

Advanced education and uneven development:

A study on Indonesian government post-graduate scholarship program (work in progress)¹

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Abstract

This study aims to provide an insight on the relation between uneven development in Indonesia and national development agenda related to education through the analysis of Indonesian government post-graduate scholarship program. The current scholarship program under LPDP scheme started in 2013 with the purpose of creating future leader through education financing. The merit-based program provides funding to study at leading universities in and outside the country for qualified citizens who may otherwise not able to afford post-graduate studies. However, data on the number of awardees and their home provinces between 2013 and 2018 showed that the recipients were heavily skewed toward several regions—or centers of development. For example, Yogyakarta is home to around 6% of awardees while having less than 2% of national population and the capital Jakarta is home to more than 11% while having just slightly above 4% of national population. On the other hand, the province of North Sumatra is home to more than 5% of national population, but only has less than 3% of awardees. Interview with some awardees from different regional background also seeks to shed light on how the opportunity enabled by the program is seen from different perspectives.

Keywords: Higher education, uneven development, study abroad, developing country, decentralization

This paper discusses the Indonesian government study abroad scholarship program under the Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP, officially translated as the Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education; lit. Education Fund Management Organization) scheme. As a part of a bigger study concerning the international aspects of education in relation to national development planning in Indonesia, this paper would discuss the role of the scholarship program in the country's effort in science, technology, and human resource development. Specifically, this paper has two focuses, one is the distribution of the scholarship recipients and how it relates to uneven development in Indonesia, and the other is a series of narratives at the micro level drawn from interview with several awardees on how the scholarship affects their career plan and how do they perceive their position in the national development narrative. These micro narratives are framed inside the scholarship program's own rhetoric on its role in Indonesian government's national development plan.

The study abroad scholarship, started recruiting for awardee in 2012,³ is a program of the eponymous LPDP, an endowment fund organization whose initial (and additional) funding came from national government expenditure. LPDP as an organization is a “non-echelon work unit at the Ministry of Finance”

¹ As part of the author's doctoral research, this paper and its earlier iterations benefited from constructive feedback by mentors and colleagues at ISGS Integrated Seminar (East Asian and Japanese Studies) C-II. While there is no specific funding for this paper, the author gratefully acknowledges that the research is part of his doctoral study partially funded by Kawashima Shoshi Memorial Scholarship. All views in this paper, unless otherwise noted, and all mistakes are the responsibility of the author.

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³ See history section at the programs homepage: <https://www.lpdp.kemenkeu.go.id/profil/sejarah/>

instead of the Ministry of Education and Culture or Ministry of Research and Technology (LPDP, 2018). LPDP manages and provides scholarship programs covering tuition fee and living cost for post-graduate education in Indonesia and abroad without the obligation to return the money. The organization also has research grant programs as well as providing backup funding to repair educational facilities in Indonesia damaged by disasters. The program, especially the study abroad scholarship part, is a subject to both discussion within the government, with the endowment fund's allocation being subject to national assembly's meeting,⁴ and public discourse on what role the recipients should have and what kind of public accountability they should bear.⁵ While since its inception the program put emphasis on its awardees' obligation to "contribute to the country," In 2017 it explicitly made it compulsory for the study abroad program awardees to return to Indonesia upon graduation—with possibility for temporary permit for internship or other short-term stay—and "serve" in the country for double the scholarship period plus one additional year, a formula colloquially called 2n+1, previously the common arrangement for study-leave of civil servants.

Problem setting

Initially this paper was going to ask, "What is the role of LPDP scholarship program within the national development agenda, especially in the perspective of uneven development?" However, obstacles including the availability of crucial statistics as well as COVID-19 pandemic preventing research trips and free movement in general led the author to reframe the paper into its current form, asking two separate but related questions meant to help construct further research:

1. How is the scholarship distributed regionally in Indonesia?

The rhetoric of promoting more equal development is featured quite heavily in the national development plan white papers and in the scholarship organization's own reports. The findings here could hopefully provide an insight to analyses on overall education system, planning, and development in Indonesia, as this suggested that performance of many regions differed between secondary education and post-graduate level.

