

## Research article

# Collaborative Governance for Reopening Schools in Indonesia Following the COVID-19 Pandemic

Hendarman Hendarman<sup>1,2</sup><sup>1</sup>Policy Analyst at Pusat Penguatan Karakter, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology<sup>2</sup>Pakuan University**Abstract.**

Due to COVID-19, there has been a change in the teaching process and climate in schools and universities. Teaching that was originally carried out face-to-face was changed to online learning. This study was carried out to examine how a policy to accelerate the opening of face-to-face learning known as Surat Keputusan Bersama 4 Menteri or a Joint Decree of 4 Ministers (namely the Minister of Religion Affairs, of Health, of Home Affairs, and of Education, Culture, Research and Technology) has been implemented and its impact. This joint decree regulates how schools are allowed to open after a reduction in cases of COVID-19. Data were collected from relevant regulations, government documents and scientific papers. It was revealed that this joint decree, which is based on the roles and responsibilities of each ministry at the central and region level, has been differently perceived and implemented. The success of accelerating school openings is determined by the level of collaborative governance where the related elements, namely local government, schools, parents and the community, understand their respective roles and are open and accountable to any existing problems and mitigation actions when new clusters emerge. The leadership of regional heads is the key to the safety and health of students and education personnel in conducting face-to-face learning after COVID-19. In addition, media campaigns must be encouraged to achieve a common perception among various stakeholders.

**Keywords:** school reopening, post-COVID-19, Indonesia, collaborative governance

## 1. INTRODUCTION

An executive summary of the UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and OECD publication reveals that in 2020, schools around the world were fully closed across all four education levels. The length is 79 instruction days on average, ranging from 53 days in high-income countries to 115 days in lower-middle-income countries. As of 1 February 2021, it was reported that 21 per cent of respondent countries fully closed the schools due to COVID-19. None of which were low-income countries. It is interesting that a variety of learning modalities have been introduced to overcome school closures. These include fully remote learning or hybrid learning, and other measures to mitigate potential learning losses.

Corresponding Author:

Hendarman Hendarman; email:  
hendarman@kemdikbud.go.id

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The Indonesian government sets a strict policy in early April 2020, through a largescale social restriction to reduce the spread of COVID-19 as well as to limit people movement. The Ministry of Education and Culture issued the policies that learning from home or online mode is implemented, and Television of the Republic of Indonesia the so-called TVRI broadcasts everyday those educational modules at every level of education.

There are four countries in East Asia and the Pacific, including Indonesia, that have not yet implemented full face-to-face learning. Another 23 countries or around 85% of countries in this region, have done full face-to-face learning. Among these 23 countries are Vietnam, China, Cambodia, and Laos.[1]

It is therefore, the push for face-to-face learning or the so-called “Pembelajaran Tatap Muka (PTM)” becomes such a critical issue in Indonesia. This push actually was started a year ago through the issuance of a Joint Decree (SKB) of 4 Ministers or the so-called Surat Keputusan Bersama (SKB) 4 Menteri”. The four ministers include the Minister of Religion Affairs (MORA), of Home Affairs (MOHA), of Health (MOH), of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MECRT).

This joint Ministerial Decree has been revised three times since it was initially stipulated on July 15, 2020, the first was amended on August 7, 2020, was amended again in January 2021 and the last was in April 2021. Revisions were made with contextual and situational considerations. Initially, based on zones whereby green zone areas were given the opportunity to open schools. Although opened, PTM is not at once for all participants and levels.

This joint ministerial decree allows joint authority if confirmed cases of COVID-19 are found. The central government, regional governments, regional offices, regional office of ministry of religion, and school principals are required to handle cases and may temporarily suspend limited offline learning in schools.

The joint ministerial decree also regulates the right of parents/guardians to choose for their children to attend limited offline learning or continue to do learning from home. This means that schools cannot force students to participate in offline learning. Schools should provide online learning for students whose parents do not allow them to attend school.

More importantly, this joint ministerial decree reflects that reopening school post COVID-19 requires the active and collaborative participation of different ministries in decision-making process. This is due to the fact that the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) is responsible for religious schools comprising Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI),

Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) and Madrasah Aliyah (MA) at the primary and secondary education level.

