

BRIDGING THE UNBRIDGEABLE? THE STRUCTURAL NATURE OF URBAN-RURAL EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: Educational inequality between urban and rural areas remains a persistent structural problem in Indonesia. This study aims to identify the main factors causing the urban-rural educational divide in Indonesia and analyze why this inequality is difficult to overcome. Using a systematic literature review method, this study analyzed 23 accredited journal articles, official reports, and indexed conference proceedings published between 2016-2026. 17 of these articles served as the primary sources for identifying the three structural factors of educational inequality presented in the discussion, while the remaining 6 supported the theoretical framework, methodology, and policy context. The findings reveal three interrelated structural factors: (1) unequal distribution of teachers and educational infrastructure, (2) household economic disparities affecting learning participation, and (3) inequality in education policy and budget allocation that tends to be urban-biased. These three factors form a dynamic that reinforces each other. Within Bourdieu's framework, this mechanism functions as social reproduction, children from affluent urban families inherit cultural and economic capital that is then strengthened by quality schools, while rural children with limited capital are trapped in low-quality schools, causing inequality to reproduce across generations. Breaking this dynamic requires a holistic approach that simultaneously reforms teacher distribution based on real needs, improves basic infrastructure in disadvantaged areas, reforms the allocation of school operational funds (BOS) and special allocation funds (DAK) using a needs-based approach, integrates education policies with poverty alleviation programs, and develops contextual curricula and adaptive digitalization

Keywords: educational inequality; urban-rural divide; structural factors; social reproduction

Abstrak: Ketimpangan pendidikan antara wilayah perkotaan dan pedesaan masih menjadi masalah struktural yang persisten di Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor utama penyebab ketimpangan pendidikan kota-desa di Indonesia serta menganalisis mengapa ketimpangan tersebut sulit diatasi. Menggunakan metode tinjauan literatur sistematis, penelitian ini menganalisis 23 artikel jurnal terakreditasi, laporan resmi, dan prosiding konferensi terindeks yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2016-2026. 17 artikel di antaranya menjadi sumber utama untuk mengidentifikasi tiga faktor struktural ketimpangan pendidikan yang disajikan dalam pembahasan, sedangkan 6 artikel lainnya digunakan untuk mendukung kerangka teori, metodologi, dan konteks kebijakan. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan tiga faktor struktural yang saling terkait: (1) ketimpangan distribusi guru dan infrastruktur pendidikan, (2) disparitas ekonomi rumah tangga yang mempengaruhi partisipasi belajar, dan (3) ketimpangan alokasi kebijakan dan anggaran pendidikan yang cenderung bias perkotaan. Ketiga faktor ini membentuk dinamika yang saling memperkuat. Dalam kerangka Bourdieu, mekanisme ini berfungsi sebagai reproduksi sosial, anak dari keluarga mampu di perkotaan mewarisi modal budaya dan

ekonomi yang kemudian diperkuat oleh sekolah berkualitas, sementara anak desa dengan modal terbatas terjebak dalam sekolah berkualitas rendah, sehingga ketimpangan bereproduksi lintas generasi. Untuk memutus dinamika tersebut, diperlukan pendekatan holistik yang secara simultan mereformasi distribusi guru berbasis kebutuhan riil, meningkatkan infrastruktur dasar di daerah tertinggal, mereformulasi alokasi Dana BOS dan DAK dengan pendekatan berbasis kebutuhan, mengintegrasikan kebijakan pendidikan dengan program pengentasan kemiskinan, serta mengembangkan kurikulum kontekstual dan digitalisasi adaptif

Kata Kunci: ketimpangan pendidikan; kesenjangan kota-desa; faktor struktural; reproduksi sosial

INTRODUCTION

Educational inequality between urban and rural areas is one of the most persistent structural problems in the Indonesian education system. Despite various government policies, ranging from the School Operational Assistance (BOS) program to affirmative action policies for underdeveloped regions, the gap in education quality and access between urban and rural areas remains fundamentally unresolved. This phenomenon not only reflects a failure in resource distribution but also demonstrates the existence of a systemic mechanism for the reproduction of inequality. As emphasized in a study, educational inequality in Indonesia is multidimensional and closely linked to regional disparities, resource allocation, and unequal teacher quality¹.

