Madrasah for girls and private school for boys? The determinants of school type choice in rural and urban Indonesia∗

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A R T I C L E   I N F O
JEL classifications:
D04
I21
O15
Keywords:
School choice
Gender
Poverty
Madrasah education
Indonesia

A B S T R A C T
Using a nationally representative data set on Indonesian households and villages, we study the determinants of enrolment in Islamic schools (i.e. madrasahs) and private schools vis-à-vis government schools. Multinomial logit estimates indicate that madrasahs systematically attract children from poorer households, rural locations and less educated parents while the opposite is true for private school enrolment. Moreover, girls are significantly more likely to be in madrasahs, irrespective of their locations, while boys enjoy a higher probability of enrolment in non-madrasah schools, particularly in urban areas. A significant effect of household income remains even after factoring out the influence of child characteristics, parental background, and village characteristics. Therefore policies that reduce household poverty are likely to reduce demand for Islamic schooling. However, the presence of a “girl effect” in madrasah enrolment independent of household income and location factors is puzzling and underscores the need to better understand the socio-cultural determinants of school choice in Indonesia.

1. Introduction

Indonesia is home to the largest Islamic education system in the world where thousands of madrasahs exclusively cater to the educational needs of children from Muslim households. As a matter of fact, Indonesia belongs to a regional belt, stretching from North and West Africa to South and South-East Asia, including countries like Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, where the madrasah system of education is thriving (Anzar, 2003; Coulson, 2004; Hefner and Zaman, 2007; Atran et al., 2008; van Bruijessen, 2008; Izama, 2014; Asadullah and Chaudhury, 2016). However, madrasahs are often accused of promoting extreme political and religious views and gender norms (Anabor, 2006; Asadullah and Chaudhury, 2010). The large presence of Islamic schools in Muslim countries, therefore, raises an important question: why do households choose to send their children to madrasahs? The common perception is that madrasah attendance is higher in rural locations and driven by household poverty and/or cost-related concerns (Parker and Raihani 2009). If true, madrasah choice has important policy implications given that Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan host over half a billion people most of whom live in rural areas and on less than two dollars a day. Identifying the determinants of Islamic school attendance vis-a-vis non-madrasah schools is crucial for understanding parental choice in poor Muslim communities throughout South-East Asia. Country-specific knowledge of the determinants can guide appropriate policy design to ensure that these countries capitalize on the opportunity to reap benefits from the demographic dividend by improving the quality of available human resources.

Indonesia’s madrasah system is unique in the Muslim world for...
several reasons. First, the majority of the country’s madrasahs are in the non-state sector, in most cases teaching Arabic religious texts alongside a non-religious curriculum. Yet they belong to centralized bureaucracies, associated with Indonesia’s two leading Muslim organizations, Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama (NU) (Hasan, 2008; van Bruinussen, 2008). Second, Indonesian madrasahs have been open to girls for nearly a century. Both Muhammadiyah and NU maintain a nationwide network of madrasahs led by women who interpret sacred texts and exert powerful religious influence (van Doorn-Harder, 2006). This is in stark contrast with madrasahs in South Asia which were until recently all-male institutions. Third, a large number of fee-charging non-religious private schools operate throughout Indonesia alongside madrasahs. The large size and heterogeneous composition of the non-state education sector is despite a large-scale public school construction programme undertaken in the country in the past (Dufflo, 2001). Therefore, compared to most other Muslim countries in Asia, Indonesian households face a different mix of schools comprising of madrasahs, non-religious private and public schools. In other words, households can choose a private school/madrasah, one that operates independently, or send their children to a government-aided school or madrasah (Stern and Smith, 2016). Fourth, Indonesia’s fragmented geography means that the availability of alternatives to madrasahs may vary across regions. Regional disparities remain in student access and educational quality in remote and poor areas (OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015). More integrated, urbanized, and prosperous geography means that the availability of alternatives to madrasahs may vary across regions. Regional disparities remain in student access and educational quality in remote and poor areas (OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015). More integrated, urbanized, and prosperous geography means that the availability of alternatives to madrasahs may vary across regions. Regional disparities remain in student access and educational quality in remote and poor areas (OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015). More integrated, urbanized, and prosperous geography means that the availability of alternatives to madrasahs may vary across regions. Regional disparities remain in student access and educational quality in remote and poor areas (OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015). More integrated, urbanized, and prosperous geography means that the availability of alternatives to madrasahs may vary across regions. Regional disparities remain in student access and educational quality in remote and poor areas (OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015). More integrated, urbanized, and prosperous geography means that the availability of alternatives to madrasahs may vary across regions. Regional disparities remain in student access and educational quality in remote and poor areas (OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015). More integrated, urbanized, and prosperous geography means that the availability of alternatives to madrasahs may vary across regions. Regional disparities remain in student access and educational quality in remote and poor areas (OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015). More integrated, urbanized, and prosperous geography means that the availability of alternatives to madrasahs may vary across regions. Regional disparities remain in student access and educational quality in remote and poor areas (OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015). More integrated, urbanized, and prosperous geography means that the availability of alternatives to madrasahs may vary across regions. Regional disparities remain in student access and educational quality in remote and poor areas (OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015). More integrated, urbanized, and prosperous geography means that the availability of alternatives to madrasahs may vary across regions. Regional disparities remain in student access and educational quality in remote and poor areas (OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015). More integrated, urbanized, and prosperous geography means that the availability of alternatives to madrasahs may vary across regions. Regional disparities remain in student access and educational quality in remote and poor areas (OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015). More integrated, urbanized, and prosperous geography means that the availability of alternatives to madrasahs may vary across regions. Regional disparities remain in student access and educational quality in remote and poor areas (OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015).
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