

Systematic Literature Review: Examining Indonesia's Educational Inequality Factors and Government Equity Policies

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 12 April 2025

Accepted 20 June 2025

Published 30 June 2025

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Keywords

Education Inequality, Education Equity, Government Policy, Education Infrastructure, Teacher Distribution, Indonesia Smart Program, School Operational Assistance.

How to cite: Muchtar, C. O., Purba, A. A., Sitorus, J. S., Siagian, M. F., Harahap, N. M., Ginting, R. A., Bangun, M. B., & Muchtar, Z. (2025). Systematic literature review: Examining Indonesia's educational inequality factors and government equity policies. *International Journal of Educational Practice and Policy*, 3(1). 1-9.

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ABSTRACT

Education inequality in Indonesia remains a complex challenge, especially in remote areas and low-income communities. This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify the main factors causing education inequality, such as limited infrastructure, shortage of qualified teaching staff, socio-economic barriers and government policy implementation constraints. The findings reveal that inadequate infrastructure and a shortage of qualified teachers are prevalent in rural and underdeveloped regions, significantly limiting educational quality. Geographical disparities and socio-economic challenges further exacerbate these inequalities, creating systemic barriers to equitable access. While programs such as the Indonesia Smart Program (PIP) and School Operational Assistance (BOS) have provided partial relief, their effectiveness is often hampered by unequal resource distribution and bureaucratic inefficiencies. This study recommends a data-driven approach for more effective resource allocation, cross-sector collaboration and strengthening of education policies to create an inclusive and sustainable education system. The findings provide important insights for policymakers to overcome structural barriers and ensure equitable education for all Indonesian children.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the proclamation of Indonesian independence on August 17, 1945, the nation's founders have consistently emphasized the importance of providing access to education for all citizens, recognizing it as a cornerstone for national progress and development. This commitment is firmly enshrined in Article 31 of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which not only guarantees the right of every individual to receive education but also obligates the government to establish and maintain a comprehensive national education system regulated by law (Hakim, 2016). By prioritizing education, the founders underscored its dual significance: as a fundamental human right that upholds the dignity of individuals and as a critical benchmark for assessing the quality and potential of a country's human resources in contributing to global competitiveness and national prosperity.

Despite its undeniable significance, Indonesia continues to face persistent and complex challenges in achieving satisfactory educational indicators, which are crucial for ensuring the overall development and competitiveness of the nation. Efforts to equalize and expand access to quality education remain at the forefront of strategies to address the significant disparities experienced by students from diverse social, economic, and geographical backgrounds, as well as those with varying intellectual and physical abilities (Fanny Puspasari Sianipar & Siti Tiara Maulia, 2023). However, in practice, many remote and underdeveloped regions continue to struggle with limited access to basic educational facilities, underscoring the unequal and inconsistent implementation of national educational policies across the archipelago.

These challenges are compounded by the chronic shortage of qualified educators in these areas, alongside a lack of adequate professional development programs and training opportunities, which hinder the delivery of effective and inclusive education. Such disparities not only affect the quality of teaching and learning processes but also limit students' ability to compete on an equal footing with their peers in more developed regions. Furthermore, data from the Central Bureau of Statistics reveal a concerning trend: regions with lower per capita income often exhibit significantly lower gross enrollment rates in both secondary and higher education, indicating a strong and systemic correlation between socio-economic welfare and access to quality education (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2022). This data highlights the urgent need for targeted policies and interventions to bridge these gaps and ensure that all Indonesian children, regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location, have equal opportunities to thrive and contribute to the nation's future.

To address these persistent disparities, the Indonesian government has implemented a variety of strategic programs aimed at improving access to education and reducing inequality. These initiatives include the Smart Indonesia Program (PIP), which provides financial assistance to underprivileged students; the School Operational Assistance (BOS) program, which supports schools in managing operational expenses to ensure affordability; and the development of educational infrastructure in underdeveloped and remote areas to bridge gaps in physical accessibility and resources (Suhada & Amelia, 2024). These programs signify the government's recognition of the multifaceted challenges within the education sector and its commitment to ensuring that every child, regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location, has the opportunity to receive quality education.

However, despite these commendable efforts, the effectiveness of such programs is often undermined by bureaucratic inefficiencies, such as delays in fund disbursement, lack of coordination among stakeholders, and overlapping responsibilities between central and local governments. Additionally, resource distribution challenges, including inequitable allocation of financial aid, inadequate monitoring, and mismanagement, further exacerbate the disparities

they aim to resolve. As a result, many targeted beneficiaries, particularly in marginalized regions, fail to fully experience the intended benefits of these programs.