Government policies aimed at addressing the education gap between urban and rural areas have found that this inequality is caused by differences in access to educational infrastructure, the quality of teaching staff, and unequal learning facilities. Policies such as School Operational Assistance (BOS), teacher placement programs, and digital learning have made positive contributions to improving access to education in rural areas. However, these policies still face challenges such as limited infrastructure, technological inequalities, and suboptimal implementation oversight in remote areas. The effectiveness of government policies still needs to be strengthened through more contextual planning and equitable distribution of educational resources, as well as synergy between the central and regional governments². This inequality not only occurs in the physical aspects of schools, but also extends to the quality of learning interactions and systemic support received by students.

Furthermore, the uneven distribution of teachers is a major driver of low education quality in rural areas. The uneven distribution of primary school teachers is influenced by recruitment policies that are not based on actual school needs, negative perceptions

¹ [Johan Manik Sidauruk, Monica Susilowati, and Kamal Karimullah Akbar](#), "Indonesia's Struggle with Education Inequality: Is Reform the Answer?," *Indonesia Discourse*, vol 2, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.15294/indi.v2i1.23035>

² [Jainatin Halomoan Hrp and Usiono Usiono](#), "Analisis Kebijakan Pemerintahan dalam Mengatasi Kesenjangan Pendidikan Antara Wilayah Perkotaan dan Pedesaan," *Jurnal TIPS* vol 31, no. 2 (September 2025): hlm. 145-160.

of remote assignment locations, and limited regional incentives³. As a result, schools in remote areas lack qualified educators, while schools in urban areas tend to have an oversupply of teachers. This situation creates a dynamic where low-quality education in rural areas leads to minimal social mobility, which in turn reinforces economic and social backwardness in those areas. On the other hand, targeting efficiency and spatial equity in teacher allowances in geographically remote schools in Indonesia provide important insights. This study found that schools in remote areas located more than 54 km from district capitals face significant challenges in securing qualified teacher allocations. This study recommends integrating geographic indicators and the Village Development Index (IDM) in designing more equitable, data-driven teacher incentive policies. The findings indicate that IDM-based targeting significantly outperforms traditional administrative decisions, reducing inclusion errors by up to 23 percentage points and exclusion errors by up to 46 percentage points⁴.

From a policy perspective, various affirmative action programs have been launched to address this gap. However, evaluations of the implementation of these policies have shown suboptimal results. Although educational equity policies have been pursued through various initiatives such as the School Operational Assistance (BOS) program, improvements to educational infrastructure, and teacher deployment to remote, underdeveloped (3T) areas, implementation still faces various obstacles, including limited basic facilities, uneven teacher distribution, low community support, and difficult geographic conditions⁵. In other words, centrally designed policies often fail to accommodate diverse local contexts, thus perpetuating disparities.

Another factor that contributes to widening the gap is the disparity in family socio-economic conditions. Children from poor rural families face dual obstacles, limited access to quality schools on the one hand, and economic pressures that force them to work rather than attend school on the other. Within the framework of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, this inequality can be understood as a manifestation of cultural reproduction and social reproduction. Cultural reproduction is the process of passing on habits, values, knowledge, and ways of thinking from one generation to the next, for example, how middle-class families teach the habit of reading or discussing things from an early age. Social reproduction is the process of preserving the social class structure, where a person's position in society tends to be inherited. Both of these

³ [Teguh Triwiyanto and Desi Eri Kusumaningrum](#), "Ketimpangan Distribusi Guru Sekolah Dasar Negeri dan Pemerataan Akses Mutu Pendidikan," *Jurnal Administrasi Publik* Vol 21, no. 2 (December 2025): hlm. 215-230, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52316/jap.v21i2.607>

⁴ [Temu Ismail, Trisno Martono, Khresna Bayu Sangka, and Dewi Kusuma Wardani](#), "Targeting Efficiency and Spatial Equity in Teacher Hardship Allowance: Evidence from Geographically Disadvantaged School in Indonesia". *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, vol 16 no. 2 (March 2026): hlm 272.

