

# The Issues of Educational Equality in Indonesia

Ani Hendriani, Ruswandi Hermawan, Sofiani Kusniasari

Indonesia University of Education, Indonesia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2024.1102027>

Received: 27 January 2024; Revised: 08 February 2024; Accepted: 13 February 2024; Published: 16 March 2024

## ABSTRACT

Education as a pillar of nation-building is indisputable. Therefore, the realm of education holds a crucial position in the country's development plan. The importance of providing equal access to all citizens becomes the government's task in improving the education sector. This article aims to address the issue of educational equalization in Indonesia. Referring to educational equality, inclusive learning, and empowerment through education, the article explores concrete steps that can be taken to enhance access and quality of education nationwide, particularly in regions that may face disparities. The reference sources examined and analyzed by the author are obtained from various sources, including reference books and other studies published in both national and international journals. The study is limited to the importance of equality, what factors cause educational equality to still encounter obstacles, and what solutions can overcome these problems.

**Keywords:** Educational Equality, Inclusive Learning, Empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

The essence and urgency of education as the foundation for a nation's development are no longer subjects of diametric debate. There is no controversy on this matter, and the same holds true in Indonesia. However, as we delve into more technical aspects, there is a tug-of-war, with pros and cons emerging, and various obstacles arising. Issues related to philosophy, conception, implementation, funding, and other technical aspects emerge as ongoing problems. In this context, our education system is currently facing various challenges such as issues of educational equality, quality, efficiency, effectiveness, and relevance. Indonesia is a developing country experiencing various developmental processes, including in the education sector. Therefore, the implementation of the education process also faces various challenges and issues commonly experienced by developing countries, such as the uneven distribution of education, especially in remote areas (Nurhuda, 2022). This inequality is often experienced by economically disadvantaged groups. As we know, the higher the level of education, the higher the cost. Therefore, it is not uncommon for many people to choose not to attend school due to the high expenses involved. In relation to this, a problem can be defined as the gap between expectations and reality. The reality is that there are still parts of the population in Indonesia who have not received education services as planned and expected by the government. The emerging educational problem is influenced by many factors, stemming from various components of the education system. Therefore, various alternative solutions that have been, are being, and need to be implemented by various parties, including the government, the community, and relevant stakeholders, will be discussed in this article.

---

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Educational Equality and Participation

The issues of educational equity and participation are related to how education policymakers can provide extensive opportunities for all citizens to acquire an ideal education. The existence of this problem can be observed in individuals who should be participants in a particular educational unit but, in reality, are not. In various regions, there are still many children who should be participants in early childhood education units but are not part of these units due to various factors, such as religious beliefs and societal awareness of the importance of education. For example, in North Kalimantan, there are only 23 government-owned early childhood education schools with a total of 1,267 students, which contrasts significantly with West Java, which has 93 early childhood education schools with 6,875 students (Kemendikbud, 2020). This situation undoubtedly leads to problems when they enter primary school. Similarly, there is a significant number of high school graduates who do not continue their education to higher education institutions. Without proper preparation, they may face challenges when entering the workforce.

The goal of efforts to achieve educational equality is to prepare the community to participate in development, especially in formal or structured education. Each level of education has its own function and policies for obtaining educational opportunities at each level are carefully determined, considering both quantitative and qualitative factors as well as continuous relevance. In primary education, the policy of obtaining educational opportunities is based on quantitative factors because all citizens need to be provided with the same basic foundation. Meanwhile, policies for higher education are based on qualitative considerations, such as individual interests and abilities, workforce needs, and the development of society, culture, and technology that have transformed education in aspects of teaching, learning, and administration (Subroto et al., 2023).

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, educational equalization is an effort to ensure that every individual has equal access to quality educational opportunities, regardless of their social, economic, or geographical background. The primary goal of educational equalization is to reduce disparities in the quality of education among various societal groups. Educational equalization is one of the main focuses of education policy in Indonesia. The ministry has committed to improving access and quality of education across all regions of Indonesia, including in remote and marginalized areas. For example, the Program Indonesia Pintar (PIP) is one initiative launched by the Indonesian government to enhance educational access for students from impoverished and vulnerable families throughout Indonesia.

