CIPS
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# Parent's Perception on Face-to-Face Learning

**by Latasha Safira**


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## Key Messages

- Throughout Indonesia, parental engagement with schools has mostly been through their involvement in their children's education. This parental involvement increased during distance learning brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, as parents needed to supervise their children's studies, monitor their academic progress, ensure the completion of assignments, and maintain communication with teachers. However, parental involvement in school management and the decision making process has remained low, despite the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MOECRT) mandating the formation of School Committees to support school management, as well as increase transparency and accountability.

- The majority of parents are satisfied with the face-to-face learning policy, citing that it provides a more conducive learning environment than distance learning. They are also satisfied with the provision of choice within the policy, as parents had the final say in allowing their children to return to school or continue their online education from home.

- Those who are not satisfied with face-to-face learning have expressed that the policy remains inappropriate given the rising Covid-19 cases as a result of the Omicron wave. This was also linked to parents' concerns over increased risk of transmission to the rest of the household as well as the school's capacity to adhere to the safety protocols.

- MOECRT needs to expand opportunities for parents to engage in school management through the reinforcement of School Committees. School Committees can be reintroduced to school leaders as part of the post-pandemic recovery, as its members can provide additional support to ensure a safe and effective implementation of face-to-face learning, especially in the midst of an ongoing pandemic.

- In states of emergencies, schools need to be granted greater autonomy to respond appropriately based on their level of resources and capacity. With this policy, therefore, schools would not be as affected by ever-changing policies from the MOECRT, which would be inevitable during crises. Greater autonomy can empower school leaders over their school management and decision-making processes, for example in facilitating smoother transitions between distance learning and face-to-face learning.

- The barriers to distance learning must continually be addressed, even as the pandemic ends. MOECRT, along with other key ministries such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Communication and Informatics must pay attention and boost public-private partnerships with telecommunication and hardware providers, as well as increase appropriately targeted digital literacy programs to bridge the digital divide. These measures are critical to ensure that students have a good support system in the event where distance learning must be reintroduced.

# A Return to School

As teachers were no longer able to closely monitor their students' academic and socio-emotional development over distance learning, the demand for parents to play a larger role in their children's education increased quickly. Studies across different regions in Indonesia have found that approximately 80-95% of the parents were involved in their children's distance learning process, albeit in different capacities (Novanti and Garzia, 2020; Simanjuntak and Kismartini, 2020). Among other responsibilities, parents were required to coordinate with their children's teachers on the lesson plans and assignments, submit or upload homework to online platforms, and in some cases, take on the role of teaching their children the class materials themselves.

For the past two years, schools had no choice but to continually adjust their operations based on the recommendations given by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MOECRT) due to the rises and falls in confirmed Covid-19 cases. This has led to constant shifts between distance learning and face-to-face learning.

In December 2021, MOECRT along with the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) along with the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA), the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Home Affairs published Joint Decree No. 03/KB/2021, No. 384/2021, No.HK.01.08/MENKES/424/2021 and No.440-717/2021, which permits the implementation of in-person learning for education units located in particular zones (also known as *Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat*[1] or *PPKM* level 1, 2, 3 regions).

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[1] *Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat (PPKM)* is Indonesia's social distance policy that was mandated during the Covid-19 pandemic. PPKM is divided into four levels based on the rate of transmission of Covid-19 and the number of active cases in the area. The first level indicates the lowest risk (20 positive cases, 5 hospitalizations and 1 death per 100,000 people), and the fourth level indicates the highest risk (150 positive cases, 30 hospitalizations and more than 5 deaths per 100,000 people)

This policy came with several requirements, including compliance to the Covid-19 safety protocols (also known as *5M*[2]), the vaccination of education personnel, verification and evaluation of school readiness with regional heads and MOECRT, or MORA (for Madrasahs[3]), and more. If the schools were unable to meet these conditions, they must continue to carry out distance learning. The same applies to schools located in the *PPKM* level 4 regions. Schools were able to implement the face-to-face policy in four different ways:

**Table 1. Four possible schemes for face-to-face implementation at school**

| Scheme | Maximum class attendance | Maximum time permitted on campus per day | Eligibility |
|---|---|---|---|
| Full capacity | 100% | Six hours | • More than 80% of education personnels are fully vaccinated<br>• At least 50% of elders in the region are fully vaccinated |
| Full capacity, limited time | 100% | Four hours | • At least 50% of education personnels are fully vaccinated<br>• At least 40% of elders in the region are fully vaccinated |
| Limited capacity | 50% (Students attend classes in shifts) | Six hours | • 50-80% of education personnels are fully vaccinated<br>• 40-50% of elders in the region are fully vaccinated |
| Limited capacity, limited time | 50% (Students attend classes in shifts) | Four hours | • At least 40% of education personnels are fully vaccinated<br>• At least 40% of elders in the region are fully vaccinated |

In addition, among the schools that do not offer face-to-face learning at full capacity, they may offer a hybrid learning model instead. This means that when students are not attending their classes in person, they may resume their studies online. Therefore, in these cases, students will experience shifts between online and offline learning.

However, with the rise in cases of the Omicron variant, the response to the new regulation has been divided, as parents worry about their children's health and safety, while also considering the long-term implications of distance learning. CIPS conducted a survey in March 2022 to examine the perceptions of face-to-face learning among parents, especially in relation to their decision-making process for their children's education. Data was gathered from a total of 326 parents of students across gender, regions, household income, marital status, work status, school level and types of school, regions and household incomes[4].

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[2] *5M* is the abbreviation for Indonesia's official health protocol to prevent Covid-19 infections. It stands for *mencuci tangan* (washing hands), *menggunakan masker* (use of masks), *menjaga jarak* (maintaining distance), *menjauhi kerumunan* (avoiding crowds) and *mengurangi mobilitas* (reducing mobility)
[3] Madrasahs are education institutions that offer Islamic studies alongside the national curriculum. They offer education at all school levels: primary (*Mardrasah Ibtidaiyah/MI*), secondary (*Madrasah Tsanawiyah/MTs*) and senior secondary (*Madrasah Aliyah/MA*). Madrasahs are supervised and regulated by the Ministry of Religion.
[4] See Appendix 1 for the demographic characteristics of the parents

# Parent's Dilemmas with Face-to-Face Learning

The survey revealed that the majority of the respondents (60%) were "quite satisfied" with the face-to-face learning policy (Figure 1). This finding was consistent across gender, regions, household income, marital status, work status, and their children's school level and school type.

**Figure 1. Parent's overall satisfaction with the face-to-face learning policy**

Overall as a parent, how satisfied are you with the face-to-face learning policy (PTM)
during the recent pandemic?



- Very satisfied
- Quite satisfied
- Quite unsatisfied
- Very unsatisfied
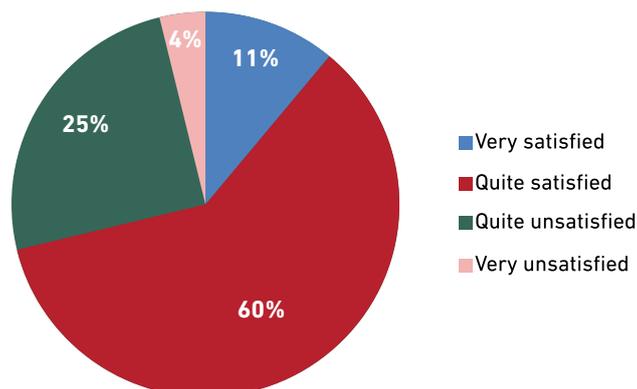
Several parents have reported that they were "quite satisfied" with the face-to-face learning policy because they were not satisfied enough with its implementation thus far. As many as 9 out of the 20 respondents who reported gaps in the current face-to-face learning policy attributed its weaknesses to the limited capacity and time. Parents believe these factors hinder their children's ability to absorb the materials effectively. Moreover, once students shift to online classes, they may lose interest and have lower motivation to actively participate in their learning. Similarly, 36% of the parents who rated that they were "quite unsatisfied" and "very unsatisfied" with the current face-to-face learning policy find that its implementation is still ineffective. Of the 36%, more than half of the respondents attributed its ineffectiveness to the time limits. This indicates that parents may have expected a return to face-to-face learning that is similar to the traditional learning arrangements that was implemented before the pandemic.