To overcome these barriers and achieve the goal of equitable education for all, a more comprehensive and data-driven approach is essential. This approach should include the use of advanced analytics and real-time data to identify and prioritize the most pressing educational needs, coupled with transparent mechanisms for resource allocation and rigorous evaluation frameworks to ensure accountability. Furthermore, fostering partnerships between government, private sectors, and local communities can help mobilize additional resources and foster innovative solutions tailored to the unique challenges of each region. By addressing these systemic issues, the government can significantly enhance the impact of its programs and create a more inclusive and equitable education system for future generations.

The pursuit of educational equality is of paramount importance, not only as a means of enhancing the quality of human resources but also as a strategic tool for reducing the persistent social and economic disparities that exist within society. Equal access to education provides a foundation for individuals from diverse geographic regions and socio-economic backgrounds to realize their full potential, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to national development and global competitiveness. By leveling the playing field, education serves as a critical pathway for social mobility, fostering inclusivity and empowering marginalized communities to break free from the cycle of poverty and inequality.

Education inequality in Indonesia has been the focus of many previous studies. Sianipar and Maulia (2023) highlighted the importance of school infrastructure rehabilitation as a strategic step in reducing the education gap between urban and rural areas (Fanny Puspasari Sianipar & Siti Tiara Maulia, 2023). Rabbani et al. (2023) discuss the zoning system in new student admissions (PPDB), which despite its potential to improve equitable access to education, faces implementation challenges due to inequality in school quality between regions (Muhammad Sufyan Rabbani et al., 2023).

In addition, Kurniawati (2022) found that the shortage of education facilities and the lack of qualified teachers are the main causes of inequality between urban and rural areas (Kurniawati, 2022). Rosmana et al. (2022) highlighted the constraints faced by 3T (Disadvantaged, Outermost, Frontier) areas, including long distances to school, lack of transportation and inadequate education infrastructure (Rosmana et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Suryana (2020) underlines the close relationship between low teacher qualifications and inequality in education facilities with the overall education gap (Suryana, 2020). These findings confirm that education inequality in Indonesia is not just a geographical issue but also involves social, economic and policy factors, all of which require strategic attention to create equitable access to education for all Indonesian children.

This study was written to find out the condition of the educational gap in Indonesia, the factors that cause it and what efforts have been made by the government to overcome it. This research delves into the multifaceted factors that influence the distribution of educational opportunities in Indonesia, examining how geographical, economic, and infrastructural disparities contribute to significant differences in educational access and quality between urban and rural areas. Furthermore, it evaluates the effectiveness of various government policies, such as funding programs, infrastructural development initiatives, and teacher placement strategies, in addressing these disparities. Special attention is given to the challenges encountered in achieving equitable education in remote and underdeveloped areas, including logistical constraints, limited availability of qualified educators, and the lack of adequate learning facilities and materials.

In addition, this study aims to uncover the structural and systemic barriers that hinder the implementation of policies designed to promote educational equity. By identifying these barriers and analyzing the root causes of inequality, the research seeks to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to develop more targeted and sustainable strategies. Ultimately, the findings emphasize the critical need for a collaborative, data-driven, and inclusive approach to ensure that all Indonesian children, regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location, are given equal opportunities to succeed and thrive in an increasingly competitive and interconnected world. The Introduction section should provide: (1) a clear statement of research background; (2) a clear statement of the problem; (3) the relevant literature; and (4) the proposed approach or solution. The citation and references format are made in American Psychological Association 7th edition (APA 7th Edition). The terms in foreign languages or scientific term are written *italic*.

2. METHODOLOGY

The analysis was conducted by examining articles in the Google Scholar database about the education equity in Indonesia during 2014-2024. The keywords use for selecting the proper article paper are “pemerataan pendidikan di indonesia 2014-2024”. The search resulted in for keyword “pemerataan pendidikan di Indonesia” is 97100 articles from the Google Scholar database. Moreover, the articles also limited by several categories that are only open access article, Indonesia language, journal, and published during 2014-2024. The remain number of paper-based on the selected category is 208 articles. The irrelevance topic papers were excluded from the analysis which is remained 20 papers.