⁵ [Friska Aqilah Vilanti, Muhammad Harli Hanapi, Mayshel Adinda Viola, and Linardo Pratama](#), "Implementasi Kebijakan Pemerataan Pendidikan dalam Mengatasi Ketimpangan Akses di Daerah Terpencil," *Education and Library Journal*, vol 3 no 1 (January 2026), <https://www.online-journal.unja.ac.id/edlib/article/view/50054>

processes occur through educational institutions. Bourdieu explains that families possess three forms of capital: (1) cultural capital, which is the same as cultural reproduction, namely knowledge, habits, and ways of thinking, for example, the habit of reading or access to libraries; (2) economic capital, which is material wealth such as income and assets; (3) social capital, which is a network of beneficial relationships and connections. These three types of capital tend to be inherited and reinforced through schools. Schools place more value on middle-class cultural capital, so that children from families with poor cultural capital are left behind. As a result, education, which should be a means of social mobility, instead functions as a tool of cultural and social reproduction that perpetuates inequality⁶.

From a human rights perspective, unequal access to education in remote areas is a violation of the principle of non-discrimination guaranteed in various international and national legal instruments. A study confirms that the right to education is guaranteed in the 1945 Constitution and Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights⁷. However, the realization of this right still faces serious challenges in remote areas officially classified as such through Ministerial Decree No. 160/P/2021. These challenges include inadequate educational infrastructure, limited access to transportation, low socioeconomic conditions, a shortage of qualified educators, and geographic barriers that exacerbate inequality in access to education services. Therefore, comprehensive policy reform is needed, including increasing needs-based education budget allocations, improving teacher distribution systems, and fostering synergy between the central and regional governments and civil society.

Although various studies have addressed educational inequality between urban and rural areas in Indonesia, most remain partial, both in terms of coverage (only one province or district) and in terms of the aspects studied (focusing solely on teacher distribution, affirmative action policies, or family economic factors). Some studies only highlight the inequality in teacher distribution in East Java, while others emphasize policy analysis without integrating household economic factors. A gap that has not been widely explored is studies that simultaneously integrate all three structural factors (teacher and infrastructure distribution, household economic disparities, and policy and budget inequality) into a single, coherent analytical framework. Furthermore, studies that systematically synthesize literature from various regions in Indonesia using a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to identify the mechanisms of inequality reproduction are still very limited. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by synthesizing 20 accredited journal articles and official

⁶ [Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron](#), *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 1990), hlm. 30-45.

⁷ [Rohmatul Hasanah](#), "Ketimpangan Akses Pendidikan di Daerah Terpencil: Isu HAM dan Kebijakan Hukum di Indonesia," *Wicara: Jurnal Hukum dan Hak Asasi Manusia* 3, no. 1 (May 2025): hlm. 55-70, <https://doi.org/10.57123/wicara.v3i1.97>

reports and analyzing the structural factors causing urban-rural educational inequality in Indonesia within Bourdieu's social reproduction framework.

This study aims to answer the main question, namely, why is educational inequality between urban and rural areas in Indonesia structural and difficult to overcome? Using a systematic literature review approach, this article will identify the dominant factors causing inequality, analyze the reproduction mechanisms of inequality in the education system, and formulate more contextual and equitable policy recommendations. The significance of this study lies in its effort to not only describe the problem, but also uncover the structural roots that have so far made efforts to equalize education tend to be "unbridgeable" or at least, appear so because the approach used so far has been partial and does not touch the core of the problem⁸.

By understanding the structural nature of this educational inequality, it is hoped that policymakers can design more targeted and sustainable interventions, so that education can truly function as a tool for equitable social mobility for all Indonesian children, regardless of where they were born and raised.