2. How do the scholarship awardees perceive the scholarship's policies, especially the obligation to return and work in Indonesia following graduation?

This question was motivated by not only the significant economic benefits received by LPDP scholarship awardees, but also the program's rhetoric on the awardees being "future leaders" and "catalyst of development" in both national and regional context. Moreover, the obligation to return and work in Indonesia for a set amount of time upon graduation shows the government's interest in utilizing the awardees domestically. The findings provided in this paper, while acknowledging the limitation of micro level narrative in the overall research design, do hopefully provide at least a rough image on how the obligation to return upon graduation affected the awardees' career path or design. That in turn could help elaborate how the unevenly distributed scholarship translates into contribution to the society by looking at how the scholarship benefited the awardees which came from different regional backgrounds, and how

⁴ See for instance <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/ekonomi/20190822070333-532-423609/dana-abadi-naik-pemerintah-kaji-ulang-program-beasiswa-lpdp>

⁵ See for instance <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/trensosial-44599268>

the awardees themselves entered the Indonesian society after their study abroad (where do they work, who else benefited from their study abroad, etc.). The findings could hopefully also provide insight to the program's performance and ways to improve or optimize it, including—but not limited to—adjusting the field of study and developing cost recovery measures

Theory discussion

This paper puts the scholarship program as a policy instrument which uses public funding to achieve certain goals. In relation to national development, the Indonesian government considered education as a mean to develop its citizens, considered by the government to be both “human capital” and “human resource” as well as ones “who would enjoy the fruit of development...”⁶ Further, at least in rhetorical plane, the Indonesian government considered developing “noble mind” of the citizens and their sense of “patriotism” to be part of human development, itself framed as part of the country's effort to stay internationally competitive⁷ and goes hand in hand with other goals including political maturity of the citizenry. In what Welch (2000) called the tension “between democracy and technocracy” in education planning then, Indonesian government's rhetoric would—depending on the observer's perspective—either fall straight to the technocracy side or not adhering to the framework at all.

On practical plane, throughout the implementation period of Long Term National Development Plan 2005-2025⁸ the Indonesian government having managed to extend access to primary education nationwide continually tried to find the right balance, as pointed out by Ali (2009), between developing the secondary education and higher education (pp. 127-128) and to optimize between academic and vocational education (p. 272). That said, the bulk of government's education budget still goes to keeping public primary schools free, in between 2011-2018 leaving only around twelve percent of the budget for higher education.⁹ Consequently, students bear a significant portion of higher education cost even in public universities (see e.g. Wicaksono and Friawan, 2011) and while the tuition fee at public universities is generally cheaper, some “high-demand courses” could cost more than less popular courses at private universities (Welch, 2007 p. 680 in Welch, 2011). Moreover, while enrollment in higher education has increased significantly in the first decade of 21st century, there is an indication that it consistently correlated positively with the level of family income.¹⁰ This is important to bear in mind because while LPDP scholarship programs only take a meager amount of government budget, its benefit to the recipients in form of free post-graduate education is significant within the aforementioned context.

Distribution of scholarship awardees

By 2018, just above 20,000 people have signed contract as LPDP scholars. Although the detailed breakup between domestic and study abroad program is not readily available, the 2018 Annual Report showed

⁶ Opening section of Long Term National Development Plan 2005-2025

⁷ Opening of Part IV of Long Term National Development Plan 2005-2025

⁸ See for instance opening and rhetoric sections of Medium Term national Development Plan(s) of 2004-2009 and 2020-2025

⁹ Data obtained through public information request to Indonesian Ministry of Finance

¹⁰ National Medium Term Development Plan 2014-2019 Book II

that at the time there were 3,551 on going recipients studying abroad and 6,330 recipients studying in Indonesia meaning that around 35% of the recipients were getting the study abroad scholarship. These scholarship—along with all LPDP programs—are funded by investment profit of the endowment fund whose initial and additional capital came from national government spending. At a glance, as a public policy instrument under education section, the funding for LPDP initial and additional funding is relatively meager. It is reported under “education financing expenses” and the total expenditure of that category hovered around one to less than four percent of total education budget.

