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# The Impact of Social Inequality on Educational Quality in Indonesia: Challenges and Policy Recommendations

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## **Abstrak**

**Objective:** This study aims to analyze the impact of social inequality on the quality of education in Indonesia. The research focuses on identifying examples of inequality, analyzing the contributing factors, and evaluating strategic efforts to address this issue. Theoretical framework: The theoretical framework employed is the theory of social inequality, which highlights the relationship between economic disparities, access to education, and human resource development. Literature Review: The literature review encompasses various studies discussing educational budget allocation, government programs, and the correlation between socioeconomic status and access to quality education in Indonesia. Methods: The research adopts a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis techniques. Data were collected through document analysis, interviews with educational stakeholders, and analysis of official government reports related to educational budget allocation. Results: The findings reveal that despite the government allocating 20% of the national budget (APBN) for education, significant gaps persist in access to and the quality of education, particularly in remote areas and among low-income communities. Key contributing factors include economic disparities, unequal distribution of resources, and weak educational infrastructure. Implications: The implications of these findings highlight the need for more targeted policy strategies, such as equitable redistribution of educational funds, improved access to educational technology, and enhanced teacher capacity in underdeveloped regions. This study offers a novel contribution by integrating a data-driven and social inequality theoretical approach to identify innovative and sustainable solutions. Novelty: The novelty of this research lies in its multidimensional analysis, combining social, economic, and educational aspects to provide more comprehensive policy recommendations. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for policymakers in improving the quality of national education to create intelligent and competitive human resources for the future.

**Keywords:** social inequality, education quality, educational access, policy strategies, human resource development.

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, with its rich cultural and ethnic diversity, has great potential in building superior human resources. Education is the main pillar in achieving this goal. However, realities on the ground show that social disparities are still a serious challenge that hinders access and quality of education in Indonesia [1].

Social disparities, reflected in economic disparities, access to resources, and opportunities, have a significant impact on education. For example, children from underprivileged families

in remote areas often face difficulties in accessing proper schools, limited educational facilities, and uneven quality of teaching. This results in them falling behind in the learning process and potentially experiencing difficulties in reaching their maximum potential [2].

The impact of this social gap is very detrimental, both for individuals and the nation. Children from underprivileged families tend to have low motivation to learn, have difficulty following lessons, and are even forced to drop out of school. This has an impact on the quality of human resources and hinders the progress of the nation [3].

Education is one of the main pillars in the development of a nation. Education is not only a means to increase individual capacity but also a foundation for creating an inclusive, prosperous, and globally competitive society. In Indonesia, education has been recognized as a basic right of every citizen as mandated in the 1945 Constitution. The government has also allocated 20% of the State Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBN) for the education sector. However, despite various efforts made, disparities in access and quality of education are still a significant problem. Social inequality, which includes economic, geographical, and cultural inequalities, is one of the main factors influencing such inequality [4].

This condition is evident in the difference in the quality of education between urban and rural areas, as well as between high- and low-income groups. This gap not only hinders educational equity but also creates a vicious cycle of poverty that is difficult to break. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of social disparities on the quality of education in Indonesia to formulate more effective and inclusive policies [5], [6].

The importance of this research. Research on the impact of social inequality on education has high relevance, both academically and practically. Academically, this study enriches the study of the relationship between social inequality and education, especially in the context of developing countries such as Indonesia. Practically, this study provides policy recommendations that can help the government and other stakeholders in overcoming existing challenges [7], [8].

In the context of globalization and the Industrial Revolution 4.0, the quality of education is the main key to creating competent and adaptive human resources. Indonesia, as a country with a large population, faces the challenge of ensuring that all its population has equal access to quality education. The study highlights various aspects of disparities, including access to infrastructure, resource distribution, and the quality of teaching staff, all of which have major implications for the quality of education [9].

This study uses several key indicators to measure the impact of social disparities on the quality of education in Indonesia: 1). Access to education: Includes school participation rates, availability of educational facilities, and distance to schools, especially in remote areas. 2). Quality of teaching staff: Assessing teacher competence based on academic qualifications, training, and equitable distribution of teachers. 3). Student learning outcomes: Measured through academic achievement, graduation rates, and achievement gaps between socioeconomic groups. 4). Educational infrastructure: Includes physical facilities such as school buildings, laboratories, and access to educational technology. 5). Financial support: Including allocation of education budgets, scholarships, and subsidies for low-income groups [10]–[12].