Among the respondents who reported that they were "very satisfied" and "quite satisfied" with the face-to-face learning policy, the highest reported reason for their satisfaction level is the improvements in learning processes and outcomes (48 respondents), their trust in the school's safety protocols (47 respondents), followed by increased socialization with teachers and peers (33 respondents) regardless of the face-to-face policy scheme implemented by their children's school. A majority of the parents (71%) agreed that the learning environment in school is much more conducive than at home. This reflects the level of concern that parents have over the weaknesses of distance learning towards their children's academic progression, as the links between distance learning and observations of learning loss have alarmed parents.

The effectiveness of distance learning was experienced unevenly across Indonesia, with low-income families, especially those living in rural communities, being disproportionately disadvantaged due to limited access to affordable, stable internet connectivity and appropriate gadgets. Network coverage remains stronger on the island of Java, as it is inhabited by more than half of the Indonesian population. According to Boston Consulting Group (2021), approximately 13 million Indonesians across 12,500 remote villages have no access to the internet. However, urban areas are also affected by unequal internet connectivity. Families living in urban areas were also negatively affected by the unprecedented adoption of home-based learning as less than 25% of children have computers to support their distance learning activities (Unicef, 2020a).

Meanwhile, teachers and parents also struggled to adapt to distance learning because they had never integrated and interacted with technology for educational purposes before. Therefore, their limited experience and digital competencies hampered their capacity to support and guide the student's online education. Throughout the school closures, students had no choice but to attempt to continue their education in an environment that does not facilitate effective technology-based learning.

Since distance learning was implemented, students were reported to have experienced a regression in their learning capacity and abilities. As school closures were extended beyond December 2021, the World Bank (2021) estimates a loss of 1.2 years of learning adjusted schooling among Indonesian students. According to Pratiwi (2021), there are four strategies parents can adopt to mitigate the learning loss experienced during distance learning: making a routine schedule that mimics face-to-face learning, closely supervising the academic progress of their children, mastering the class materials, and actively communicating with the teachers. However, parents have already reported stress over their increasing role in distance learning as they struggle to find the time to balance between their work demands and their children's education.

Approximately 16% of the parents noted that with the face-to-face learning policy, they have more time to focus on their other responsibilities as the demand to supervise their children's learning has decreased. Of these parents, the majority are mothers (65%) who are living in urban areas (97%), has a household income of less than IDR 15.000.000 per month (47%), and are from a dual-income household (39%). This is consistent with findings from Unicef, UNDP, Prospera and SMERU (2021) where 71.5% of households in their sample showed that mothers were the ones who accompanied their children during their online classes.

Mothers were disproportionately affected by the distance learning policy. Even when both parents are working, mothers are expected to take on more responsibilities in their children's home-based learning. Kerr et al. (2021) found that in turn, compared to fathers, more mothers described feelings of burnout during the pandemic. They strived to cope with employment changes and financial losses as a result of the Covid-19 recession while facing challenges in attaining a work-life balance. These hardships may influence the parents' pressure and desire to reintroduce face-to-face learning for their children as it may alleviate the stresses they have been facing for the past two years.

On the other hand, of the 26% of parents who are "quite unsatisfied" and "very unsatisfied" with the face-to-face learning policy, 53% reported that the reason for their rating is the inappropriateness of the policy's timing given the current Covid-19 situation. A study by Chen et al. (2022) reveals that the Omicron variant is 10 times more contagious than the original strain of Covid-19. Given the high infectivity of the Omicron, the direct, physical contact at school increases the chances for both students and teachers to contract the virus. In September 2021, MOECRT recorded a total of 1,299 schools that became clusters for the Covid-19 virus, in which 15,655 students were infected (Databoks, 2021). Despite children and young people being of low risk for Covid-19 mortality, several studies have highlighted reported cases of neurological issues in children with Covid-19 such as strokes, demyelinating disease, and encephalopathy (Bhopal et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2021; LaRouvere, Riggs and Poussaint, 2021).

