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Email : editorijhess@gmail.com

Education for All: A Systematic Analysis of Equity Policies and Challenges in Indonesia

R.Madhakomala[1)], Putri Puspita Ayu[2)], Tika Septiani[3)], Parulian Halomoan Butarbutar[4)]
[1, 2, 3, 4)] Postgraduate Study Management Science, Jakarta State University

*Corresponding Author
Email: tikapramana@gmail.com

Abstract

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) explores the impact of educational policies and interventions on improving access, quality, relevance, equity, and educational opportunities in Indonesia. A total of 30 articles were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis approach to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities for achieving inclusive and equitable education. The findings reveal significant disparities in access and quality between urban and rural areas, with key obstacles including limited infrastructure, low digital literacy in remote regions, and uneven quality of teaching. In urban areas, schools benefit from better facilities, professional training for teachers, and more access to technology, whereas rural areas face substantial gaps in these resources. Affirmative policies, such as the Smart Indonesia Program and education digitalization initiatives, have demonstrated positive impacts in expanding access to education, though their implementation is still hindered by inadequate infrastructure and limited teacher training in remote areas. Additionally, the national curriculum is often found to be less relevant to local needs, particularly for indigenous populations and students with disabilities, highlighting the need for more localized and context-specific approaches. The study concludes that addressing educational inequity in Indonesia requires evidence-based policies that integrate local needs, multidisciplinary approaches, and contextual solutions. Recommendations include improving educational infrastructure in remote areas, revising curricula to better reflect local contexts, and conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impacts of educational policies. The expansion of inclusive education policies and better teacher training, coupled with the strategic use of technology, are essential steps toward narrowing the educational gap and ensuring a more equitable future for all students in Indonesia.

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Keywords: Educational Justice, Education Quality, Educational Relevance, Educational Opportunities, Educational Equity.

INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia has long been an important instrument in creating social mobility and building an inclusive nation. However, inequality in access, quality, relevance, and equity in education remains a significant challenge. With a population of more than 270 million people spread across thousands of islands, Indonesia faces unique problems in realizing fair and quality education(Mifsud, 2024a).

One of the current issues that is very relevant is the inequality of access to education, especially between urban and rural areas, as well as between developing and developed countries. This inequality arises due to disparities in the provision of educational facilities, the quality of teaching, and access to adequate technology. Moreover, with the rapid development of technology, many regions have not been able to access technology-based learning. This condition has a direct impact on the quality of education received by students, with underdeveloped areas experiencing difficulties in accessing learning materials online, limited number of qualified teachers, and lack of adequate educational facilities. As a result, there is a phenomenon of *learning loss* that hinders students' academic development and reduces their competitiveness at the global level.

