



Regional focus

South East Asia

Foreign Ministers at the sixth East Asia Summit (EAS) in Bali, Indonesia, in July 2011 welcomed the convening of the first EAS Education Ministers meeting. The meeting of the Education Ministers of the 18 EAS countries was agreed at the previous EAS meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam, in October 2010. The ministers agreed to pursue further cooperation to enhance the quality of education, and promote educational exchange and innovation in the region.

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) prepared an Education Policy Paper and Action Plan, commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, for the inaugural EAS Education Ministers meeting.

Australia's representative at the meeting, Commonwealth Minister for Tertiary Education, Senator Chris Evans, said Australia would:

- fund three projects to assist countries in the region in developing a quality assurance regime for vocational education
- support EAS countries to ratify the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Regional Convention on qualifications recognition, and
- investigate the merit of a regional facility for monitoring education quality in schools.

Members of ACER's research division, and psychometric and methodology division, recently completed the Quality of Education in Madrasah study into various dimensions of education in Indonesian Madrasah (Islamic Schools) regulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which operate alongside the schools regulated by the Ministry of National Education.

The collaboration between ACER, Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, AusAID's Contractor Strategic Advisory Services (CSAS), the Indonesian University of Education and the Basic Education Capacity Trust Fund, which ran from April 2009 to June 2010, was funded under the Australia-Indonesia Basic Education Program.

The study investigated the quality of education of Year 9 students in Indonesian Madrasah in terms of the level of student achievement, students' views of their schooling experience and the extent to which Madrasah meet the draft Minimum Service Standards being developed by the Ministry of National Education.

More than 6,000 students from 150 Indonesian Madrasah completed achievement tests in mathematics, science, Indonesian and English as well as ACER's School Life Questionnaire, designed to measure their attitudes towards learning, teachers, other students and school in general. ACER developed an assessment of students' background characteristics in order

to observe whether they are related to student achievement. A Principal Interview Schedule and School Inventory were also developed by ACER to identify relationships between school facilities, student achievement and student attitudes.

ACER's final report to CSAS and the Ministry of Religious Affairs will play an important role in informing policy recommendations aimed at improving the quality of education in Indonesian Madrasah.

Collaboration between ACER and the Ministry of Education in Brunei, meanwhile, is establishing an assessment and monitoring system for government schools called the National Study of Student Competencies in Mathematics and English, and building capacity in test development and psychometrics in Brunei.

ACER is examining the Brunei curriculum, developing assessment instruments in line with the curriculum, constructing reporting scales, and training staff in item writing and marking, interpretation of results and use of data analysis software.

The capacity building component of the project has included workshops for teachers and Ministry of Education staff on the principles of ACER methodologies as well as on the interpretation of student and school reports, the processes of selecting items in the preparation of tests, data entry and data management.