These indicators provide a comprehensive picture of how social disparities affect various aspects of education in Indonesia.

The uniqueness of this study lies in its multidimensional approach to analyzing the impact of social inequality on the quality of education. This study not only identifies the problem but also explores the causal relationship between social, economic, and geographical factors that affect education [13]–[15]. This approach includes:

1. Integration of theory and empirical data: This research combines social inequality theory with field data to provide a deeper understanding of the problem at hand.

- 2. Solution-based approach: In addition to analyzing the problem, the study offers policy recommendations that can be implemented to reduce disparities.
- 3. Focus on disadvantaged areas: This study pays special attention to the areas most affected by social disparities, such as remote areas and marginalized communities.
- 4. Relevance to the SDGs: This research supports the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in terms of ensuring inclusive and quality education and reducing inequality [16]–[18].

As such, this research not only provides academic contributions but also offers practical insights for policymakers, educational institutions, and the wider community to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. This research is expected to be a foothold to develop a more effective strategy for creating a fair and equitable education system [19], [20].

Therefore, this article will discuss more about the impact of social disparities on education in Indonesia, focusing on examples of educational disparities, their causal factors, and efforts that can be made to address them. Through a comprehensive analysis, it is hoped that this article can provide a deeper understanding of this problem and encourage the birth of effective solutions to build a fair and quality education system for all the nation's children [21].

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Social inequality in Indonesia has profound implications for the quality of education, perpetuating disparities that affect students' opportunities for learning and future socioeconomic mobility. Several studies have identified key challenges, including resource disparities, uneven teacher distribution, and limited access to quality infrastructure, as well as policy gaps that exacerbate educational inequality [22]–[24].

Challenges of Social Inequality in Education. Economic Disparities: A significant factor driving educational inequality is the economic divide. Wealthier families can afford private education or supplementary learning resources, while children from low-income households often attend under-resourced public schools. According to Suryadarma schools in poorer districts often lack access to basic facilities, teaching materials, and qualified educators, resulting in substandard educational outcomes [25], [26].

Geographic Disparities: Rural and remote areas face acute challenges in educational access and quality. Research by Purnastuti and Salim highlights that children in Indonesia's outer islands often experience limited access to schools, with long travel distances and inadequate infrastructure further compounding the problem. This rural-urban divide contributes to significant gaps in literacy rates and learning achievements [27]–[29].

Teacher Quality and Distribution: The uneven distribution of qualified teachers is a critical issue. Urban schools tend to attract more experienced and better-trained educators, while rural and underserved regions are staffed by less experienced teachers. A study by Chang found that Indonesia's teacher certification program, intended to improve teacher quality, has not adequately addressed these disparities [30]–[32].

Policy Responses and Recommendations. Indonesia has implemented several policies to reduce educational inequality, such as the School Operational Assistance (BOS) Program, which provides financial support to schools. However, critics argue that the program's funding formula does not adequately account for regional cost differences, leading to unequal benefits across districts.

To address systemic inequality, policy recommendations include:

- 1. Targeted Investments: Increasing funding for schools in marginalized areas and providing subsidies for disadvantaged students can bridge resource gaps.
- 2. Improved Teacher Deployment: Introducing incentives for teachers to work in remote regions and enhancing training programs to build capacity in underserved schools.

- 3. Infrastructure Development: Prioritizing the construction of schools and transportation facilities in rural areas to improve access.
- 4. Equity-Based Curriculum: Tailoring curricula to address local contexts and needs while integrating technology to overcome geographical barriers.

While efforts to address social inequality in education in Indonesia are ongoing, significant challenges remain. A comprehensive approach that combines equitable funding, teacher support, and infrastructure improvements is necessary to ensure that all students, regardless of socioeconomic background, have access to quality education. Further research should explore the long-term impacts of these initiatives to refine strategies for reducing inequality.