METHOD

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) approach. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the characteristics of this study, which aims to comprehensively identify, evaluate, and synthesize all relevant research conducted on educational inequality between urban and rural areas in Indonesia. This study use a systematic literature review approach because it was deemed most appropriate for the research needs. As explained by Mannarath, SLR provide a structured framework that is crucial for researchers in the social sciences to effectively synthesize literature. This framework, which includes a clear search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and study quality assessment, significantly reduces bias and allows for a more reliable synthesis compared to conventional narrative literature review⁹.

The use of the SLR method in this study is based on the consideration that the topic of urban-rural educational inequality has been widely studied separately in various local contexts, but few studies have systematically synthesized these findings into a comprehensive understanding of the structural factors causing inequality. Therefore, SLR is the most appropriate methodological instrument to answer the main research

⁸ [Moh. Badrut Tamam, Josafat Gracia Ginting, Ahmad Rais Habib](#), "Keberagaman, Kesenjangan, dan Inklusi dalam Pendidikan Indonesia," *Methoda*, vol 15, no 3 (2025):

<https://ejournal.methodist.ac.id/index.php/methoda/article/view/4826>

⁹ [Anil Kumar Mannarath](#), "Systematic Literature Review for An Effective Research: A Structured Framework For Social Science Researches", *Springer Nature: Qual Quant*, vol 60 (2026): <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-025-02458-3>

question why educational inequality between urban and rural areas in Indonesia is structural and difficult to overcome.

The literature search was conducted at the end of March 2026 using a combination of keywords tailored to each database. Keywords in Indonesian include: "ketimpangan pendidikan Indonesia", "kesenjangan kota desa pendidikan", "distribusi guru daerah terpencil", "kebijakan afirmasi pendidikan", "Dana BOS ketimpangan", "pendidikan daerah 3T", and "Reproduksi pendidikan Bourdieu". As well as using these keywords in English. Keyword combinations use Boolean operators AND and OR, for example: ("educational inequality" OR "educational gap") AND ("urban" OR "rural" OR "remote") AND Indonesia. The search was also conducted using the snowballing feature (searching the bibliography of relevant articles) to ensure the completeness of the literature.

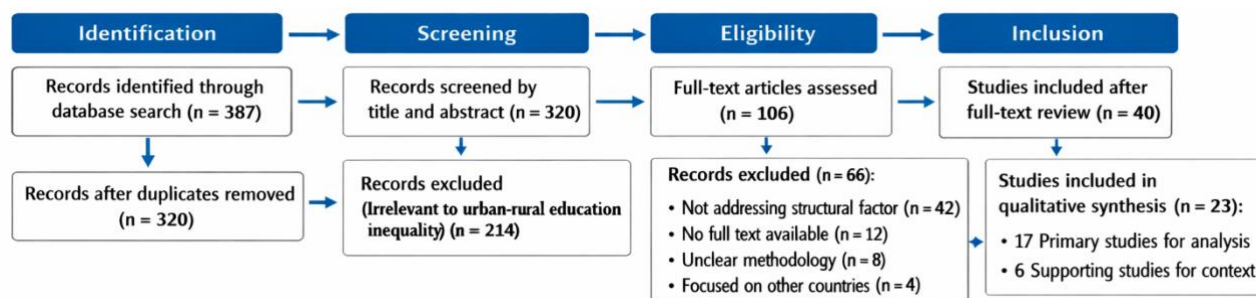
This study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol, adapted for research in the social sciences and education. The PRISMA protocol was used to ensure transparency and reproducibility of the literature selection process¹⁰. The eligibility criteria established in this study are as follows:

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Year of publication	2016-2026	Before 2016
Language	Indonesian and English	Apart from these two languages
Publication type	Accredited journal articles (Sinta accredited) or internationally indexed (Scopus, Web of Science), official government reports (BPS, Kemendikbudristek)	Textbooks, media opinions, non-academic articles
Research focus	Educational inequality between urban and rural areas in Indonesia; teacher distribution; educational equity policies; access to education in the 3T regions	Studies outside the Indonesian context; focus on micro-learning aspects without any connection to structural inequality
Research methods	Quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, or literature review	Studies without clear methodology

Table 1. List of Eligibility Criteria

The literature selection process was conducted in four stages according to the PRISMA protocol.