Educational equalization in Indonesia is considered crucial to address the educational disparities between urban and rural areas. Despite the increase in access to education in various regions, there are still challenges in improving the quality of education, especially in areas far from urban centers (Sari, et al., 2022). The issue of educational equalization remains a primary concern in Indonesia (Research and Development Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2021). Concrete efforts are needed to improve educational infrastructure, enhance the quality of teaching and learning, and increase the availability of qualified educators across all regions. Thus, educational equalization in Indonesia poses a complex challenge that requires concerted efforts from the government, society, and other stakeholders to ensure that every individual has equal opportunities to receive quality education, in line with the vision of national educational development.

Equalizing education is considered crucial in government policies because it has significant positive impacts on the overall social, economic, and national development. Some main reason why equalizing education is deemed crucial in government policies include:

1. Reducing Social and Economic Inequality

Equalizing education can be a key instrument in reducing social and economic disparities among different societal groups. Providing equal access to education for all layers of society opens up equal opportunities for progress and success.

## 2. Improving the Quality of Human Resources

By providing equal educational opportunities, the government invests in shaping high-quality human resources. Individuals who receive good education have greater chances of making positive contributions to the economic and social development of the country.

## 3. Promoting Inclusivity and Diversity

Equalizing education supports the principles of inclusivity and recognizes the value of diversity in society. All societal groups, including those from low economic backgrounds or minority groups, should have equal access to develop their potential.

## 4. Enhancing Global Competitiveness

Countries with equal education have the potential to create a more educated and creative society. This can enhance the global competitiveness of the country in various sectors, including the economy, technology, and innovation.

## 5. Preventing Poverty and Crime

Equal education can be a key factor in reducing poverty levels. Individuals with adequate education have greater opportunities to secure decent jobs, reducing the risk of poverty and involvement in criminal activities.

## 6. Building Knowledgeable Communities

Equalizing education helps create knowledgeable and educated communities. Educated communities are more likely to participate in the development process, understand their rights and responsibilities, and contribute to the formation of democratic societies.

## 7. Addressing Social Issues

Equal education can be a solution to alleviate social issues such as gender inequality, discrimination, and intolerance. Education provides the insights and understanding necessary to build an inclusive and fair society.

## **Inclusive Learning**

Inclusive learning is an approach in the field of education that emphasizes inclusion and active participation for all students, including those with special needs. Essentially, this theory advocates the idea that every individual, regardless of differences, has an equal right to learn and develop optimally. In the context of education equity, the theory of inclusive learning provides the foundation to create a learning environment that supports diversity and reduces disparities among learners.

Inclusive Learning promotes the creation of equal access to education for all students, including those with special needs. Thus, educational equity can be achieved by providing equal learning opportunities for all individuals. Inclusive learning fosters appreciation for diversity, encompassing abilities, talents, and other

characteristics. This creates an environment where every student is valued and acknowledged, helping to address disparities and enhance inclusion. The inclusive concept also involves the active participation of all students in the learning process. This can enhance educational equity by ensuring that every individual has equal opportunities to contribute and experience success. Inclusive Learning provides a solid foundation for educational equalization efforts, opening the door to inclusive learning and stimulating the development of every student without exception (Ilahi, 2013).

### **Empowerment in Education**

Empowerment in the context of education involves providing individuals with the power, skills, and knowledge to take an active role in the learning and self-development process. Educational empowerment is closely related to educational equalization as it aims to enhance access and empower all individuals, regardless of their social, economic, or cultural backgrounds, to attain equal educational opportunities. Educational empowerment supports equal access for all individuals, including groups that may face access barriers. This involves efforts to create an inclusive educational environment and provide equal opportunities for all students, leaving no one behind.

Educational empowerment focuses on developing skills and knowledge that can enhance individuals' capacity to manage their own lives. By imparting these skills to all students, empowerment contributes to educational equalization by ensuring that everyone has the tools for success in the educational environment. Empowerment encourages active participation in decision-making and the learning process. This addresses disparities by giving all individuals, regardless of their social or economic status, the opportunity to have a voice in their educational experiences.

Educational empowerment can help reduce disparities in educational achievement among societal groups. By providing tools, support, and necessary resources to marginalized groups, empowerment contributes to equalizing educational outcomes. Educational empowerment does not solely focus on academic aspects but also on holistic self-development. This includes aspects such as independence, creativity, and the courage to speak up, all of which support equalization by providing every individual with the opportunity to develop comprehensively. By integrating the principles of empowerment into education, the creation of a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for all students is expected.