In this respect, it can be seen that the policy of joint ministerial decree employs the collaborative governance principle. Lynn, et al.[2] argue that governance broadly as regimes of laws, rules, judicial decisions, and administrative practices that constrain, prescribe, and enable the provision of publicly supported goods and services. In addition, the joint ministerial decree adopts the meaning of governance as simply means the process of decision-making. The process refers to implemented decisions or not implemented ones. With these arguments, then an analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors. These two types of actors involved in decision-making and implementing the decisions made and the formal and informal structures which aim to arrive at and implement the decision.[3]

The study basically examines the policy effectiveness on the joint ministerial decree to push school reopening as this decree considered as collaborative governance in nature. There will be four research questions of the study as follows:

1. What is the reason to accelerate the opening of offline learning?
2. Are there objections for school reopening post COVID-19?
3. How do policy makers consider previous research results to formulate school reopening policy post COVID-19?
4. How do related ministries distribute the roles and responsibilities at the central and regional levels?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This research will examine the proposed policy implementation on school reopening post-COVID19 as seen from collaborative governance paradigm. Collaborative in this research is meant how various stakeholders at central and local levels involve with each role and responsibility.

This research did not employ primary data due to the restriction to for society activity or the so-called PPKM (Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat). Thus, secondary data and information were used and obtained from various government documents enacted by several ministries/agencies, research results and scientific papers, and publications from different donor agencies and research institutions as well communities. Sobal emphasizes that any data which have been collected for another purpose

and later reanalysed may be seen as secondary data (2, p.480). [4] Whereas Vartanian contends that secondary data onclude any data that are examined to answer a research question other than the question for which the data were initially collected.[5]

Research using secondary data has different purposes. Heaton Janet argues that this research applies a new research problem – strictly researching with new research objectives that are different from previous research. [6] Whereas Fielding considers this research as utilize old data to come up with new ideas.[7] According to Hinds et al.[8] this can be used to "test" the results of research that has been carried out, in the form of testing untruth with correct evidence, testing the truth with evidence of untruth, or exploring data from different perspectives, and "exploring" data is meant to "boggle" the data (in a neutral sense) or explore, dive into, sift through the data.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Government is one of the actors in governance, whereas other actors involved vary depending on the level of government. In rural areas, other actors may include influential land lords, associations of peasant farmers, cooperatives, NGOs, research institutes, religious leaders, finance institutions political parties, the military etc.

At the national level, media, lobbyists, international donors, multi-national corporations, may play a pivotal role in decision-making or in influencing the decision-making process. All actors other than government and the military are grouped together as civil society. At the national level, informal decision-making structures, such as "kitchen cabinets" or informal advisors may exist. The situation in urban area is much more complex, whereby organized crime syndicates such as the land Mafia may influence decision-making. In some rural areas, local powerful families may make or influence to decision-making. It is important to note that informal decision-making is often the result of corrupt practices or leads to corrupt practices.

In some countries, organized crime syndicates also influence decision-making, particularly in urban areas and at the national level. Similarly, formal government structures are viewed as another means by which decisions are arrived at and implemented.

#### 3.1. Reasons for Accelerating School Reopening

The need to reopen school post-COVID19 is assumed important and this could not be delayed. The delay will impact not only to students, but also parents, society and the

government. As a policy, the opening of schools or face-to-face learning should be supported by a number of justifiable reasons.

United Nation International Children's Emergency Fund East Asia and Pacific Regional Office for example, released the results of two surveys on how student study from home during the COVID-19 pandemic period in 2020.[9] The survey was conducted in two periods, namely between 18-29 May 2020 and 5-8 June 2020. The survey was conducted through the U-Report channel, which consists of SMS, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger. The survey was followed by more than 4,000 student responses in 34 provinces. Students were asked how they were going through distance learning activities during the pandemic, and how they felt about the reopening of schools.

Many students expressed a desire to return to school. Two-thirds (66 percent) of students said they felt uncomfortable studying at home. Of these two-thirds, 87 percent said they wanted to return to school immediately. Uncomfortable due to the challenges faced, namely: (1) 38 percent said there was a lack of guidance from teachers; (2) 35 percent cited poor internet access; and (3) 62 percent need internet quota assistance if distance learning continues.

Another survey from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission or the so-called "Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia (KPAI), indicates the findings that are almost the same as the UNICEF survey. This survey involved 1,700 student respondents, from high school to kindergarten levels in 20 provinces and 54 districts/cities. The survey used a multistage random sampling technique, conducted from April 13 to April 20, 2020. In general, the majority of students stated that there was no interaction between teachers during learning from home in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic period. [10]

KPAI survey reveals that 79.9 percent of students admitted that there was no interaction at all except giving assignments and collecting assignments. Interestingly, 20.1 percent of respondents stated that there were interactions between students and teachers. The interaction used short messages or messaging applications 87.2 percent, zoom meetings 20.2 percent, WhatsApp video calls 7.6 percent and telephone 5.2 percent. This survey revealed that 77.8 percent of assignments piled up because other teachers also gave assignments, 42.2 percent did not have an internet quota, 15.6 percent did not have the necessary equipment, and 37.1 percent had limited study time.