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Central government	37.66	35.18	34.40	34.76	36.40	35.33	33.87	33.70
Regional Transfer	61.33	62.46	64.09	65.24	63.60	63.32	63.54	62.92
Education Financing Expenses	1.01	2.35	1.51	0.00	0.00	1.35	2.59	3.38

Table 1 Percentage breakdown of Indonesian Government expenditure for education between central government, regional transfer, and education financing expenses. LPDP capital is part of the third category. Source: Public information request to the Ministry of Finance, processed by author.

While it is easy to dismiss LPDP as a small outlier part of the overall education or human resource development policy, it nonetheless is worth looking at given the per-capita expense (which directly translates into benefit received by its recipients). Looking at per-capita allocation of a public policy instrument (a contextual Gini coefficient) is useful when analyzing sectors like education where benefactors of the policy are readily quantifiable and can quite easily be categorized—see e.g. Lu et al (2001). Perhaps due to the vastly different amount of money spent due to the steep difference in price level (and consequently education and living cost) between Indonesia and LPDP scholarship destination countries, in addition perhaps to a sense of romanticism among the public in regard to studying abroad, news reports about LPDP scholarship tend to focus on the study abroad program. In 2015, then-Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla reportedly joked at an LPDP scholar pre-departure preparation camp that the amount of money spent each month for a study abroad scholarship recipient was equal to his core salary as a vice president.¹¹

Moreover, regional distribution of the scholarship recipients is important not only because Indonesian government’s overall rhetoric on inclusive regional development, but also explicit commitments on the LPDP side as well. From the start, LPDP opened a special allocation of scholarship for applicants from less developed regions, dubbed “affirmative scholarship,” which the 2013 LPDP Annual Report called as the effort to create “catalyst for development” in such regions (LPDP, 2013). Additionally, in 2017 it added another special allocation for “original residents” of Eastern Indonesia. Looking at the regional distribution of LPDP scholarship recipients as a whole—because the data exclusive to study abroad program recipient was not readily available—it is clear that some provinces are proportionally overrepresented while many are underrepresented. Shown below is the regional breakdown of LPDP scholarship recipients compared to population size of each province.

¹¹ “JK: Penerima beasiswa LPDP utang ke negara, bayar pakai prestasi”(2015)
<https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/jk-penerima-beasiswa-lpdp-utang-ke-negara-bayar-pakai-prestasi.html>

Province	Percentage of Population	Percentage of Awardee
Aceh	1.89	2.79
Sumatera Utara	5.46	2.35
Sumatera Barat	2.04	2.91
Riau	2.33	1.65
Jambi	1.30	0.78
Sumatera Selatan	3.14	1.29
Bengkulu	0.72	0.70
Lampung	3.20	1.49
Kepulauan Bangka Belitung	0.51	0.31
Kepulauan Riau	0.71	0.45
DKI Jakarta	4.04	11.73
Jawa Barat	18.12	19.25
Jawa Tengah	13.63	9.51
DI Yogyakarta	1.45	6.10
Jawa Timur	15.77	13.39
Banten	4.47	4.75
Bali	1.64	1.55
Nusa Tenggara Barat	1.89	2.42
Nusa Tenggara Timur	1.97	2.02
Kalimantan Barat	1.85	1.01
Kalimantan Tengah	0.93	0.23
Kalimantan Selatan	1.53	0.53
Kalimantan Timur	1.50	0.88
Sulawesi Utara	0.96	0.48
Sulawesi Tengah	1.11	0.85
Sulawesi Selatan	3.38	5.77
Sulawesi Tenggara	0.94	1.16
Gorontalo	0.44	0.29
Sulawesi Barat	0.49	0.40
Maluku	0.65	0.87
Maluku Utara	0.44	0.40
Papua Barat	0.32	0.51
Papua	1.19	1.18
INDONESIA	100.00	100.00

Table 2 Regional distribution of LPDP scholarship recipients and population size. Source: National Population Census 2010, LPDP Annual Report 2018. Green label means the province is overrepresented vis-a-vis its population size, red means underrepresentation. However, the coloring does not show the degree of over- or underrepresentation itself.