Table 1. Literature on the Impact of Social Inequality on the Quality of Education in Indonesia

Heading	Author	Key findings	Policy Recommendations
Social Inequality and Access to Education: Structural Analysis in Indonesia	Farkhati	Social inequality affects access and learning processes, especially for vulnerable groups.	Adjustment of education budget allocation and improvement of facilities in marginal areas.
Recent Developments in Higher Education in Indonesia: Issues and Challenges	Wicaksono & Friawan	Inequality in higher education is influenced by low perception of graduate outcomes and lack of infrastructure.	Strengthening scholarship programs and higher education infrastructure in remote areas.
Influences of Regional Inequality in Education in Indonesia	Azzizah	Regional inequalities in education are related to unequal access to facilities and the distribution of educators.	Decentralization of education by strengthening the monitoring system in the regions.
Educational in Indonesia: Rising to the Challenge	Schleicher	Low family incomes limit access to education and social mobility.	Education subsidy programs and investments in low-economic communities.
Financing Public Education in Indonesia	Shaturaev	Lack of public funding leads to low quality in primary and secondary education.	Restructuring of education funds and implementation of performance-based funding.
Urbanisation in Indonesia: The Relationship between Income Inequality, Urban Infrastructure, and Education	Telaumbanua et al.	Urbanization exacerbates the educational gap between urban and rural areas.	Increase in the budget for educational infrastructure in rural areas and small towns.
Teachers Quality and Educational Equality Achievements in Indonesia	Kawuryan et al.	The low quality of teachers and the imbalance of distribution affect the inequality of education quality in marginal areas.	Intensive training for teachers and strengthening the equitable distribution system of educators.

Providing Equity of Access to Higher Education in Indonesia	Fadhil & Sabic- El-Rayess	Access to higher education is influenced by less supportive regulations and an economic-based selection system.	Reform of the mechanism for higher education entrance selection based on potential and equitable distribution of digital access.
Educational Inequality in Indonesia: Are Intergovernmental Fiscal Transfers Effective?	Wirandana & Khoirunurrofifik	Fiscal transfers between governments are not effective enough in reducing educational inequality.	Revise fiscal transfer policies with indicators based on local educational needs.
Innovative Approaches to Addressing Educational Inequities	Amen	Technology can reduce inequality in access to education in remote areas with distance learning.	Increasing internet access in remote areas and strengthening the capacity of locally-based educational technology.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social inequality on the quality of education as well as to formulate relevant policy recommendations [33]–[35].

Research Design: 1). Quantitative Research: Conducted through a large-scale survey to measure the relationship between social inequality indicators (family income, access to educational infrastructure, and availability of educators) and education quality (national exam results, school participation rate, and graduation rate). 2). Qualitative Research: Conducted with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) to understand the experiences of the community and stakeholders in facing social inequality in education [36], [37].

Population and Sample. The study population is primary and secondary schools in different regions of Indonesia, covering urban, rural, and remote areas. 1). Quantitative Sample: The sample was taken by stratified random sampling based on the level of social inequality, covering 1,000 students from 50 schools. 2). Qualitative Sample: A total of 30 participants consisting of teachers, students, parents, and policymakers were taken by purposive sampling for interviews and FGD [38], [39].

Data Collection Techniques: 1). Quantitative: The survey uses a structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale to measure students' and teachers' perceptions of access to education. Secondary data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) and the Ministry of Education regarding school participation rates, inequality indexes, and education budgets. 2). Qualitative: In-depth interviews are conducted with school principals, parents, and policymakers. 3). FGD with local community groups to identify challenges and solutions in education [40].

Data Analysis Techniques. 1). Quantitative Analysis: Uses regression analysis to look at the relationship between social inequality and quality of education. 2). Qualitative Analysis: Data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach to identify key themes related to educational challenges and policies. 3). Validity and Liability. The validity of the quantitative data was tested through the construct validity and reliability test with Cronbach's Alpha test. For qualitative data, validity is carried out through data triangulation by comparing the results of interviews, FGDs, and documents [41]–[43].

This research is expected to produce a mapping of social inequality factors that affect the quality of education as well as evidence-based policy recommendations to reduce this inequality.

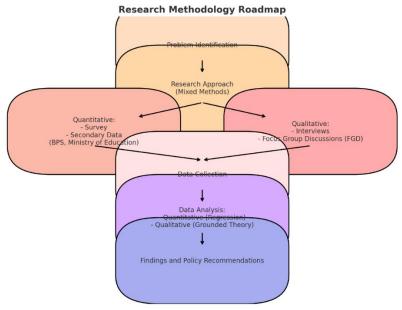


Figure 1. Research Methods Roadmap

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of several studies have agreed that education is one of the most important aspects in the scope of life. Through education, the nation will create quality generations so that they can lead and realize the nation's ideals [44], [45].