As the long-term impact of being infected with Covid-19 has yet to be established, parents may prefer distance learning rather than face-to-face learning as they prioritize their children's health and safety over their academic achievement. In particular, among those who have underlying medical conditions such as asthma and diabetes (Limbers, 2020). Furthermore, the Indonesian government only began to permit vaccination of children under the age of 12-17 in July 2021 and ages 6-11 in December 2021. Data from the Ministry of Health (2022) shows that as of 17 April 2022, approximately 81% and 62% of children aged 12-17 and 6-11 have received their second dose of vaccination, respectively. A recent study indicates that individuals may require two more boosters (in addition to the two full doses) to increase their immunity against the Omicron variant (Regav-Yochay et al., 2022). However, given that the vaccination program was only rolled out towards the end of 2021, very few children have received their booster shot. Therefore, parents may remain cautious over the increased exposure in face-to-face learning due to their children's health and safety, even if they are fully vaccinated.
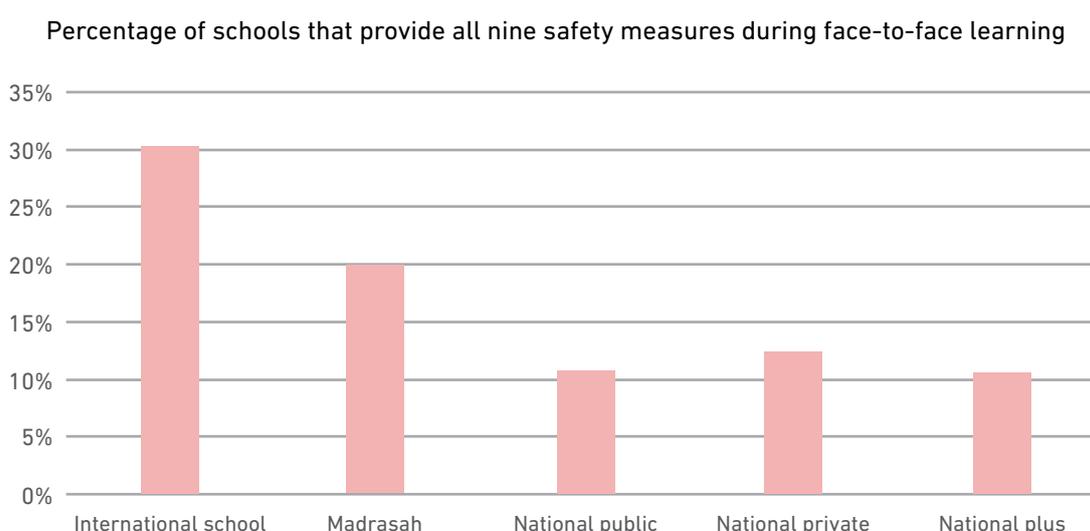
As face-to-face learning increases mobility, 26% of the parents who rated dissatisfaction with the face-to-face learning policy have also raised concerns over the increased risks of transmitting the virus to other members of their household, which may include individuals with the highest vulnerability to Covid-19 (such as those with comorbidities or who are unvaccinated). This suggests that the face-to-face learning policy, particularly during the pandemic, not only affects the students, teachers and parents, but other members of the household as well.

As a collectivistic culture, Indonesia's living arrangements often include their elders, with 28% and 39% of elders living with their families and in three generational homes, respectively (Statistics Indonesia, 2020). Since March 2020, the decline in household income, as well as concerns over risks of mortality of Covid-19, has pushed the need for elder family members to move in with their families (TNP2K, 2020). This allows elders to receive care and support more easily, especially given the restrictions on mobility throughout the pandemic. The Ministry of Social Affairs states that in Indonesia, family-based care is the primary approach to elder-care (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2021). Therefore, parents' perception of the face-to-face policy is also influenced by their own household dynamics as they must contemplate the health and safety of their family as a unit, rather than the individual members.

Alongside worries over the spread of the Covid-19, 27 parents expressed doubt over the readiness and capacity of schools to safely execute in-person classes. This finding is consistent with the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (2021), which reported that after monitoring face-to-face learning practices across 42 schools in 12 different cities, approximately 80% were unprepared for offline learning, especially in terms of infrastructure and compliance with health protocols.