### **METHOD**

In the article titled "The Issues of Education Equality in Indonesia", the methodological approach used is the literature review method. The reference sources studied and analyzed by the author are obtained from various sources, including reference books and other research articles published in journals, both at the national and international levels. This review focuses on the importance of understanding the various problems that hinder education in Indonesia, the factors causing these problems, solutions to address these issues, and case studies presented as illustrations of the topic under discussion.

### **DISCUSSION**

Issues of educational equality and participation arise when a significant number of citizens, especially school-age children, cannot be accommodated within the education system or institutions due to a lack of available educational facilities. Several specific factors contribute to the emergence of problems related to educational equality and participation, including (1) the geographical layout of Indonesia, with the dispersion of islands, hinders the equal distribution of education. Indonesia, with its thousands of islands and geographical diversity, is a major obstacle to educational equality. Schools in remote areas often lack adequate attention and facilities. Equal distribution of education in Indonesia experiences significant

obstacles due to complex geographic challenges (Smith, J. et al., 2018); (2) the rapid growth of the population contributes to the challenges in providing equal educational opportunities; (3) social and cultural aspects also influence access to education. Some communities may still face traditional barriers that hinder participation in education. Equitable education needs to have an understanding and solution to the social and cultural factors that influence local communities (Kumar, S., 2019). Various social issues, such as juvenile delinquency leading to school dropout, hinder the optimal implementation of educational equality; (4) economic inequality in various regions is also an obstacle to equal distribution of education. Families with low incomes find it difficult to provide full support for their children's education. The ongoing exploitation of children by parents hampers children's rights to access education. Alleviating educational inequality requires a strategic approach that takes into account economic inequality between regions (Jones, A., 2020); (5) unequal education policies are also a serious problem. Budget allocation and policy implementation strategies must be considered in order to achieve optimal equality. The unequal distribution of quality and quantity of teachers working in the interior of Indonesia is the impact of incomplete budget allocation in the education sector. Education policies need to ensure a fair distribution of resources to achieve the goal of equity (Ministry of Education, Indonesia, 2021). Addressing these factors is essential for achieving a more equitable and participatory education system that ensures every child has access to quality education, regardless of geographical location, social background, or economic status.

Many solutions have been and are being implemented by the government to improve the equality and participation of education in order to enlighten the nation's life. Some of these solutions are:

### **1. Smart Indonesia Program**

The Smart Indonesia Program (SIP) through the Indonesia Smart Card (ISC) provides cash assistance for education to school-age children (aged 6-21) from poor or vulnerable families: owners of the Family Welfare Card (FWC), participants in the Family Hope Program (FHP), orphans, people with disabilities, and victims of natural disasters/calamities. The Smart Indonesia Program is part of the improvement of the Poor Student Assistance Program. The Smart Indonesia Program is a collaboration between three ministries: the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Religion. The Smart Indonesia Program is designed to assist school-age children from poor/vulnerable/priority families in receiving educational services until completing secondary education, both through formal education channels (starting from elementary school to graduating from high school/vocational school/religious school) and non-formal education channels (Package A to Package C and standardized courses). Through this program, the government aims to prevent students from dropping out and hopes to attract school dropouts to return to continue their education. The Smart Indonesia Program is also expected to alleviate the personal education expenses of students, both direct and indirect costs. The Smart Indonesia Program funds can be used to assist students with personal expenses, such as buying school/course supplies, pocket money, transportation costs, additional practice fees, and competency test fees. The amounts vary, with elementary school students receiving Rp 450.000 per year, junior high school students receiving Rp750.000 per year, and high school/vocational school/religious school students receiving Rp 1.000.000 per year. The detailed amounts for each grade level can be found in the Implementation Guidelines for The Smart Indonesia Program from the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2016. Through the Smart Indonesia Program, the government hopes to minimize school dropout rates caused by economic factors.