Education which was mandated by the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945 is a basic right for all Indonesian citizens to get education equally and maximally, as a constitutional right, the state in which in this case the government is responsible must fulfil the right to get education properly. The problems that have arisen so far include the lack of attention from the government in providing educational facilities and infrastructure that are distributed to remote, outermost, and remote areas that are still within the territory of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia [46], [47].

Programs from the government that have provided a budget for education funds of 20% of the state budget and various programs that provide convenience for citizens to get adequate educational facilities have not met expectations. The need for the seriousness of the government as a stakeholder and policymaker to be able to improve the quality of education as a step to create adequate, intelligent, and competitive human resources with foreign nations to face the challenges of life in the future [48].

In the implementation of teaching and learning activities, several regions in Indonesia experience educational gaps. There are still many schools that do not have adequate infrastructure, such as what happened at SDN Cicaringin 3, Gunung Kencana District, Lebak, Banten. To reach the school, the students had to travel 6 kilometres and cross the Ciliman River which risked causing them to fall. This happened because the government was slow in building regional infrastructure [49], [50].

Elsewhere, in Bukit Subur Village, Tabir Hilir District, Merangin, Jambi, a hut called State Elementary School (SDN) 29 Kelas Jauh, used as a place to study for his children, almost collapsed. The school, which only has two classrooms, is very unworthy of being called a

school because the room is only walled with boards with poles made of wood and a roof that only uses zinc [51].

One of the other reflections of social disparities in education is the elementary school in Blessing Village. The state elementary school is a school for the children of pond farmers, even all students at the school are only residents of the blessing village. The geographical location of the village is thanks to being in the middle of the village, the distance to the city is about 150 Km. At a glance, the field conditions of the village have been described as increasingly complicated because there is no electricity in the village. A school building made of stone with a shabby indoor condition [52].

There are still many problems related to social disparities in education in Indonesia. Social disparities in education are a serious problem faced by many countries in the world. This problem occurs when there are groups of people who do not have the same access to education so it is difficult for them to achieve the same opportunities in life. Social disparities in education can affect the quality of a country's human resources and have an impact on the progress of a nation, including Indonesia [53].

Social disparities in education in Indonesia are very felt and concerning, especially among the lower classes and in remote areas. The following are factors that affect social disparities: First, it is difficult to access schools. One of the factors that causes social disparities in terms of education is the difficulty of access to schools. This condition is caused by the lack of subsidies from the government to build regional infrastructure. In addition, the distance that must be travelled is also sometimes very far, even in some areas of Indonesia there is road access that is difficult to pass. Second, the a lack of school facilities. Many schools have damaged buildings and a lack of learning media. Some schools do not have their buildings, Third, lack of interest and quality of teachers. The low interest of teachers is mostly because the infrastructure of the 3T region is very poor and requires service improvement. In addition to the problem of facilities and infrastructure, there are still teachers who do not have the professional skills to carry out their duties according to Article 39 of Law No. 20 of 2003, including being involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning outcomes, consulting and implementing training, implementing and providing research, and community service [54].

Fourth, household expenses. Liao and Shen's research conducted in 38 out of 68 countries involved in the Project for International Student Assessment (PISA) explained that 22.44% of educational inequality is caused by differences in social, religious, and economic status. Household education expenditure shows the capacity of households to support children's education. As the level of education increases, the costs incurred also increase [55], [56].



Figure 2. Social Inequality in Education in Indonesia

Based on the data above, a visualization approach can be used based on several key points described, such as:

Primary Education Completion Rate: Comparison between urban (85%) and rural (60%) areas.

Internet Access in Remote Schools: Percentage of schools in remote areas without internet access (70%).

Effects of Economic Inequality: The proportion of students from poor families who have to work while in school (40%).

Fund Allocation and Education Policy: The impact of programs such as the BOS Fund and the Smart Indonesia Card.

Based on the above factors regarding the social gap in education, the government and community participation must unite to improve the quality of education. The government must be able to provide needs that support the educational process from urban areas to remote or remote areas. The role of the community is to encourage citizens that education has an important meaning and a noble goal, especially to make the Indonesian nation have good quality in the eyes of the world. Social disparities related to education must be minimized and even resolved so that they do not become prolonged conflicts in society [57], [58].