As seen in the figure above, the capital Jakarta and the education powerhouse Special Province of Yogyakarta were the most overrepresented regions. Interestingly, provinces like Aceh and provinces in easternmost of Indonesia like Papua and West Papua performed much better in term of LPDP scholarship

awardee number despite being the most underperforming regions in term of national high school leaving exam (Ujian Nasional) in recent times.¹² Ideally, this finding should be followed-up with analyses on factors that went into play. However, limitation in resource and readily available data meant that such analyses must be relegated to future research. On the other hand, this finding could provide an insight to analyses on overall education system, planning, and development in Indonesia, as this suggested that performance of many regions differed between secondary education and post-graduate level. As a caveat for this part, it is worth noting that, according to 2016 data more than 70 percent of awardees already had employment (LPDP, 2016), so the data on applicants' home address may not reflect their actual origin—i.e. where they received earlier education; that being said, the least developed region affirmative scholarship specifically required its applicants to finish either primary or secondary education in the target region.

Another aspect worth looking at in term of awardee distribution is where the disseminations of information regarding the scholarship were conducted. Java Island where both the capital city Jakarta and Indonesia's top three public universities are located consistently hosted more information sessions than other regions. Moreover, the 2018 Annual Report stated that the capital Jakarta hosted three times more information sessions than the second most often provinces (LPDP, 2018) despite Jakartan people already outperformed those from other provinces in term of awardee distribution. This begged question on how the decisions on promoting the scholarship program were made, given the program's own explicit commitment to inclusive education.

The next part of this paper would shift perspective into the awardees' point of view, to provide illustration on how they perceived the scholarship and how it in turn affected their lives.

LPDP scholarship and the compulsory repatriation policy: Micro level narrative from the scholarship awardees' point of view

In total, nine informants consisting of current and former LPDP study abroad scholarship awardees were interviewed for this section. Seven were given semi-structured interview either through video conference or by free-form questionnaire followed by electronic correspondence. The other two, Heru and Fluffy, were interviewed less in-depth through only online correspondence. All names are pseudonym given the potentiality of their participation in this research affecting their career or its prospect. Angela and Fluffy chose their own pseudonyms, while the rest were given randomly selected common Indonesian names to with initial ranging from A to I to make it easier for unfamiliar readers to follow. All informants gave their written consent. Provided below are some of the findings from the interviews.

Many LPDP awardees became aware of the “obligation to return upon graduation” rule in the middle of, or right after finishing their studies, although most interviewees already had some form of expectation regarding the rule

Angela (Prefer not to identify gender, Jakarta, master's degree in southern Japan, 2015, currently looking for a job after finishing doctoral degree without LPDP support) said that they already have some

¹² Data on national exam result is taken from Ministry of Education and Culture data base.

expectation about the rule of compulsory repatriation, and its announcement did not particularly affect her. That being said, they evaded the bureaucratic struggle by going back to Indonesia right after graduating with master's degree using the return ticket provided by LPDP before returning to Japan right away, partly because they were pessimistic that the postponing of their return would be granted.

Desi (Female, Makassar, 20s, master's degree in Australia, 2016, currently teaching at a private university in Bandung, West Java) said that she learned of the compulsory repatriation rule when she was in her third semester in Australia, around which time she also heard about the new rule through a visit by LPDP board members to her city. Desi said that she does not have problem with programs and regulations of LPDP, as she was sure that the rule is actually flexible as long as the awardees themselves stick with a career path relevant to the needs of Indonesian society.