The survey data showed that the level of Covid-19 protocol implementation was influenced by the type of school. The majority of international schools (30%) provided the highest number (nine[5]) of safety measures as part of their compliance to the mandated health protocols (Figure 2). The majority of national public (22%), national private (41%), and national plus schools (36%) provided eight safety measures, with Covid-19 rapid testing being the least commonly provided safety measure. It is important to note that on average, Madrasahs had the most variation in terms of Covid-19 protocols. Two Madrasahs in the survey sample are reported to provide all nine safety measures while another two provided as little as one safety measure.

**Figure 2. Percentage of Schools that Provide All Nine Protocols**

Percentage of schools that provide all nine safety measures during face-to-face learning

The data demonstrates that the schools' capacity to implement and adhere to the safety protocols in face-to-face learning depends on the level of resources available to the schools. Ultimately, this impacts the parents' perception of face-to-face learning, particularly in regards to their confidence (or skepticism) of the school's health protocols. The higher the number of safety measures provided for the school, the higher the parent's satisfaction rating.

As many as 23 parents reported that they were satisfied with the provision of choice within the face-to-face learning policy, while 8 parents expressed dissatisfaction because they had no choice in their children's learning process. The provision of choice refers to the parent's ability to determine whether they want their children to attend school in person or online instead. The Joint Decree states that "parents or guardians can choose if their children will return to face-to-face learning or to continue with distance learning." The provision of choice has been well accepted by parents as their children can continue with their learning if their parents are not ready to permit their children to physically return to school. Ultimately, this empowers parents to exercise their right and role to make critical decisions regarding their children's education.

In addition, 26 parents also provided suggestions on how face-to-face learning can be improved, whether to maximize the students' learning or to ensure the safety of both students and teachers. For example, one one parent whose child's school is undergoing face-to-face learning at a limited capacity, proposes that given the outbreak of the Omicron variant, "[the students] should not be in school for too long. And perhaps [they] should not eat during their break time, because they would be removing their masks for too long and this is dangerous." On the other hand, a parent also argued that the "face-to-face learning policy should not be generalized to all students within one school. Rather it should be based on the schools' capacity to carry out face-to-face learning safely, as well as their students' capacity to participate." This demonstrates the extent to which parents are active decision makers in education. Unfortunately, even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been very little parental engagement in school management and education policy. Wahyuddin (2018) noted that local policymakers[6] have offered minimal effort to mobilize and encourage parents to be more involved with their children's schools, only going as far hosting a few discussions to facilitate parent-teacher dialogue.

Several studies have demonstrated that the higher parental involvement in schools (in which the highest level refers to school management), the better the school outcomes (Anderson and Minke, 2007; Blimpo et al., 2016). However, the extent of expected parental engagement with schools in Indonesia tends to only include open communication with teachers and principals, volunteering at school activities and functions, and at-home supervision and guidance for their children's academic and socio-emotional growth and development (Anggraini, 2018; Rohmah, 2018; Apriliyanti, Hanurawan and Sobri, 2021). In addition, Indonesia's traditional teaching and learning dynamics promotes the expectations for parents to entrust their children to the school, and teachers and principals have demonstrated some resistance over increasing parents' involvement due to concerns that it may lead to confusion and disorganization (Yulianti et al., 2022). This provides a barrier for willing parents to become more involved in their children's schools. On the other hand, low parental involvement may also stem from the lack of awareness of how they can engage with the schools to improve its quality, practices, and operations (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018).

MOEC Regulation No. 75/2016 indicates that parents have the opportunity to actively participate within their children's schools through "School Committees"[7], which are tasked with overseeing the implementation of MOECRT

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[6] In his study, Wahyuddin referred to policy makers within a district in the province of West Sulawesi

[7] School Committees are non-governmental bodies consisting of local community members advising, supporting and supervising one education unit. Each School Committee must have between 5-15 members in which at most 50% comprise of parents, 30% are community leaders and 30% are education experts

policies and provide input on school programs and budgeting, as well as supervise the quality of educational services[8]. For example, MOECRT Regulation No.6/2021 stipulates that the use of the School Operational Assistance Fund requires agreement from the School Committee. Therefore, the School Committees also function to ensure accountability and transparency of schools. In the context of the pandemic, this platform would provide parents with the avenue to voice their concerns, contribute to shaping the face-to-face learning policies at the school level, and ensure the school's compliance and adherence to the health protocols.