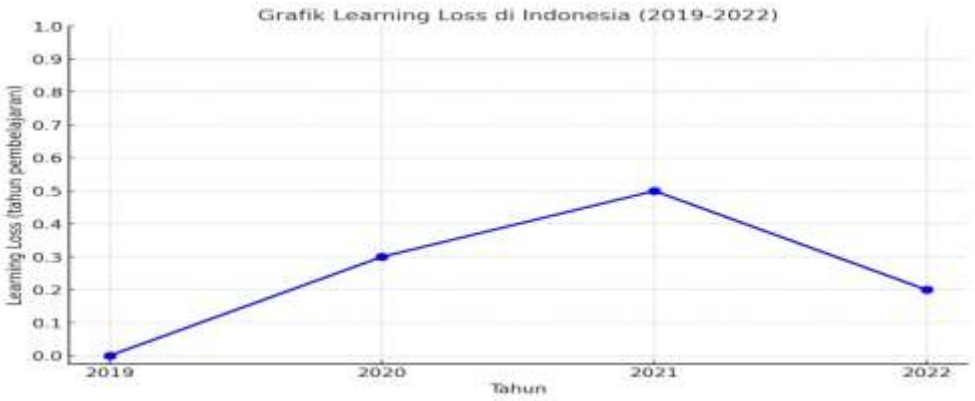

Figure 1 Learning Loss Chart in Indonesia

This graph shows the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in Indonesia between 2019 and 2022, with the largest learning loss occurring in 2020 and 2021. In 2020, learning loss reached 0.3 years of learning due to school closures and a sudden switch to online learning that was not equally accessible to all students. In 2021, the learning loss rate increased to 0.5 years of learning, reflecting major challenges in educational adaptation and recovery. However, in 2022, there was a slight recovery with learning loss reduced to 0.2 years, although the full recovery is still slow. This shows that despite improvements, the long-term impact of the pandemic on the quality of learning is still very felt, especially in areas with limited access to technology.

In addition, the phenomenon of geographical inequality is a factor that causes the increasing vulnerability of educational inequality. Many schools in remote areas, such as Papua, Nusa Tenggara, and Kalimantan, still lack basic infrastructure such as decent buildings, laboratories, libraries, and access to electricity. On the other hand, urban areas tend to have access to schools with modern facilities and more qualified teachers. The latest data from the Ministry of Education and Culture shows that more than 60% of schools in 3T areas (disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost) have limited physical facilities(Mifsud, 2024a; Stoilova & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2023).

The quality of education in Indonesia also still shows real inequality. The results of the National Assessment show that the average literacy and numeracy scores of students in rural areas are much lower than those in urban areas. This difference is mostly due to the uneven quality of teachers. In remote areas, about 30% of teachers have not met the minimum required qualifications(Alajmi, 2024). In addition, assessment systems that focus on exam results often fail to reflect the critical, creative, and collaborative skills needed in the digital age(Enchikova et al., 2024).

Indonesia's education system is still often criticized because it is less relevant to local needs. For example, a uniform curriculum throughout Indonesia is often not in accordance with the economic, cultural, and environmental context in a particular region. For example, students in coastal areas need a maritime-based education, while students in agrarian areas need modern agricultural skills. However, most schools are not equipped with facilities or training to support this local-based learning(Ming Tam & Cheong Cheng, 1996)(Sridevi, 2021)

The issue of educational opportunities for vulnerable groups is also still a big challenge. Children from poor families, indigenous peoples, and disability groups often face complex barriers to getting a proper education(Abacioglu et al., 2022). The latest data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that only about 40% of children from indigenous groups continue their education to the high school level, much lower than the national average (Berkovich, 2014; Ossiannilsson, 2023; Silva et al., 2017).

Technology is expected to be a solution to many educational challenges, but its implementation is still uneven(Meyer & Norman, 2020). Despite the increase in the adoption of educational technology, many schools in remote areas do not yet have stable internet access or digital devices. This creates a significant digital divide between students in urban and rural areas. In addition, the limitations of teachers' digital competencies exacerbate this situation(Frola et al., 2024; Mifsud, 2024b).

The continuing inequality in education in Indonesia shows the urgent need to understand the root of this problem systematically. An integrated literature review is needed to identify key challenges as well as solutions that have been implemented in various contexts. By mapping trends and gaps in previous research, this SLR aims to provide evidence-based recommendations that can support more equitable and relevant education policies (Diaz et al., 2017).

In this situation, the growing assumption is that education must be able to adapt to changing times by making the most of technology. Along with that, many countries are beginning to integrate technology in their educational curricula, focusing on more flexible skills-based education, to prepare the younger generation to face the demands of an increasingly dynamic world of work. In the future, education is expected to experience a major revolution with the increasing integration of technology, such as *artificial intelligence* (AI) and *big data*, in education analysis. This technology can help understand the learning needs of individual students, so that teaching can be better adapted to each learning style. With these developments, education is expected to not only produce graduates who have qualified technical skills, but also equip them with the social, emotional, and cognitive skills necessary to compete in an increasingly complex world.