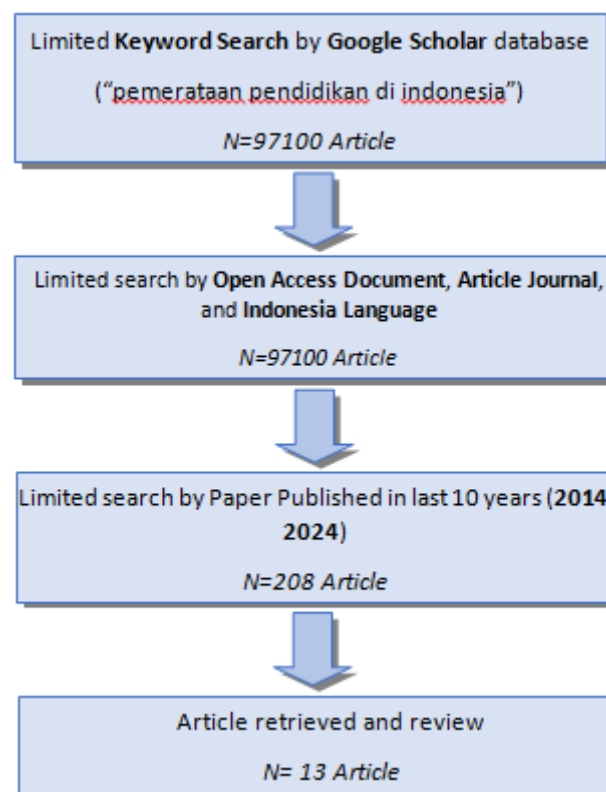


Figure 1. Steps of Selecting Articles for Review

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study categorizes findings based on three main themes of causes of educational inequality in Indonesia, namely: (1) Social Factors, (2) Infrastructure and Geography, and (3) Quality of Education and Government Policy. Each theme is explained based on the results of a literature review and discussions that deepen its relevance to the current context in Indonesia.

Table 1. Results of Literature Review

| Researcher | Article |
|--|--|
| (Anisha, 2024) | <i>Understand the impact of socioeconomic factors on educational equity and student success.</i> |
| (Muhammad Sufyan Rabbani et al., 2023) | <i>Polemics over the PPDB Zoning System in Realizing Education Equity.</i> |
| (Nurul Indika Wardhani & Supriyanto, 2023) | <i>Implementation of the Teaching Campus Program on the Independent Campus Learning Curriculum in Equitable Education Quality.</i> |
| (PERDANA, 2019) | <i>Implementation of Ppdb Zoning in Efforts to Equalize Access and Quality of Education.</i> |
| (Suryana, 2020) | <i>Education Quality Issues in the Perspective of Educational Development.</i> |
| (L. E. Wahyudi et al., 2022) | <i>Measuring the quality of education in Indonesia.</i> |
| (M. A. Wahyudi & Lutfi, 2019) | <i>Analysis of Education Reform in Realizing Equitable Quality of Education in Indonesia.</i> |
| (Kurniawati, 2022) | <i>Reviewing the Problems of Low Quality Education in Indonesia and Solutions.</i> |
| (Rosmana et al., 2022) | <i>Efforts to Equalize Continuing Education in 3t Areas.</i> |
| (Safarah & Wibowo, 2018) | <i>Zoning Program in Primary Schools as an Effort to Equalize the Quality of Education in Indonesia.</i> |
| (Hajar et al., 2024) | <i>Education Equity through the Implementation of Zoning System Policy at SMAN 1 Hu'u and SMK Negeri 1 Hu'u in Dompu District.</i> |
| (zafitri elfira, asni wahida, 2024) | <i>Improving Accesst to Quality and Equity in Education.</i> |
| (Setiawan et al., 2024) | <i>Equitable Access to Education.</i> |

The first theme, Social Factors, encompasses a range of issues, including socioeconomic status, cultural norms, and familial support systems, which significantly influence students' access to quality education. This section draws on existing literature to highlight how disparities in wealth and social capital can perpetuate cycles of disadvantage among marginalized communities. The second theme, Infrastructure and Geography, examines the impact of physical and logistical barriers on educational access. In Indonesia, where geographical diversity spans urban centers to remote islands, the availability and quality of educational infrastructure vary dramatically. This part of the study integrates findings from various sources to illustrate how inadequate transportation, insufficient school facilities, and regional disparities contribute to unequal educational opportunities. The third theme focuses on the Quality of Education and Government Policy, analyzing how policy decisions and educational

standards affect student outcomes. This section reviews governmental initiatives aimed at addressing educational inequality, evaluating their effectiveness and the challenges that remain. Through a critical literature review and discussions with stakeholders, this theme underscores the importance of coherent and equitable policies in fostering an inclusive educational environment.

3.1. Social Factors

Social factors play a pivotal role in perpetuating educational inequality in Indonesia, significantly impacting the ability of families, particularly those from lower-middle-income groups, to meet their children's educational needs. These families often encounter a multitude of challenges that hinder their children's access to quality education. One of the primary obstacles is the financial burden associated with education, which includes expenses for learning materials, access to technology, and additional costs for tutoring or extracurricular activities. According to several experts these financial constraints can limit educational opportunities, forcing students to drop out or disengage from the learning process altogether (Anisha, 2024; M. A. Wahyudi & Lutfi, 2019).