However, there are still gaps in the implementation of School Committees in Indonesia. For example, its members may express low commitment due to the lack of organizational tools and facilities, and a misconception of its benefits may lead to the absence of support from the school principals (Triwiyanto, 2018). The MOECRT (2020) reports that currently, there are still not many School Committees that can effectively supervise and support school management, especially because the members are still unfamiliar with the education management standard regulations (Palettei, Sulfemi and Yusfitriadi, 2021). There remains a weak relationship between education personnels and School Committees as schools have not effectively communicated critical information to facilitate the School Committees' activities and duties. These findings suggest that schools may have not fully accepted the mobilization of School Committees and its role in school management, transparency and accountability, or perhaps they have not fully understood how to engage with School Committees effectively.

Without addressing the limitations of School Committees or exploring other avenues in which parents can become more involved in their children's school management, parents may continually be overlooked and underappreciated in their role within Indonesia's education system. This indicates the need to foster closer relationships between schools and parents. As there was a growing demand for parents to take on a larger role in their children's education in distance learning, parental engagement should continue to be extended and supported post-pandemic, especially beyond supervision of studies and in relation to school management.

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[8] In addition, through School Committees, members are tasked to raise funds to help their children's school achieve the National Education Standards (*Standar Nasional Pendidikan*).

# Policy Recommendations

- **Expand opportunities for parents to participate in school management**
  MOECRT should promote the School Committee and the concept of community involvement and its benefits to education providers, school principals,and teachers (Megiati, 2016). Given the increased engagement with parents throughout the pandemic, MOECRT can reintroduce the School Committee policy as part of the post-pandemic recovery for the education sector, especially in providing more input on how to effectively and safely implement face-to-face learning, as well as any observed learning gaps that need to be addressed. This policy will amplify the parent's voices and provide school leaders with additional perspectives and considerations to improve their school management. Training on collaboration and conflict resolution skills should also be extended to teachers and school principals in order to facilitate collaborations with parents.

  Socialization of School Committees at the school level is very important given its current weak relationships with education personnel. School leaders, principals, and teachers need to foster better relationships with School Committees, thereby increasing parental involvement in schools beyond the supervision of their children's education and academic progress. Increased parental involvement is linked to positive, welcoming attitudes demonstrated by education personnel (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). By acknowledging their role during the Covid-19 pandemic and communicating benefits of parental engagements for school outputs, this may increase the ways in which parents can be more engaged in school management in the long run.

- **Grant greater autonomy to schools, especially during emergencies**
  In states of emergencies, it is important to grant schools greater autonomy over their decision-making process to facilitate a smoother transition and adoption of new learning processes based on their school operations, capacity, and resources. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, MOECRT was forced to continuously amend, adjust, and reform education policies based on the number of active cases. Meanwhile, schools are dependent on the regulations mandated by MOECRT as it determines the extent to which they are able to manage face-to-face learning. However, this inflexibility may limit the effectiveness of face-to-face learning and consequently increase confusion and even anger among parents regarding the schools' operations.

  Greater autonomy among schools can also promote better engagements with parents. As schools are able to adjust their practices to the current context, they are able to facilitate quicker communications regarding the schools' short-term and long-term responses. Therefore, parents would be able to better adapt to the emergency curriculums and measures taken by their school and support their children's learning process with minimal disruptions.

- **Increase public-private partnerships to improve infrastructure and close the digital divide**
  As Indonesia is prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis, which may damage the physical campuses, a reimplementation of distance learning is still possible in the future. However, there is still a digital divide across the archipelago as internet connectivity and access to technology remains unevenly spread. This inequality ultimately affects the extent to which schools as well as families are able to conduct effective distance learning. MOECRT should consider fostering more public-private partnerships with telecommunication companies and hardware providers to increase the provision of stable internet connectivity, laptop and tablets, especially in rural areas of Indonesia, so that distance learning can be made available to all students (Azzahra, 2021). As long as these barriers are left unaddressed, distance learning may not be possible to ensure continued learning.