Gita (Female, Pematang, 20s, master's degree in southern Japan, currently doing doctoral degree without LPDP support in the same university) said that she did not remember exactly when she first knew of the compulsory repatriation rule and showed her scholarship contract with LPDP which did not mention the rule. She said that she might have known the rule from other awardee or perhaps from the official mailing list message. Upon completing her master's degree she did not think that it was viable to apply for LPDP scholarship to fund her doctoral degree. When she reported her completion of master's degree through the official online platform, Gita said that she was asked to apply for permission to not directly return to Indonesia through a process which would have involved writing three essays. Nonetheless, Gita said she received a notification saying her application for postponing her repatriation was accepted when she was in the middle of the application process.

Unlike the other interviewees, Heru (Male, Bandung, 30s, master's degree at Bandung Institute of Technology, Indonesia, 2014) was an awardee of LPDP domestic scholarship in 2014 which he used to get master's degree from ITB. At the time, he was already employed at a state-owned research institution, and upon completion of master's degree Heru got a study leave for doctoral education at a university in southern Japan with another scholarship, which he finished in September 2020. Heru said that the notification of the new rule making it compulsory for LPDP awardee to stay and work in Indonesia for double their scholarship period plus one year came when he was already in Japan, and that he received a letter—marked urgent and secret, whose scan he showed after the interview—demanding him to return or negotiate repayment of his master's degree scholarship. Heru said that he was detected of being in Japan through an alumni survey, and that his detection led to a bureaucratic struggle to prove that his continuing his study abroad is legitimate, which involved him getting letters proving his study-duty signed by his institution head and relevant government minister.

Most informants agreed that they ought to contribute to development in Indonesia, and accepted the obligation to return and work in the country as prescribed by the scholarship.

Gita said that even if there is no regulation on compulsory return and service period, she felt bound and morally indebted to Indonesia for receiving the scholarship. On the other hand, she said that she does not necessarily hold the same feeling toward Japan as she believed that her funding for doctoral degree is akin to salary she gets for research projects at the university.

Iqbal (Male, Malang, doctoral degree in southern England, 2018, ongoing awardee) believed that the LPDP scholarship selection put an emphasis on the applicant's clear plan on what they want to do after graduating and how they could contribute in their respective fields in Indonesia. Iqbal said that different scholarship might have different expectation for their applicants, and those applying for LPDP should bear in mind that the program is meant for people willing to contribute specifically to Indonesia.

It is however worth mentioning that the obligation to return and work in Indonesia could have different impact to the awardees depending on their career position at the time of graduation. For instance, Iqbal already had a teaching position at a major university in Indonesia when he graduated master (and going for doctoral degree with LPDP scholarship), and Fluffy (Female, Baubau, doctoral degree in southern Japan, ongoing) already received an informal invitation to teach at a private university in her hometown. Yet another scenario is that of Cahya (Female, Purwokerto, 30s, master's degree in northern Japan, 2016, civil servant) who was already a civil servant in her hometown's regional government. Her position as a civil servant already bound her for the obligation to return and serve for the double the study period plus one more year, the exact same formula with the scholarship's obligation for its awardees, so she was not particularly affected when the scholarship announced the rule when she was studying in Japan. She added that the rule for civil servants is actually stricter as there is practically no leeway for post-graduation activities and that she must return and fulfill the obligatory service period before even applying for another study leave.

Nonetheless, many of the informants agreed that the program (or the government) should either be more flexible regarding the repatriation policy or provide a more thorough or systematic career development support for repatriated alumni.

Bambang (Male, Tasikmalaya, 30s, master's degree in southern Japan, 2016, freelance geology consultant in the process of applying for civil servant position) believed that LPDP policy concerning its awardee's career can still be improved. He believed that the scholarship management should consider an integrated career support system which could bridge the awardees with jobs that enable them to contribute to the country in a more 'real' way, instead of for instance helping the LPDP management promoting the scholarship and volunteering to hold a kind of motivation session at Indonesian schools. Similar to Bambang, Cahya, who supported the obligation to return and work in Indonesia for LPDP awardees, also believed that the scholarship program should help in facilitating or dispatching its graduates for a job or an internship upon their return to Indonesia. In a similar vein, Fluffy also supported the policy while agreeing that the compulsory return policy could give uneasiness especially for awardees who have not yet had a job offer upon their return.