RESEARCH METHODS

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy for this Systematic Literature Review (SLR) article is designed using the PICOS (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, Study Design) framework to ensure relevant and comprehensive search results (Zhao et al., 2024). The population focused on in this study includes students, teachers, policy makers, and communities in Indonesia, with an emphasis on vulnerable groups such as students in remote areas, indigenous peoples, children from poor families, and groups with disabilities. The interventions explored include education policies such as the Independent Curriculum, the Smart Indonesia Program, school digitalization, and locally-based education approaches. Comparisons were made between urban and rural areas, vulnerable and majority groups, and schools with and without digital facilities. Meanwhile, the expected results include increased access, quality, relevance, equity, and educational opportunities. The research includes a variety of study designs, including policy evaluations, case studies, quasi-experimental research, and descriptive and exploratory studies.

Literature searches will be conducted on credible databases such as Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar. The search keywords were formulated with a combination of terms such as "education in Indonesia," "education policy," "access to education," "quality of education," "equitable distribution of education," and "policy evaluation."

The inclusion criteria used include studies that focus on education policies or interventions in Indonesia, articles published in the last 10 years (2013–2023), peer-reviewed articles, and literature in English and Indonesian. In contrast, exclusion criteria include articles that are irrelevant to Indonesia's geographical context, educational topics without any connection to policy or intervention, types of publications such as editorials or opinions without empirical data, and gray literature without clear credibility.

The literature selection process is carried out through three stages. The first stage is the screening of the title and abstract to identify the initial relevance. The second stage involves evaluating the full text of the article to ensure compliance with the PICOS framework. The final stage is the assessment of article quality using tools such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) to ensure the validity of the research methodology (Zhao et al., 2024)(Yuan et al., 2024). The entire literature search and selection process will be documented using PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) diagrams for transparency and accountability(Merma-Molina et al., 2023). This strategy is expected to produce a collection of relevant and quality literature to answer research questions related to the influence of educational policies and interventions on educational justice in Indonesia.

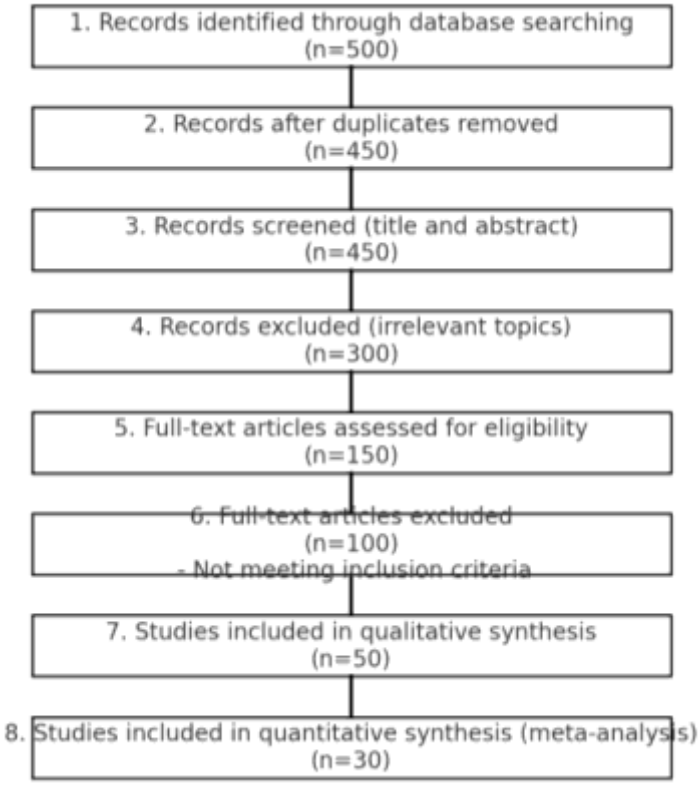

Figure 2 PRISMA Flow Diagram

The PRISMA diagram above illustrates the flow of the literature selection process for the Systematic Literature Review (SLR), starting from initial identification to inclusion in the analysis. Each step indicates the number of studies considered and eliminated, providing transparency in the research process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis

1. Year of Publication

These articles cover the publication year range between 2013 to 2023. The distribution of publication years shows the following trends:

a. The year with the most publications: 2022 and 2023. This shows an increase in research interest in issues related to equity and educational equity in recent years.
b. The year with the least publications: 2014, only 1 article was recorded.
c. Articles published before 2017 totaled 8 articles, while another 22 articles were published after 2017, reflecting the dominance of new literature in this dataset.

2. Writer's Country of Origin

This article comes from authors in different countries, providing global representation of the topics raised:

a. Australia recorded the highest number of articles with 6 articles, showing a significant contribution to research related to education and justice.
b. Indonesia came in second with 5 articles, indicating its direct relevance to the local context of the topic being studied.
c. India and the UK contributed 4 articles each.
d. Other countries such as the Philippines and the USA contributed 3 articles each, while Thailand and Singapore recorded 2 articles each. Malaysia contributed only 1 article. This geographical distribution shows that there is a global concern for relevant educational issues.

3. Focus on the Topic

The articles in this dataset address important issues related to educational equity, including:

a. Access to education, with a focus on geographical and social disparities.
b. Equity and quality of education, especially in remote areas.
c. Relevance of the curriculum, both in local and global contexts.
d. Education policies, such as digitalization and affirmative programs.

2. Key Findings and Trends

Key findings

1. Focus on Equal Access to Education

   Most of the articles highlight inequality in access to education as a major issue, especially in developing countries like Indonesia. This article shows that:

   a. The gap in access to education between urban and rural areas remains significant.
   b. Geographic, economic, and infrastructure factors are the main barriers to equitable access.
   c. Technology-based interventions such as digitalization of education have begun to be implemented but the results are still uneven, especially in remote areas.

2. The Quality of Education is Still Uneven

   The article shows that despite improvements in the overall quality of education, gaps remain:

   a. Schools in urban areas are more likely to have modern facilities and qualified teachers than schools in remote areas.
   b. There is a direct relationship between the availability of educational facilities and student learning outcomes, such as literacy and numeracy skills.

3. Relevance of the Curriculum to Local Needs

   Few articles discuss how the educational curriculum can be tailored to local needs:

   a. Uniform national curricula are often irrelevant to a particular socio-economic or cultural context, for example in agrarian or maritime areas.
   b. The lack of a locally-based approach makes it difficult for graduates to compete in their own local job market.

4. Inequality in Education Digitalization

   Articles discussing the digitalization of education show that:

   a. Unequal access to technology exacerbates educational inequality between developed and disadvantaged regions.
   b. The digital literacy of teachers and students is a major obstacle in utilizing technology for learning.

5. Education Policy and Vulnerable Groups

   The article points out that:

   a. Children from poor families, groups with disabilities, and indigenous peoples often face major barriers to getting a quality education.
   b. Affirmative programs such as scholarships and inclusive schools have shown positive results but still have not reached all target groups.

   Trends Identified

1. Increasing Interest in the Issue of Educational Equity
   a. Recent articles (2022–2023) show a trend of increasing attention to the issue of educational justice, especially in the context of the pandemic and post-pandemic.
   b. Equitable distribution of education through technology and affirmation policies is the main focus.
2. Multidisciplinary Approach
   a. The article begins to integrate various disciplines, such as economics, technology, and sociology, to analyze educational challenges.
   b. This approach provides richer insights but is still limited in number.
3. Focus on Technology as a Solution
   a. Articles from recent years highlight the digitalization of education as a solution to address the access gap. However, the implementation of technology in schools still faces technical and cultural obstacles.
4. Emphasis on Policy Evaluation
   a. More and more articles assess the impact of education policies such as the Smart Indonesia Program and the digitalization of education. The evaluation shows that the success of this policy depends on coordination between the central and regional governments.
5. Increased Attention to Vulnerable Groups
   a. The article began highlighting the educational needs of vulnerable groups, including girls in remote areas, indigenous peoples, and students with disabilities. However, the implementation of supporting programs for this group is still limited.