- **Increase interventions to facilitate improvements in digital literacy among parents to facilitate better distance learning**

  Parents have also faced challenges in leading their children's online education, as they have never engaged with technology this way before. Their limited capacity may force them to have no choice but to support face-to-face learning, even if they are worried for their children's and household's health. Alongside *Siberkreasi*, the Ministry of Communication and Informatics has launched a National Digital Literacy program that aims to provide digital literacy training[9] to 50 million participants by 2024. However, this program can be further enhanced to specifically target parents, particularly those in rural communities. If parents are able to overcome the barriers to distance learning, this empowers them with the option of home-based learning for their children, especially in situations where it is much more desirable or safer. Therefore, it is important that they are readily equipped with the necessary tools and skills to facilitate distance learning.

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[9] The National Digital Literacy program (*Program Literasi Digital Nasional*) that formulates training and curriculums to improve Indonesians' digital literacy through enhancing their digital competencies, digital culture, digital safety and digital ethics.

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# Appendix

**Appendix 1. Breakdown of Respondents' Demographics and Characteristics**

The majority of the respondents are mothers (75%) between the ages of 31-40 (41%) living in urban areas (89%). Approximately 94% of the respondents are currently married, and come from dual income households (42%). Figure 3, 4 and 5 further breaks down the respondent's characteristics.
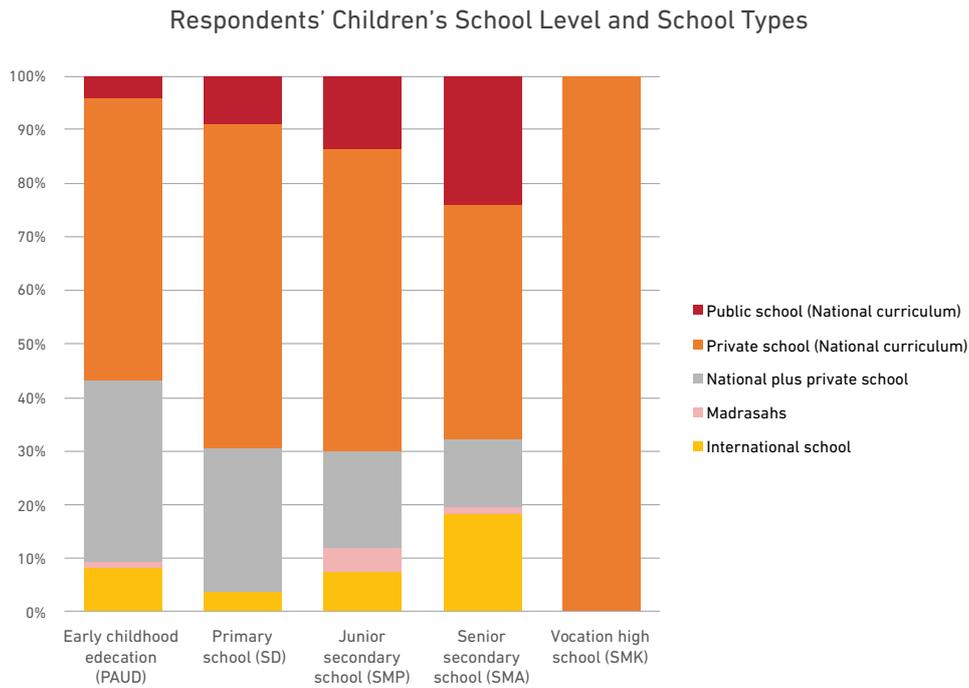
**Figure 3. Breakdown of respondents' age and gender**