Data from Mahaliyah et al. (2021) underscores the connection between economic status and educational participation. Their data reveals a strong correlation between low per capita income and reduced rates of educational participation, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels. This trend highlights how economic disadvantage not only restricts access to education but also diminishes the likelihood of pursuing higher levels of education, thereby perpetuating a cycle of poverty and limited opportunities. Furthermore, the literacy levels of both students and teachers are critical determinants of educational quality. In many regions, low basic literacy skills among students hinder their ability to engage with the curriculum effectively, leading to poor long-term learning outcomes. This issue is exacerbated in areas where educational resources are scarce, resulting in significant regional disparities. In particular, students in rural or underserved communities often receive a subpar education, which compounds their challenges in achieving academic success.

The quality of teacher training programs is another crucial factor contributing to educational inequality. Uneven access to effective professional development and training for teachers, especially in resource-constrained areas, further exacerbates the situation. Teachers in these regions may lack the necessary skills and resources to provide high-quality instruction, leading to a decline in student performance and engagement. As a result, the educational disparities between urban and rural areas continue to widen, leaving many students without the foundational skills needed to succeed in an increasingly competitive world.

3.2. Infrastructure and Geography

Infrastructure and geography serve as significant barriers to achieving equitable access to education in Indonesia, particularly in the 3T (Frontier, Outermost, and Disadvantaged) areas. These regions face unique challenges that hinder educational opportunities for children, contributing to a cycle of inequality that is difficult to break. In many 3T areas, schools are often under-resourced and lack essential facilities. Classrooms may be insufficient in number, leading to overcrowded conditions that are not conducive to effective learning. Additionally, the scarcity of textbooks and educational materials limits students' ability to engage with the curriculum fully. The absence of educational technology further exacerbates the situation, as students in these regions miss out on valuable learning tools that could enhance their

educational experience and prepare them for a technologically driven world (Rosmana et al., 2022; Kurniawati, 2022; Safarah & Wibowo, 2018).

Transportation barriers also play a critical role in educational access. Children in rural or remote areas often face the daunting task of traveling long distances to reach their schools. This journey can be fraught with challenges, including unsafe travel conditions and a lack of reliable transportation options. As a result, many students experience difficulties in maintaining regular attendance, which adversely affects their motivation to learn and their overall academic performance. The physical distance to educational institutions not only discourages attendance but also creates a psychological barrier, making education seem less attainable. Moreover, the uneven distribution of qualified teaching staff compounds these challenges. Many remote areas suffer from a significant shortage of trained teachers, leading to a reliance on underqualified personnel or even untrained community members to fill the gaps. This lack of qualified educators directly impacts the quality of instruction and the learning outcomes for students. Without access to skilled teachers, students are less likely to receive the support and guidance necessary for academic success, further entrenching educational disparities (Tarigan et al., 2023). This geographical inequality creates structural disparities in the quality of education between regions.

3.3. Education Quality and Policy in Indonesia

The Indonesian government has implemented various policies to address these disparities, such as the Indonesia Pintar (PIP) program, School Operational Assistance (BOS), and a zoning system for New Student Admissions (PPDB). However, the effectiveness of these programs is still hampered by complex bureaucracy, delays in fund disbursement, and disparities in school quality between zones (Muhammad Sufyan Rabbani et al., 2023; Setiawan et al., 2024; Ariawan, 2022).

The zoning policy, despite its goal of equitable distribution, often fails because it is not accompanied by equitable school quality. The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum also faces challenges in areas with inadequate educational infrastructure (Nurul Indika Wardhani & Supriyanto, 2023). A more contextual curriculum evaluation is needed to align policies with local needs (L. E. Wahyudi et al., 2022). In addition, improving teacher quality through training and professional development needs to be strategically focused in disadvantaged areas (zafitri elfira, asni wahida, 2024; Hajar et al., 2024). Without intervention in terms of quality and policy, the education gap will continue even though assistance programs have been rolled out.

4. CONCLUSION

This research identifies the main challenges in achieving education equity in Indonesia, which include geographical, socio-economic, infrastructure and policy inequalities. Remote and isolated areas face limited education infrastructure and a shortage of qualified educators, which results in low quality learning in these areas. In addition, low-income families often face barriers such as additional education costs and lack of learning support, which exacerbates the disparities. Although the government has implemented various programs, such as the Indonesia Smart Program (PIP) and School Operational Assistance (BOS), their effectiveness is still limited due to cumbersome bureaucracy and unequal distribution of resources. These inequalities emphasize the importance of a data-driven approach to map education needs in

each region more accurately. This research recommends collaboration between the government, private sector and communities in creating an inclusive and sustainable education system. With integrated and innovative measures, education in Indonesia can become more equitable, providing equal opportunities for all children to develop their potential and contribute to the country's progress.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank all parties who have supported this research. Thank you to Mrs. Melly Br Bangun, M. Kom and Mr. Dr. Zainuddin Muchtar, S. E., M. Pd for valuable input and guidance during the research process. We also thank our friends who have contributed to data collection and analysis. Hopefully the results of this study can be useful and contribute to the development of science.

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