### **2. Teacher Needs Affirmation Program in Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost Areas**

Disadvantaged, frontier and outermost regions in Indonesia are areas that are targets for achieving educational equality in Indonesia. Most disadvantaged, frontier and outermost areas serve as the gateways to the borders of Indonesia. The geographical location, distant from provincial capitals, impedes the growth of education and the economy due to uneven infrastructure development. Some examples of disadvantaged,

frontier and outermost areas that still require attention in education include Aceh Singkil in the Aceh province, Rote in East Nusa Tenggara, West Nias in North Sumatra, Situbondo in East Java, South Halmahera in Maluku, and Yapen Islands in Papua. The Ministry of Education and Culture has launched five affirmation programs to address the need for teachers in disadvantaged, frontier and outermost areas. The five affirmation programs are as follows:

#### **a) Teacher Education in Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost Areas (2011-2016)**

The Directorate General of Higher Education at the Ministry of Education and Culture has a program dedicated to accelerating education development in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost areas areas. This program is part of the Moving Forward Together to Make Indonesia Smarter program. One implementation is the deployment of education graduates to remote areas as educators for one year, known as the Teacher Education Program in Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost Areas. The deployment of disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost areas participants has been carried out in six batches from 2011 to 2016. The first batch of 2,479 participants was sent to provinces such as Aceh, Papua, West Papua, and East Nusa Tenggara, serving from November 2011 to October 2012. Subsequent batches were deployed to various regions across the archipelago. According to Supriadi Rustad, Director of Education and Educational Personnel at the Directorate General of Higher Education, the program serves as both a short-term and long-term solution. For the long term, the Moving Forward Together to Make Indonesia Smarter program prepares educators in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost areas through the Integrated Teacher Professional Education scheme, starting in 2011. However, the teacher education-disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost areas program was not continued after 2016, as it was initially planned for six batches. Participants in the teacher education disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost areas program have the opportunity to participate in the Teacher Professional Education and attend Frontline Teacher Training.

#### **b) Frontline Teacher Program and Teachers in Special Areas**

To address uneven education services across Indonesia, especially in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost areas areas, the Frontline Teacher Program is a government initiative in collaboration with the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform and local governments. The Frontline Teacher Program is an affirmative effort by the government to equalize education services throughout Indonesia, specifically in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost areas areas. This aligns with the *nawacita* spirit of building from the periphery and improving the quality of Indonesia's human resources. The Frontline Teacher Program recruits teachers who will become civil servant candidates after completing the Frontline Teacher Program. The program aims to recruit 17,000 frontline teacher to be placed in 15,000 villages in remote and disadvantaged areas (disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost areas ). The Frontline Teacher Program received support and commitment from local governments, with salaries funded by the regional budget of each district.

#### **c) Teacher Professional Education in Position**

In implementing Government Regulation No. 19 of 2017 on the obligation for teachers to have academic qualifications, competencies, and teaching certificates, the Ministry of Education and Culture collaborated with the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education to conduct the Teacher Professional Education in Position program starting in 2018. The program aims to provide new competencies to teachers, aligning with technological advancements and critical thinking skills. For the implementation, the central government allocated an education budget of Rp. 7,500,000 per person for 20,000 teachers. In addition to the central government, several regions, such as West Java, Aceh, and Merauke Regency, also allocated budgets for the Teacher Professional Education in Position program, targeting a total of 20,887 teachers.

#### **d) Expert Certification and Teacher Certification Program for High School/Vocational School Teachers (Dual Competency Program)**

The Dual Competency Program was initiated due to a shortage of productive teachers in vocational high schools. In 2016, Indonesia lacked 91.861 productive SMK teachers. The first phase of the Dual Competency Program selected 12.741 teachers, and the second phase aimed to add 15.000 teachers in the following year. The program allows normative teachers to obtain a competency certificate as productive teachers. Participants undergo five stages of training before receiving a competency certificate issued by a Profession Certification Institute licensed by the National Professional Certification Agency.

#### **e) Subsidy Program for the Conversion of Teachers and Education Personnel for Early Childhood Education and Community Education**

Subsidy Program for the Conversion of Teachers and Education Personnel for Early

Childhood Education and Community Education provided financial aid to 1.819 individuals across 36 higher education institutions in Indonesia. This program aimed to distribute early childhood education programs teachers more evenly across the country.