Respondents' Age and Gender



Age group

■Female ■Male
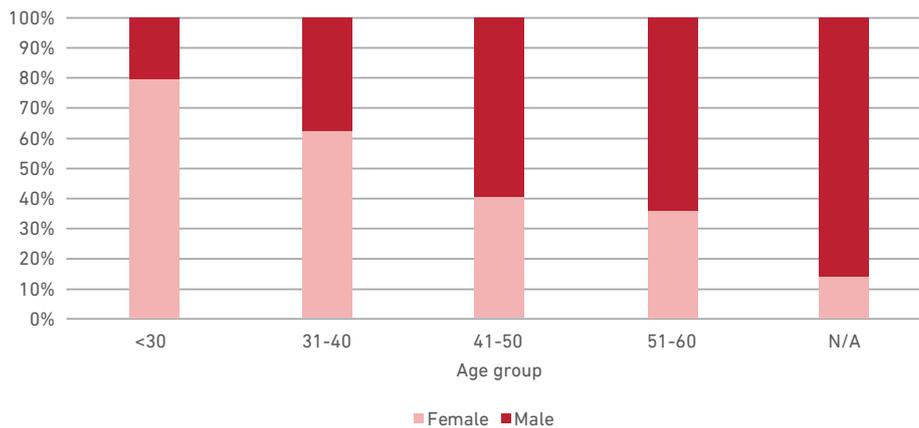
**Figure 4. Breakdown of respondents' household monthly income across different working arrangements**

Respondents' Household Monthly Income Across Working Arrangements
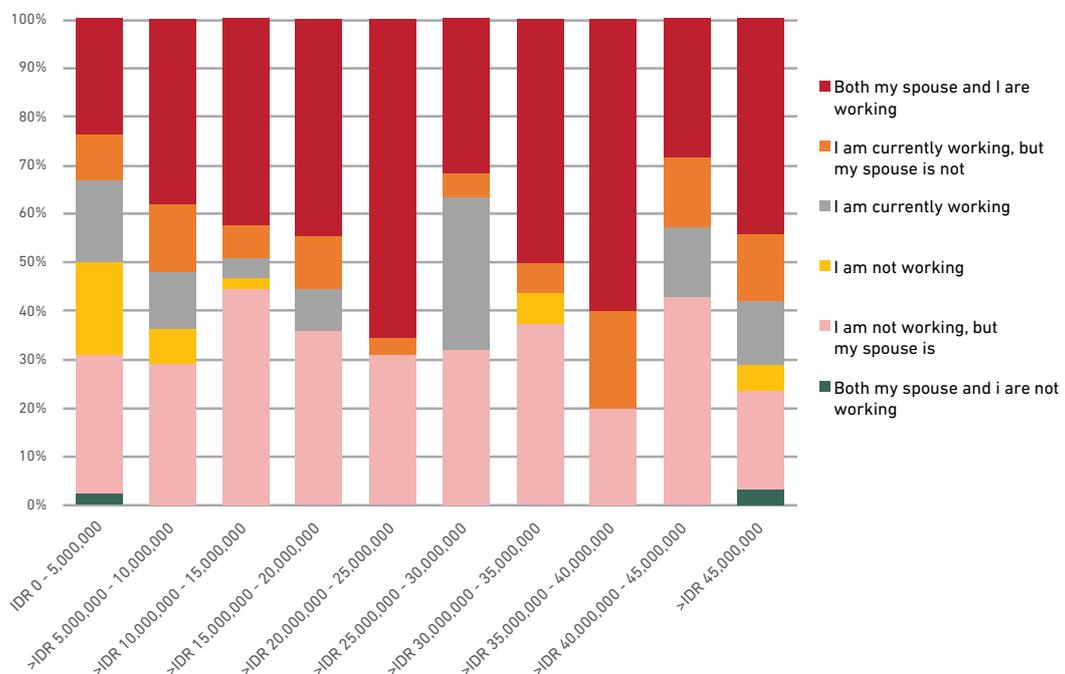
**Figure 5. Breakdown of the respondents' children's school level and school type**

Respondents' Children's School Level and School Types



Legend:
- Public school (National curriculum)
- Private school (National curriculum)
- National plus private school
- Madrasahs
- International school

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Latasha Safira** received a Master of Science degree in International Social and Public Policy at the London School of Economics and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research centers around equitable access to education and social enterprises in the digital economy.

Prior to joining CIPS, Latasha worked as a product researcher in the growth team of Indonesia's leading technology company Gojek.
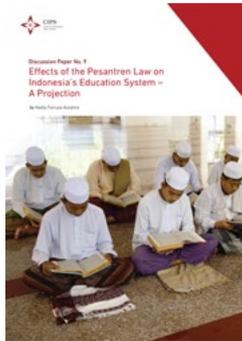
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