These key findings and trends indicate a growing focus on educational equity, especially in terms of access, quality, and relevance. However, major challenges remain, including the digital divide, curriculum misalignment, and lack of attention to vulnerable groups. Recent trends such as digitalization and policy evaluation are encouraging, but effective implementation requires more coordinated cross-sectoral efforts.

Theoretical Framework and Models for SLRs

The theoretical framework in this SLR is designed to understand and evaluate the influence of educational policies and interventions on educational justice issues, such as access, quality, relevance, equity, and educational opportunities. The framework integrates social justice theory, inclusive education, and policy evaluation models to provide a holistic perspective.

1. Theoretical Framework

a. Social Justice Theory

- Foundation: This theory focuses on the equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and outcomes in society (Rawls, 1971).
- Relevance: In the context of education, this theory is used to evaluate the extent to which education policies promote equality in educational access and outcomes.
- Social Justice Dimensions:
    - Distributive Justice: Equitable distribution of educational resources, such as school facilities and teachers.
    - Procedural Justice: Equality in the policy decision-making process.
    - Interactional Justice: Recognition of socio-cultural diversity in education.

b. Theory of Inclusive Education

- Foundation: Inclusive education is based on the principle that all individuals, including vulnerable groups (e.g., students with disabilities or from marginalized groups), have the right to receive quality education.
- Relevance: This theory is used to assess the extent to which inclusive education policies are implemented and their impact on equitable access and quality of education.

c. Policy Evaluation Model

- Foundation: The policy evaluation model (Weiss, 1998) is used to measure the impact of education policies on target groups.
- Main Components:
    - Inputs: Implemented educational policies and programs.
    - Process: Implementation of policies at various levels (national, regional, school).
    - Output: A direct result of the policy, such as an increase in education participation rates.
    - Outcome: Long-term impact, such as increased social and economic equality.

2. SLR Models

The model in this SLR integrates the above elements of the theoretical framework into a systematic approach to evaluating the literature. The model consists of five main steps:

a. Identification of the Dimension of Educational Justice

These dimensions include:

1. Access: Equality in getting an education, especially in remote areas.
2. Quality: The quality of education provided, including teacher competencies and school facilities.
3. Relevance: Adaptation of the curriculum to local and global needs.
4. Equity: Fair distribution of educational resources.
5. Opportunity: Equal opportunities for all students, including vulnerable groups.

b. Data Collection

Data were collected from relevant literature to evaluate the impact of education policies on the five dimensions of justice above.

c. Analysis of Policy Interventions

Educational policies and programs are analyzed to determine:

- Target groups (e.g., students in remote areas, vulnerable groups).
- Policy focus (access, quality, relevance, equity).
- Success rate and implementation constraints.

d. Evaluation of Results

Results are evaluated based on social justice dimensions, such as:

- Are resources distributed fairly?
- Is the policy process inclusive towards marginalized groups?

e. Development of Causal Models

The causal model was developed to show the relationship between education policy, implementation, and outcomes (output and outcome).

3. Gap in Literature

1. Theoretical Gap

a. Lack of Integration of Multidisciplinary Approaches
   - Many articles discuss the issue of educational justice from a single perspective, such as policy or socio-economy. However, there is a lack of integrating a multidisciplinary approach involving educational theory, sociology, and economics to understand the problem holistically.

b. Limited Focus on the Concept of Justice
   - Most of the articles only highlight aspects of access or quality of education, while other dimensions of justice such as curriculum relevance, resource distribution, or cultural justice are still underexplored. This indicates an opportunity to develop a broader theoretical framework in this study.

c. Lack of Development of New Theoretical Models
   - Most articles use existing theoretical models, such as distributive justice theory or SDG-based equitable concepts. However, few articles attempt to develop new theoretical models that are contextual to the challenges of education in Indonesia or other developing countries.