#### **f) Gradual Training Program for Early Childhood Education Programs Educators**

In 2017, the government organized a basic training program conducted by Teacher Performance Assessment as a partner organization and Basic Trainer Candidat training conducted by Association of Indonesian Early Childhood Educators and Education Personnel and Indonesian Kindergarten Teachers Association at the provincial level. Both programs are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The target audience for the basic training program is non-formal Early Childhood Education Programs teachers with SLTA and SLTP qualifications who have not had the opportunity to undergo gradual training or similar programs. To meet the demand for trainers in the program, the government initiated the Training for Candidate Trainers conducted by 40 partner organizations throughout Indonesia, involving 2,000 participants.

### **3. Scholarship Program**

To achieve educational equality in Indonesia, various parties are collaborating to provide scholarship programs, working hand in hand to give every citizen the opportunity to receive proper and high-quality education. The proven scholarships that have significantly contributed to the educational equality program include:

1. Education Fund Management Institution Ministry of Finance Scholarship
2. Bidik Misi Ministry of Education and Culture Scholarship
3. Outstanding Santri & Quran Hafiz Scholarship from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and other ministries
4. Indonesia Pintar Scholarship
5. National Champion Scholarship Tanoto Foundation
6. Outstanding Scholarship for Achieving Society
7. Bank Indonesia Scholarship
8. Astra Scholarship.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the context of education, the integration of values and character education has a profound impact on the

moral and character development of students. Despite facing challenges, its benefits are far greater, shaping individuals who are not only intelligent but also morally and ethically sound. Values and character education is not merely a classroom subject but an investment in building morality and personality that will shape a better society in the future. The theory of educational equality underscores the importance of providing equal access to education for all segments of society. Therefore, steps need to be taken to eliminate disparities between regions, whether urban or rural. Empowering communities through local educational programs can also enhance the balance of access.

The theory of inclusive learning emphasizes the importance of creating an educational environment that supports all students, regardless of their backgrounds. Inclusive education not only provides opportunities for students with special needs but also establishes an environment where differences are valued and integrated. Furthermore, the empowerment theory through education creates a foundation for fostering independence and creativity in learning. Educational programs that motivate students to develop their own skills, as well as understand individual needs and potentials, can be a crucial step towards educational equalization.

## REFERENCES

1. Badan Penelitian dan Pengembangan Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi. (2021). Riset Kajian Terkini Pendidikan Indonesia (RKPTPI). Jakarta.
2. Ilahi, Mohamad Takdir. (2013). Pendidikan Inklusif. Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media.
3. Jones, A. (2020). Economic Disparities and Their Impact on Education Equality. *International Journal of Educational Equity*, 19(2), 145-162.
4. Kemendikbud Indonesia. (2020). Statistik Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini 2019/2020 Pusat Data dan Teknologi Informasi. Jakarta: Setjen, Kemendikbud, 2020. x, 190 hal.; 29,7 cm.—(PAUD 1920) ISBN 978-602-8449-37-3.
5. Kumar, S. (2019). Sociocultural Barriers to Educational Access: A Case Study of Rural Communities in Indonesia. *Journal of Social and Cultural Studies*, 8(1), 45-62.
6. Ministry of Education, Indonesia. (2021). National Education Policy: Towards Inclusive and Equitable Education. Jakarta: Ministry of Education, Indonesia.
7. Nurhuda, H. (2022). Masalah-Masalah Pendidikan Nasional; Faktor-Faktor Dan Solusi Yang Ditawarkan. ... : Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Dasar ..., [stai-binamadani.e-journal.id, https://stai-binamadani.e-journal.id/jurdir/article/view/406](https://stai-binamadani.e-journal.id/jurdir/article/view/406).
8. Sari, N. P., et al. (2022). "Tantangan Pemerataan Pendidikan di Indonesia: Studi Kasus Di Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta." *Jurnal Pendidikan: Teori, Penelitian, dan Pengembangan*, 7(2), 162-171.
9. Smith, J. et al. (2018). Challenges in Achieving Educational Equity in Indonesia. *Journal of Educational Development*, 42(3), 321-339.
10. Subroto, DE, Supriandi, S, & ... (2023). Implementasi Teknologi dalam Pembelajaran di Era Digital: Tantangan dan Peluang bagi Dunia Pendidikan di Indonesia. *Jurnal Pendidikan ...*, [wnj.westsciencepress.com, https://wnj.westsciencepress.com/index.php/jpdws/article/view/542](https://wnj.westsciencepress.com/index.php/jpdws/article/view/542).