The need to school reopening has also been stated by the Minister of Communication and Information. The minister said that there are at least three main reasons to accelerate PTM. First, to avoid the threat of dropping out of school. Distance Learning or the so-called "Pembelajaran Jarak Jauh (PJJ)" which is not optimal makes children forced to work and not study, to help the family finances.

Second, to avoid a decrease in children's learning achievement. Classroom learning results in better academic achievement when it is compared to learning from home. Differences in access, quality of material obtained by students, facilities owned, can result in gaps in learning achievement, especially for children who have socio-economic limitations.

Third, there are psychosocial risks or individual conditions including psychological and social aspects of children. These risks include an increase in violence against children at home, the risk of early marriage, exploitation of children especially girls, and teenage pregnancy. Children can also experience feelings of depression, because they do not play and meet with their friends for a long time.

### 3.2. Community Objection

The Government's decision to commence face-to-face learning (PTM), did not fully get community support. One of the objections in the form of a subpoena or "somasi" was stated by the Alliance for Child Education and Safety. Their subpoena contained six demands. They gave 14 (fourteen) days to fulfill the demands, before the school was allowed to reopen.

The first demand is that the positivity rate data in each region be opened transparently. Second, to accelerate vaccination and ensure that the vaccine quota is immediately fulfilled for all children aged 12-17 years in Indonesia. Third, it is obligatory for all schools so that students who have not received the vaccine to continue to study online.

Fourth, to conduct a field review of all schools related to compliance with the requirements for the implementation of face-to-face learning based on the recommendations of WHO and the Indonesian Pediatrician Association. Fifth, to stop face-to-face learning at schools that do not comply with the recommendations accumulatively. The sixth is to stop the entire series of face-to-face learning at all schools in Indonesia if there is one school that is confirmed to be a COVID-19 cluster.

A critical question is whether or not schools are kept closed until all students get vaccinated. If this is assumed as one of the options, the concern is how much longer it will take to reach the vaccination target? The fact shows that the group of children aged 12-17 years who are vaccinated has not reached 20% until early September 2021. If it is still forced to study from home, who will take the responsibility if the emergence of high stress levels for parents and children happens? Is there help provided for psychiatric problems, especially for children?

### 3.3. Previous Research

A study conducted by UNICEF (2020) shows that children who cannot access schools directly will be left behind. The most marginalized children are the most affected. UNICEF's message to world leaders, is that every effort must be made to keep schools open or prioritize so that schools can reopen.

The latest publication from Puslitjak Kemendikbudristek "Learning Recovery-Time for Action, Policy Brief, August 2021", compares the development of numeracy literacy before and during the pandemic in grades 1 and 2 of elementary school. The impact of COVID is not uniform COVID has impacted year-to-year-progress. Concerning progress of literacy and numeracy before and during the pandemic in Grade 1 to Grade 2, there is a loss of 5-6 months of progress (for students with median scores) after 12 months of learning from home. [11]

This then contributes to a widening learning gap between what the curriculum sets for students to learn and actual student attainment. Not mastering what should be learned in one year will have compounding effects on what can be learned in the following year. If not addressed the gap will continue to grow. This publication also reveals that COVID-19 having greater impact on some groups of students than others. Students from families with a lower socio-economic background are much more likely to not be enrolled at school or disengaged from the learning process.

Online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic period have negative impacts on students. Psychological impact on students includes (1) students experience boredom after the first two weeks of studying from home, (2) the anxiety of low-income parents since they had to buy quotas to participate in online learning, and (3) the emergence of distractions of emotional mood indicated by changes in mood due to many assignments considered ineffective by students. This impact comes from research conducted by Irawan in East Kalimantan. [12]

Another reference that should be taken into account is the publication of World Health Organization entitled "Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19: annex to considerations in adjusting public health and social measures in the context of COVID-19, published on September 14, 2020.[13] This publication shows that infections in children (under 18 years old) are generally mild. Children have a lower susceptibility to infection than adults, or in other words children are less likely to transmit the infection than adults.

### 3.4. Collaborative Governance

The local government's decision to start Pembelajaran Tatap Muka (PTM) was not due to coercion from the Central Government. In accordance with the joint Ministerial Decree, the authority is indeed given to the regional government together with the COVID-19 task force in each region to make decisions, as well as parents. The local government's decision was allegedly due to the desire to avoid "learning loss" and various complaints from parents accompanying their children at home. The local government's decision must have been based on the requirements to open a PTM, as stated in the joint Ministerial Decree which has been revised several times, since it was first launched on July 15, 2020.