Eka (Male, Jakarta, 20s, master's degree in northern England, 2016) believed LPDP awardees, especially those with specific specialization with little opportunity to find suitable employment in Indonesia, should be given opportunity to work abroad first before returning and serves in Indonesia. He added that no one has anything to lose with a scholarship graduate getting some work experience. Eka said that before landing on his current job, he was already at the final stage of recruitment process with another major company, but decided to resign from the process due to the prospective position was "too general" and that he believed he would not be able to fully utilize his knowledge there. Similarly, Iqbal believed that in the end all awardees ought to return to Indonesia, but it should be on their own discretion whether to return directly or after several years. He argued that awardees who studied astronomy, for example,

would benefit from a period of internship at NASA if they managed to land a position there. However, Iqbal also believed that a career support system which channels LPDP awardees into a job such as civil servant is not needed, and that such system would be unfair toward non-awardees. That said, he would be okay with something like a career center or optional supports like entrepreneurship workshops.

There is a tendency for the awardees to move (or plan to move) to centers of development in Indonesia, either due to their career-related aspiration or simply the availability of relevant job.

Two of the interviewees, Bambang and Desi moved to work closer to development centers in Indonesia. At the time of the interview, Bambang was in the process of applying for a civil servant position in West Java provincial government, motivated by his dream to contribute to policy making process in mining and mineral resources sector. As a freelance geology consultant, a job he took after graduating master's degree with the scholarship, he was based in South Tangerang, a newly emerging urban center just outside Jakarta. Desi initially planned that upon graduation she would return to her hometown to found a foundation focusing on heritage preservation. Desi said she has been managing a community which organizes non-commercial programs in society and youth development since 2011. Upon returning to Indonesia with her master's degree, though, Desi's former professors in her university in Bandung invited her to contribute as a lecturer there given that her field of expertise was deemed highly relevant. Desi accepted the offer, believing that a teaching position at a relatively major university could enable her to contribute to the society in a way which is not necessarily available otherwise.

Another case is that of Gita's. Although she is committed to return to Indonesia after finishing her studies, Gita said that she does not plan to return to her hometown of Pematang due to the lack of suitable formal employment there. Gita said that at the selection interview, she was asked whether she would be willing to work outside a university, to which she replied that while she prefers teaching and research career, she would feel alright if demanded to work where she can properly utilize her knowledge. Gita and Angela voiced their interest to return to their alma mater, in which case they would join Iqbal as members of Indonesian researcher-educator at major universities—mostly located in major cities in the country.

While not directly related to domestic migration, it is worth to mention Eka's case, whose desired (and directly degree-relevant) position as a risk engineer with specialization in fire and explosion-related risk was relatively new in Indonesia and even major companies in the country do not necessarily have it.

Concluding remarks

This paper provided a rough image on (1) how the post-graduate scholarship under LPDP scheme is distributed throughout Indonesia, and (2) how the scholarship, especially the study abroad program, affected the awardees' career path or design, framed within the compulsory return upon graduation policy which signals Indonesian government's interest to utilize the awardees domestically. On their own however, the findings of this paper are nowhere near enough to provide a complete picture on how the scholarship program plays its role in Indonesian national development, or even on the scholarship program itself.

To proceed, the author plans to take a step back to first thoroughly examine the planning-stage and the formation of LPDP scholarship program to know more about the developmental and political motives behind the program. The next step would be utilizing the findings of this paper to help design further research mean to (1) have a more complete image on the scholarship's distribution by incorporating more relevant variables, and (2) elaborate on how the scholarship awardees contribute to Indonesian society by looking at macro level data on their career path. When these studies are done, it would hopefully be possible to construct a narrative on how the scholarship program contributes to certain aspects of national development in Indonesia.

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