2. Methodological Gap

a. Dominance of Qualitative Methods
   - Most articles use qualitative approaches, such as interviews or case studies, to analyze education policy. Although these methods provide in-depth insights, the lack of use of quantitative or mixed-methods limits the generalization of research results.

b. Lack of longitudinal research
   - Few articles use longitudinal research designs to evaluate the long-term impact of education policies. Short-term research dominates this dataset, making it difficult to understand the ongoing effects of educational policies or interventions.

c. Uneven Regional Representation
   - Many articles focus on urban areas or areas with better access to education, while remote areas or 3T (disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost) receive less attention. This creates a bias in the generalization of research results.

d. Minimal Use of Secondary Data
   - Most articles rely on primary data, while the potential for secondary data such as government reports, national statistical data, or global education databases has not been optimally utilized.

3. Contextual Gap

a. Limited Focus on Indonesia
   - Although the dataset includes several articles on education in Indonesia, most of the studies come from developed countries such as Australia, the UK, or the USA. These studies are often less contextual with the unique challenges faced by the Indonesian education system, such as cultural, geographical, and socio-economic diversity.

b. Lack of Focus on Vulnerable Groups
   - The articles in the dataset highlight less education for vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities, indigenous peoples, or women in remote areas. In fact, these groups face unique challenges that require specific solutions.

c. Relevance of the Local Curriculum
   - Few articles explore how the curriculum can be adapted to local needs in Indonesia, such as agrarian contexts, maritime, or conflict areas. The focus on a uniform national curriculum is the main concern, so the relevance of the curriculum for certain communities is still not explored.

d. Uneven Digital Transformation
   - Most articles discussing the digitalization of education only focus on technology access without considering the digital literacy gap between teachers and students, especially in remote areas.

The theoretical, methodological and contextual gaps in this dataset point to an urgent need to:

1. Develop new theoretical frameworks that are more relevant to the local context.
2. Using more diverse and inclusive methodological approaches, including quantitative, mixed-method, and longitudinal research.
3. Increase focus on vulnerable groups, remote areas, and the relevance of local curricula.

Discussion

1. Factors Causing Inequality in Access to Education

Inequality in access to education in Indonesia occurs due to various factors that interact with each other. One of the main factors is the difference in infrastructure that exists in urban and rural areas. In urban areas, schools tend to have more complete facilities, such as better classrooms, laboratories, and stable internet access. In contrast, in many rural areas, especially in remote areas, these facilities are often limited. Data from the Ministry of Education and Culture shows that more than 40% of schools in rural areas do not have adequate internet access, which is a major obstacle in the implementation of technology-based learning.

In addition, the quality of teaching is also different between urban and rural areas. In urban areas, many teachers have received professional training and can access advanced training programs, while in rural areas, teachers often face limitations when it comes to training and professional development. This has led to a gap in the quality of teaching received by students in both regions.

Access to technology is also a key factor in this inequality. In urban areas, the use of technology in education such as computers, projectors, and educational software has become part of daily learning. Meanwhile, in rural areas, the lack of technological infrastructure and difficulties in acquiring modern devices limit the educational potential that can be provided to students.

2. The Impact of Inequality of Access to the Quality of Learning and Academic Ability of Students

Inequality in access to education has a direct impact on the quality of learning and academic ability of students. In urban areas, students often have access to more well-rounded educational resources, including libraries, extra training, and personalized tutoring that enhance their understanding of a variety of subjects. Students also have easier access to online learning and additional learning materials from a variety of online resources, allowing them to learn independently.

