be less competent and view teaching as a last resort or stepping stones until finding a better job. This vicious circle keeps rolling on over the years.

Besides that, despite the complexities of a teaching job, a teacher is also perceived as an easy job that every university graduate can enter as it is believed that it does not require specific high skills such as architects, doctors or engineers. As an illustration, doctors, architects and engineers who pass the test can be certified teachers by joining a one-year certification program in PPG, but teachers cannot practice as doctors, architects or engineers by joining a shortcut program. This phenomenon questions the concept of professionalism in the teaching profession, whether the label 'certified teachers' acquired in a short period of training reflects the competencies and skills of professional teachers. Nonetheless, this policy has legal ground with government regulation. No 14/2005 confirming that candidates should have a minimum of a bachelor's degree to be teachers. However, it is not mentioned that they need to graduate from a teacher education institution. Further, Chang et al. (2014) explained that the low status for teachers in Indonesia derived from several factors such as educational qualifications, teacher competencies, perceived motivation to be a teacher, certification and income level. Unless these problems are tackled and the status of teachers is improved, the quality of teachers might be only an endless discourse to discuss without any impacts.

The tendency to choose a teaching job from financial value could be problematic. Teaching performance might be merely seen as fulfilling mandatory duties because certification is viewed from the welfare aspect for raising teachers' income and lifestyles (Rifa, 2021). As a result, teacher certification is not correlated with improvement in student learning outcomes (OECD, 2015). There is no significant difference in student achievement between certified and non-certified teachers (de Ree, Muralidharan, Pradhan, & Rogers, 2018; Feng & Sass, 2017; Kusumawardhani, 2017; Triyanto, 2012). This finding suggest that certification might not be successful yet in improving teacher quality. Therefore, the efforts to improve teacher quality must be supported by strong teacher education. Teacher education should be an institution that

can develop a student teacher's soul and core value to become a teacher, not only instrumental values to follow the job demands. This spirit seems faded from ITE in Indonesia.

One possible reason is because there is a tendency to follow the job demand from inside ITE institutions because of low interest among student teachers. So, to accommodate the interests of the entrants who might not want to become teachers, some teacher education institutions become more like higher education institutions rather than teacher preparation and explicitly mention that student teachers do not necessarily have to become teachers if they are not interested. This phenomenon might arise because the teaching profession is not solely for ITE graduates but all university graduates. On the one side, these policies might positively affect ITE graduates to have more transferrable skills, but on the other side, it impacts the curriculum and shifts the focus of ITE from teacher preparation to general higher education. As an illustration, to accommodate the inclination and interests of the prospective students, some ITE adjusts their curriculum, adding more transferrable subjects for their students such as entrepreneurship, commerce or tourism for graduates to 'survive' in the job competition just in case they could not find the teaching job or are not interested in teaching. Apart from these subjects are perceived as valuable, as a practical consequence, teaching-related subjects might be reduced, and practicum teaching is shortened. This policy argues that if student teachers want more teaching subjects and practice, they will have those specifications in PPG if they are interested in being certified teachers. Rather than solving the problem on a low proportion of students interested in teaching, some ITE follows the phenomenon, changes the direction, and facilitates students to pursue other career intentions than teaching. This concerning inclination potentially weakens the role of ITE as teacher preparation. In the worst-case scenario, government and stakeholders might lose faith in the capacity of ITE to prepare qualified teachers and see the graduates' teaching competency is not significantly different from those of non-teacher education graduates. That is when ITE loses its essential role as teacher preparation.

5. Discussions

The present paper proposes the possibilities for improvement in ITE to overcome those challenges using the following steps. First, the selection process in ITE needs to be reformed. It could be done by adding the second phase of the selection process at the faculty level after the student candidates have been selected by the entrance exam administered by the government. The selection process might include testing subject content knowledge and exploring candidates' motivation to become teachers. This way, the faculty has the authority to select the best candidates for their teacher preparation program. A note of caution is due here since the radical changes might cause frictions in the ITE institutions. It is also important to note the practicality and feasibility of the proposed reformation concerning the Indonesian context, which consists of large areas and populations. A conversation among stakeholders

regarding the best possible selection process may need to occur to mitigate the conundrum in the quality of teacher education (Brooks, 2021), meaning the idea to improve the quality has the potential to not only the opposite effect but also damage its transformative potential. Second, ITE also needs to focus on three important actions besides the improvement of the accreditation. Firstly, ITE should look inward by doing program evaluations from internal and external bodies and regular feedback from stakeholders. Secondly, ITE should look outwards by being aware of challenges from the external factors that affect the quality of teacher education and learn the best practices from other institutions. Thirdly, ITE should look forward by being aware of the current issues and debates in the field to anticipate what the future might hold for today's student teachers and plan how to get there. Last but not least, the quality concept in ITE needs to be expanded. Besides fitness for purpose, ITE should be transformative as well, in the sense of enhancing, empowering and developing student teachers into dedicated and professional teachers.

This paper has discussed the challenges of initial teacher education quality in Indonesia and possibilities for improvement in ITE. In sum, to improve the quality of ITE, Indonesia needs to overcome these three crucial challenges in ITE: quality of entrants, quality of institutions and quality of graduates, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Aspects of Quality in ITE

The figure illustrates that the quality of graduates is built on the quality of entrants and institutions. This framework indicates that the issues on one of the aspects of ITE, either the quality of entrants or institution, impacts the quality of graduates.

Concerning the limited space in this paper, it is worth acknowledged that quality issues in ITE are more complex than what is described in this paper. Nevertheless, this paper contributes to the field, as it adds to the growing body of literature by emphasizing essential points to be considered to improve ITE quality in Indonesia. Improving the quality of pre-service institutions and the candidates that enter them always becomes a recommendation of many research studies and reports in the Indonesian context. (Nielsen, 2003; OECD, 2015; World Bank, 2020).

6. Conclusion

Teacher education quality is vital for the improvement of teacher quality. This paper suggests that the quality of entrants and institutions are likely to influence the quality of graduates. Accordingly, ITE needs to tackle challenges such as an ineffective selection process, discrepancies in the quality of ITE institutions and low quality of graduates. For those reasons, improving these three quality aspects need to be taken into account. Despite the limitation on the discussion on the complexities of teacher education quality, this paper proposes that teacher education needs sustainable monitoring, evaluation on the quality ITE and input from the stakeholders. Besides that, this paper also suggests the reformation of the selection process, including selecting candidates on their subject content knowledge and their motivation to become teachers as one possible solution to improve the quality of teacher education in Indonesia.

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