¹⁰ [David Moher, Alessandro Liberati, Jennifer Tetzlaff, and Douglas G. Altman](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000097), "Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement," *PLOS Medicine*, vol 6, no. 7 (July 2009): e1000097, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000097>



Picture 1. Visualization of The PRISMA Model Used.

First, identification through an initial search yielded 387 articles from various databases. After removing duplicates (n=67), 320 articles remained. The second stage involved screening by title and abstract. Articles irrelevant to the topic of urban-rural education inequality in Indonesia were excluded (n=214). This left 106 articles that met the initial criteria. The third stage, eligibility, assessed eligibility through a full-text review. At this stage, articles were excluded if they did not address structural factors of inequality (n=42), lacked full-text access (n=12), had unclear methodology (n=8), and focused on other countries (n=4). This left 40 articles that met the eligibility criteria. The fourth stage was the inclusion stage. After going through a quality assessment process, 23 articles were deemed suitable for analysis. 17 of these articles serve as primary sources for identifying the three structural factors of educational inequality presented in the discussion table, while the other 6 articles are used to support the theoretical basis, methodology, and policy context in the introduction and methods sections.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach with the following steps: open coding, where all findings from 23 articles were coded into initial categories based on identified inequality factors. Thematic grouping, where similar codes were grouped into larger themes, resulted in three main themes: (a) inequality in the distribution of human resources and infrastructure, (b) household economic disparity, and (c) inequality in policy and budget allocation. Cross-study synthesis, where the results of each theme were analyzed integratively to identify patterns of relationships between factors, mechanisms of inequality reproduction, and remaining research gaps. Thematic validation, to ensure the reliability of the analysis, involved discussions and peer debriefing of the resulting thematic groupings¹¹.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of a systematic literature review of articles that met the eligibility criteria, this study identified three main structural factors that cause educational

¹¹ [Anil Kumar Mannarath](#), "Systematic Literature Review for An Effective Research: A Structured Framework For Social Science Researches", *Springer Nature: Qual Quant*, vol 60 (2026): <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-025-02458-3>

inequality between urban and rural areas in Indonesia to be persistent and difficult to overcome. These three factors are: (1) unequal distribution of teachers and educational infrastructure, (2) disparities in household economics that affect learning participation, and (3) unequal allocation of educational policies and budgets.

1.1 Main Structural Factors

In this sub-chapter, the author will divide the main structural factors into three tables, each of which discusses the problem, the title of the article and the findings from the article.

Factor	Problems	Article title	Findings
Unequal distribution of teachers and educational infrastructure	Uneven Distribution of Teachers	Analisis Kebijakan Pemerintah dalam Mengatasi Kesenjangan Pendidikan Antara Daerah Perkotaan dan Pedesaan	Research by Hrp and Usiono (2025) analyzed government policies to address the education gap between urban and rural areas through a systematic literature review. The study found that the unequal distribution of teachers is caused by unequal access to quality teaching staff. Although programs such as the School Operational Assistance (BOS) and teacher placement programs have made positive contributions, these policies still face challenges such as limited infrastructure and suboptimal implementation oversight in remote areas ¹² .
		The Reproduction of Educational Inequality in Indonesia: An Examination of Hindering Factors and Digital Access in Rural and Urban School Settings	Dongoran and Aditia (2026), using PISA 2022 data from a sample of 410 schools in Indonesia, found a significant relationship between school location and learning barriers related to teacher availability, physical infrastructure, and digital resources. These findings indicate that these problems are predominantly concentrated in public schools in rural areas, indicating systemic disadvantage. This study also confirms that educational inequality in Indonesia is structurally reproduced, perpetuating social and economic hierarchies ¹³ .
		Indonesia's Struggle with Education	Sidauruk, Susilowati, and Akbar (2025) examine Indonesia's struggle against educational inequality. Their research

¹² [Jainatin Halomoan Hrp and Usiono Usiono](#), "Analisis Kebijakan Pemerintahan dalam Mengatasi Kesenjangan Pendidikan Antara Wilayah Perkotaan dan Pedesaan," *Jurnal TIPS* vol 31, no. 2 (September 2025): hlm. 145-160.