## **Research Results**

Inequality of Access to Education Research shows that social inequality affects access to education in Indonesia. Quantitative data revealed that children from low-income families tended to have lower school participation rates compared to those from high-income families. In urban areas, about 85% of school-age children complete primary education, while in rural areas only about 60% [59], [60].

Uneven Quality of Education The quality of education varies significantly between developed and disadvantaged regions. The results of in-depth interviews revealed that schools in remote areas often lack qualified teachers, facilities, and access to learning technology. For example, more than 70% of schools in remote areas do not have internet access, limiting the implementation of digital learning [61], [62].

The Role of Economic Inequality Economic inequality exacerbates disparities in education. Students from poor families often cannot afford to buy learning materials or pay additional educational fees. Survey data shows that 40% of students from poor families have to work while schooling, which negatively impacts their performance [63].

Effects of Education Policy Programs such as the BOS Fund and the Smart Indonesia Card have helped reduce economic barriers for some students, but the impact is still limited. Qualitative analysis shows that the distribution of funds is often inefficient and does not reach the target group [64], [65].

### Discussion

Structural Inequality Social inequality in Indonesia is a reflection of broader structural inequality. Factors such as geographical distribution, family income, and infrastructure affect students' chances of getting a quality education. For example, areas with low Gross Regional Domestic Product (GDP) often have poorer school quality due to a lack of local education investment [6].

Teacher Gap One of the main causes of inequality in the quality of education is the uneven distribution of teachers. The best teachers tend to congregate in urban areas, leaving remote areas without competent educators. This contributes to the low learning outcomes of students in marginalized areas [66].

The Influence of Technology In the digital age, technology has great potential to reduce the education gap, but limited internet access is a major obstacle in many regions. Online learning

programs, while promising, cannot be enjoyed equally due to the lack of digital infrastructure in remote areas [67].

Existing education policies, such as the BOS Fund, focus on reducing cost barriers but often neglect the quality aspect. In addition, policies oriented towards the decentralization of education are not always effective because of the different capacities of local governments in managing education [68].

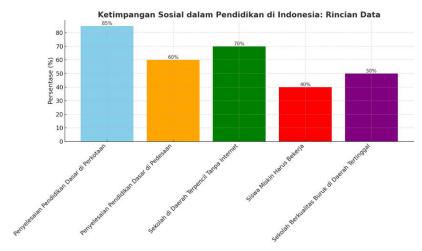


Figure 3. Social Inequality in Education in Indonesia: Detailed Data

Based on the graph above, details of social inequality in education in Indonesia are drawn. This graph illustrates the differences between urban and rural areas, the challenges of internet access in remote schools, students from poor families who have to work, and poor-quality schools in disadvantaged areas.

## **Policy Recommendations**

- 1. Teacher Redistribution: The government needs to develop more attractive incentives for teachers to work in remote areas, such as salary increases, housing facilities, and career development opportunities.
- 2. Investment in Educational Infrastructure: Expanding internet access and building learning facilities in disadvantaged areas should be a priority.
- 3. Strengthening Fiscal Transfer Policy: Fiscal transfers between governments should be directed to areas that need it, with clear and need-based indicators.
- 4. Evaluation of Assistance Programs: Programs such as the BOS Fund need to be evaluated to ensure their efficiency and impact on the quality of education [69].

The results of the study show that social inequality has a significant impact on the quality of education in Indonesia. To address these challenges, a holistic approach is needed that includes resource redistribution, strengthening needs-based policies, and developing educational infrastructure. With these steps, a fairer and better-quality education in Indonesia can be realized.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Education is an important aspect of life that plays a role in creating a quality generation to lead and realize the nation's ideals. Although the government has allocated 20% of the state budget for education and launched various programs to improve access, the results are still unsatisfactory. Therefore, the government needs to be serious as a stakeholder in improving the quality of education to create intelligent and competitive human resources. Some factors affect social disparities: First, the difficulty of access to schools, Second, the lack of school facilities. Third, lack of interest and quality of teachers. Fourth, household expenses. Based on the above factors regarding the social gap in education, the government and community

participation must unite to improve the quality of education. Social disparities related to education must be minimized and even resolved so that they do not become prolonged conflicts in society.

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#### **Author Contribution**

All authors contribute equally to the publication of this paper, all authors read and agree to this paper, and all authors declare no conflict of interest.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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