First, the local government decides the PTM on the condition that it is not at once for all participants and levels. The local government of course gives permission to schools that have met all the requirements. The main thing is not to oblige. Second, the local government has prepared a mitigation process. This means, in the event of a confirmed case of COVID-19, the regional government together with the central government and the head of school are required to handle cases and can temporarily suspend face-to-face learning in school.

Third, the local government regulates for children who do not want PTM because there is the right of parents/guardians to choose. This means that local governments and schools provide online learning for students whose parents do not allow them to attend school. Fourth, local governments have synchronized decisions by not only referring to the Joint Decree of the 4 Ministers but also the Minister of Home Affairs (MOHA)'s policy concerned the Enforcement of Restrictions on Community Activities (PPKM). The policy has also been revised several times.

The issuance of the Joint Ministerial Decree is somehow in line with the concept of collaborative governance. According to Ansel & Gnash, collaborative governance has emerged to replace adversarial and managerial modes of policy making and implementation. Collaborative governance brings public and private stakeholders together to engage in consensus-oriented decision making. Ansel & Gnash define collaborative governance as a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process. The process is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative aiming at making or implementing public policy or manage public programs or assets.[14]

Trends toward collaboration also arise from the growth of knowledge and institutional capacity. Knowledge becomes increasingly specialized and distributed and institutional



infrastructures become more complex and interdependent. These then result in the increased demand for collaboration. Kramer & Gray points out the common metric for all these factors as the increasing turbulence faced by policy makers and managers.[15]

The decision-making made for policy on school reopening by the Indonesian government actually apply the concept of multiple decisions on school closures, remote learning and reopening. This is in line with the findings of a collaborative survey conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), focusing on education recovery in a number of countries amid the COVID-19 Pandemic.[16]

The survey asked countries to report how they made decisions at administrative level, using eight strategic policy measures during the pandemic. As found in the survey, the eight measures include: (1) school closures and reopening; (2) adjustments to the school calendar; (3) resources to continue learning during school closures; (4) additional support programs for students after school reopening; (5) working requirements for teachers; (6) compensation for teachers; (7) hygiene measures for school reopening; and (8) changes in funding to schools.

The survey reveals that decisions were mostly made centrally by involving the central government with some subnational entities. This trend was found in lower income countries, while some of the decisions were more devolved in higher income countries. In fact, most countries made decisions either exclusively at the central level or through coordination across different layers of administration. In 68 per cent of countries, decisions on school closure/reopening were made exclusively at the central level. In other 21 countries decisions were at multiple, including central levels.

Centrally decisions were found for school calendar adjustments (69 per cent), school funding changes (53 per cent) and school reopening hygiene measures (48 per cent). For teacher compensation, 58 per cent of the countries involved various decision levels. Decisions on additional support programmes for students and on teacher working requirements particularly in OECD countries, were more taken exclusively at the school level.

The government also employs various strategies in order for public to understand and perceive school reopening policy as a good will. One of strategies is inviting decision-makers from central and provincial as well district levels to discuss the plan and implication of school reopening policy. Another strategy is facilitation media campaign that include the use of public service ads (PSA) or "iklan layanan masyarakat", the making of short video, and the provision of infographic in social media.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

It is obvious, the delay to hasten face-to-face learning will bring about serious impact. Firstly, more children will be trapped in domestic violence without being detected by the teacher. Secondly, an increased risk for early marriage, exploitation of children, especially girls, and teenage pregnancy, as well as the low quality of education. Thirdly, distance learning can lead to disparities in learning outcomes, especially for children from different socio-economic backgrounds, due to quality to access.

For school reopening post COVID-19, the joint decree of the four Ministers emphasizes two principles, namely keep healthy and safety. These principles assure that learning protects students, educators, education staff, families, and the community. The implementation of these two principles is also included in the obligations of the school. Each school is required to fill out a readiness checklist. The checklist includes, among others, the availability of sanitation and hygiene facilities; able to access health service facilities (puskesmas, clinics, hospitals, and others); and readiness to apply the mandatory area for cloth masks or see-through masks for students with hearing impairments. This readiness must be bound by mutual agreement between school and school committee.

The Joint Decree outlines what relevant parties must do at the central level, including the ministry in charge of education, culture, research and technology and the ministry responsible for religious schools; as well as the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders at the provincial, district and city level. It is important to note that parents have the right to decide whether their children go to school or continue to study from home. This implies that the concept of collaborative governance has been in place and taken into actions by the government at different levels of decision-making.

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