¹³ [Faisal Rahman Dongoran and Reza Aditia](#), "The Reproduction of Educational Inequality in Indonesia: An Examination of Hindering Factors and Digital Access in Rural and Urban School Settings," *International Journal of Indonesian Education and Teaching* vol 10, no. 1 (January 2026): hlm. 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.24071/ijiet.v10i1.12907>

		Inequality: Is Reform the Answer?	reveals that despite substantial investment in education and ongoing efforts to improve access, significant gaps in educational quality persist between urban and rural areas, as well as between different socioeconomic groups. Key factors contributing to educational inequality include regional disparities, resource allocation, teacher quality, and accessibility of educational infrastructure ¹⁴ .
		Targeting Efficiency and Spatial Equity in Teacher Hardship Allowances: Evidence from Geographically Disadvantaged School in Indonesia	Ismail et al. (2026) in their study on targeting efficiency and spatial equity in teacher allowances in geographically remote schools in Indonesia provides important insights. This study shows that schools in remote areas located more than 54 km from district capitals face significant challenges in securing qualified teacher allocations. This study recommends the integration of geographic and development indicators in designing more equitable, data-driven teacher incentive policies ¹⁵ .
	Inequality in Educational Infrastructure and Facilities	Analisis Faktor-Faktor Sosioekonomi yang Mempengaruhi Rendahnya Prestasi Pendidikan di Indonesia Menggunakan Kombinasi Metode Data Mining	Yusuf and Razi used a combination of data mining methods to analyze the socioeconomic factors influencing low educational attainment in Indonesia, finding that inequality in educational infrastructure is one of the most influential variables. Using the K-Means Clustering and Decision Tree algorithms, this study grouped Indonesian provinces into three clusters based on socioeconomic similarities, with the most disadvantaged cluster showing significantly lower levels of education ¹⁶ .
		Pemerataan Mutu Pendidikan di Indonesia: Analisis	Hajri (2023) in his literature review on equalizing the quality of education in Indonesia identified that the educational gap between urban and rural areas is caused by unequal teacher distribution, limited

¹⁴ [Johan Manik Sidauruk, Monica Susilowati, and Kamal Karimullah Akbar](https://doi.org/10.15294/indi.v2i1.23035), "Indonesia's Struggle with Education Inequality: Is Reform the Answer?," *Indonesia Discourse*, vol 2, no. 1 (2025): hlm. 23-40, <https://doi.org/10.15294/indi.v2i1.23035>

¹⁵ [Temu Ismail, Trisno Martono, Khresna Bayu Sangka, and Dewi Kusuma Wardani](https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2026-0294), "Targeting Efficiency and Spatial Equity in Teacher Hardship Allowances: Evidence from Geographically Disadvantaged School in Indonesia," *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, vol 16, no. 2 (March 2026): hlm. 272, <https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2026-0294>

¹⁶ [Diana Yusuf and Fahrul Razi](https://doi.org/10.32546/jusin.v6i1.3115), "Analisis Faktor Sosial Ekonomi yang Mempengaruhi Rendahnya Capaian Pendidikan di Indonesia Menggunakan Kombinasi Metode Data Mining," *Jurnal Sistem Informasi (JUSIN)*, vol 6, no. 1 (2025): hlm. 51-62, <https://doi.org/10.32546/jusin.v6i1.3115>

		Kesenjangan dan Kebijakan Afirmasi	infrastructure in 3T (frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged) areas, and suboptimal affirmative action policies. Urban communities have better access to qualified teachers and adequate educational facilities, while rural communities—especially in eastern Indonesia—still face significant resource constraints ¹⁷ .
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Table 2. Factor 1: Unequal distribution of teachers and educational infrastructure.