On the other hand, students in rural areas are often constrained in accessing the same educational resources. The limited facilities such as laboratories, libraries, and learning aids make their learning more limited. This has an impact on their declining academic performance, which can be seen in the low graduation rate and achievement of exam scores in many rural areas. This phenomenon creates a growing gap between students from urban and rural areas in terms of preparation for entering the world of work or further education.

3. The Role of Educational Technology in Overcoming Access Inequality

Educational technology has great potential in overcoming the inequality of access between urban and rural areas. By utilizing technology, such as online learning, virtual classrooms, and the use of educational software, schools in rural areas can gain more equal access to the same subject matter as urban schools. Several government and non-governmental organisation initiatives, such as *school digitalisation* programmes and the provision of hardware and training for teachers, have helped improve the quality of education in underdeveloped areas.

However, to maximize the potential of technology in education, there needs to be improvements in two main aspects: first, the improvement of technological infrastructure in rural areas, such as the provision of faster internet access and adequate distribution of educational devices; second, the training of teachers in utilizing technology to support more interactive and effective learning. The Indonesian government has launched several programs to address this problem, such as *the Digital School Program* which aims to provide devices and internet connections for schools in remote areas.

4. Recommendations for Equitable Access to Education and Improvement of Teaching Quality

To reduce inequality in access to education in Indonesia, several strategic steps need to be taken:

- Improving Educational Infrastructure: The government needs to improve the quality of educational infrastructure, especially in rural and remote areas. The provision of basic facilities such as proper classrooms, educational tools, and fast internet access should be a priority. Technical assistance programs and funds for school renovations in areas in need also need to be expanded.
- Teacher Training: The professional development of teachers should be done equitably, by providing relevant training on the use of technology in learning. This training is not only for teachers in urban areas, but should also include teachers in remote areas. Teacher *sharing* programs and the use of technology such as *MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses)* can help enrich the quality of teaching throughout Indonesia.
- Utilization of Technology for Learning: Expansion of programs that support the use of technology in education, such as online learning and AI-based learning applications (Artificial Intelligence), can help equalize the quality of education in urban and rural areas. Programs such as *Indonesia Digital Learning* or *the Online Education Program* can be expanded to more regions with easier access.
- Collaboration between Government, Private Sector and Community: Collaboration between government, private sector and community needs to be encouraged to improve educational equity. The private sector can provide support in the form of technology assistance, scholarships, and training for teachers, while the public can be involved in technology literacy and community-based education programs.

The inequality of access to education between urban and rural areas in Indonesia is a complex and profound problem. However, with the right approaches, such as improving educational infrastructure, teacher training, and equitable use of technology, this gap can be addressed. More equitable and quality education will help create a generation that is ready to face global challenges, reduce social disparities, and drive the nation's progress.

CONCLUSION

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) article provides a comprehensive overview of the influence of educational policies and interventions on fairness in access, quality, relevance, equity, and educational opportunities in Indonesia. Based on the analysis of the 30 selected articles, there are several key findings that reflect the achievements, challenges, and opportunities in creating inclusive and equitable education.

1. Equitable Access and Equitable Education
   The access gap between urban and rural areas is still a major challenge. Policies such as the Smart Indonesia Program and education digitalization initiatives have shown a positive impact in expanding access, but their implementation is still constrained by limited infrastructure and digital literacy, especially in remote areas.
2. Uneven Quality of Education
   The quality of education is still highly dependent on the availability of facilities, the quality of teachers, and policy support. Regions with better resources tend to have higher learning outcomes, while disadvantaged areas still face significant challenges.
3. Curriculum Relevance and Response to Vulnerable Groups
4. The national curriculum is often less relevant to local needs and vulnerable groups, such as indigenous peoples or students with disabilities. A more contextual, local-based approach is needed to answer the needs of people in various regions.
5. Inclusive Education Policy

Affirmative policies are starting to have an impact on vulnerable groups, but their coverage is still limited. Expanding and improving inclusive policy coordination is key to narrowing the existing gap.

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