Factor	Problems	Article title	Findings
Household economic disparity	Poverty and Education Participation	Statistik Pendidikan 2024	Official data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in its 2024 Education Statistics publication shows a significant correlation between household economic status and the type of school chosen. A total of 10.31 percent of public school students come from poor households and 28.36 percent from vulnerable households. In contrast, in private schools, the proportion of students from poor families is only 7.72 percent and from vulnerable families is 21.45 percent. This finding indicates that public schools act as a safety net for low-income families, while private schools are more accessible to the middle to upper economic classes ¹⁸ .
		Kemiskinan Multidimensional dan Partisipasi Pendidikan di Indonesia	Research by Suryadarma and Yumna (2024) reinforces these findings with an analysis of multidimensional poverty in Indonesia. Their study found that children from poor rural families are 2.5 times more likely to drop out of school than children from wealthy urban families. Factors such as the inability to afford indirect costs (transportation, uniforms, books), the need to contribute to the family's finances, and low parental support are the main causes. This study also confirms that access to public schools alone is not enough to guarantee equal quality education, as significant disparities remain between public schools in urban and rural areas in terms of teacher quality, facilities, and learning resources ¹⁹ .

¹⁷ [Muhammad Taufiq Hajri](#), "Pemerataan Mutu Pendidikan di Indonesia: Analisis Kesenjangan dan Kebijakan Afirmasi," *Jurnal Pendidikan Progresif*, vol 13, no. 2 (August 2023): hlm. 456-472.

¹⁸ [Tim Penyusun Badan Pusat Statistik](#), "Statistik Pendidikan 2024", vol 13 (Jakarta: Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024).

¹⁹ [M. Suryadarma and A. Yumna](#), "Kemiskinan Multidimensional dan Partisipasi Pendidikan di Indonesia," *Jurnal Perencanaan Pembangunan*, vol 8, no. 2 (2024).

		Can Education Reduce Inequality? Unraveling Indonesia's Human Development Paradox	Muhlisin, Sakti, and Subroto's (2026) study on whether education can reduce inequality in Indonesia used the Vector Error Correction Model (VECM) method with data from 2018 to 2024. The study's findings indicate that poverty is a significant barrier to educational participation in the long run (coefficient: -38.93), while income inequality is positively related (coefficient: 3.85). Impulse response analysis shows that policy interventions have a positive impact on education in the short term, although the impact tends to decline or even become negative in the long run ^{20 21} .
	Social capital and educational aspirations	Pengaruh Stratifikasi Sosial Terhadap Akses Pendidikan Dasar di Wilayah Perkotaan dan Pedesaan	Hanifa (2025) found that the influence of social stratification on access to basic education in urban and rural areas influenced the social structure of a community's ability to access quality education. Families with higher socioeconomic status have greater capital to invest resources in their children's education ²² .
		Analisis Rendahnya Kualitas Pendidikan di Indonesia Saat Ini: Suatu Kajian Literatur	Dzaky (2025), in his analysis of the literature on the low quality of education in Indonesia, identified that family socioeconomic factors are a significant determinant of children's educational attainment. The economic disparity between urban and rural households creates significant differences in opportunities for accessing quality educational resources ²³ .

Table 3. Factor 2: Household economic disparity.

Factor	Problems	Article title	Findings
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²⁰ [Muhlisin, Norida Canda Sakti, and Waspodo Tjipto Subroto](#), "Can Education Reduce Inequality? Unraveling Indonesia's Human Development Paradox," *CEEOL: Cental and Eastern European Online Library*, no. 2 (2026): hlm. 81-101

²¹ [Muhlisin, Norida Canda Sakti, and Waspodo Tjipto Subroto](#), "Can Education Reduce Inequality? Unraveling Indonesia's Human Development Paradox," *CEEOL*, no. 2 (2026), <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=1407613>

²² [Fitriyani, Hanifah, Siti Umayyah, Nanda Fairuz Fatin, and Arum Fatayan](#), "Pengaruh Stratifikasi Sosial Terhadap Akses Pendidikan Dasar di Wilayah Perkotaan dan Pedesaan," *Jurnal Sains Student Research*, vol 3 no. 4 (2025): hlm. 34-44, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61722/jssr.v3i4.5230>

²³ [Satria, Dzaki, Ihsan Hutama Kusasih, and Gusmaneli](#), "Analisis Rendahnya Kualitas Pendidikan di Indonesia Saat Ini: Suatu Kajian Literatur," *Jurnal Bintang Pendidikan Indonesia*, vol 3 no. 2(2025): hlm. 292-309, DOI: [10.55606/jubpi.v3i2.3838](https://doi.org/10.55606/jubpi.v3i2.3838)

Inequality in Education Policy and Budget Allocation	Decentralization and Fiscal Inequality	Dampak Desentralisasi Pendidikan terhadap Ketimpangan Akses di Indonesia	Affandi (2025) found that the impact of educational decentralization on inequality of access in Indonesia has actually widened the educational gap between rich and poor regions. Regions with high Regional Original Income (PAD) are able to allocate larger education budgets, while regions with low PAD are highly dependent on central transfers, which often fall short of actual needs ²⁴ .
		Analisis Inovasi Kebijakan Daerah dalam Rangka Pengurangan Kesenjangan Wilayah	Fajar (2019), in his analysis of regional policy innovations to reduce regional disparities, emphasized the importance of a contextual approach in designing education policies. Centrally designed policies often fail to accommodate diverse local conditions ²⁵ .
	Affirmative action programs that are not yet optimal	Analisis Kebijakan dalam Pendidikan	Research by Fadilah and colleagues (2025) on education policy analysis in Indonesia identified that although education policies have been formulated with clear directions and objectives and supported by regulations and funding, their implementation has not been fully optimal. Inhibiting factors include regional disparities, limited infrastructure, disparities in teacher competency, and bureaucratic inefficiency. This research confirms that affirmative action policies for educational equity require a more adaptive and locally context-based approach to address the gap between urban and rural areas ²⁶ .
		Transformasi Perencanaan Sekolah: Implementasi Siklus IRB Berbasis Rapor Pendidikan	Imami and colleagues' (2025) research on data-driven school planning transformation found that education policy implementation in Indonesia still faces a gap between the availability of evaluation data and the implementation of quality improvement programs. This study identified that data-driven planning has transformative potential in shifting the school planning paradigm from an intuitive approach to one based on

²⁴ [Y. Affandi](#), "Dampak Desentralisasi Pendidikan terhadap Ketimpangan Akses di Indonesia," *Jurnal Inovasi Penelitian Ilmu Pendidikan Indonesia*, vol 2 no. 3 (2025): hlm. 153-166, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31004/mnhraz85>

²⁵ [Sumirat, Fajar](#), "Analisis Inovasi Kebijakan Daerah dalam Rangka Pengurangan Kesenjangan Wilayah," *Kementerian Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional/Bappenas*, vol 2 no. 2 (2019): hlm. 270-293, <https://doi.org/10.47266/bwp.v2i2.45>

²⁶ [Fadilah, Fera Zihan, Softa Rizanah, Fitri Yati Naga, Galih Prayogi, Siti Nur Azizah, and M. Nasor](#). "Analisis Kebijakan dalam Pendidikan." *UNISAN JURNAL*, vol 4, no. 8 (August 2025): hlm. 108-119, <https://journal.an-unur.ac.id/index.php/unisanjournal/article/view/4362>

			empirical evidence. However, its successful implementation depends heavily on transformational leadership, organizational culture, and the digital competency of policymakers at the regional level ²⁷ .
	Digitalization of Education and New Inequalities	The Reproduction of Educational Inequality in Indonesia: An Examination of Hindering Factors and Digital Access in Rural and Urban School Settings	Dongoran and Aditia's (2026) research revealed that the digital access gap is a new challenge to educational equality. Their findings indicate that the availability of digital resources is concentrated in urban schools, while schools in rural areas still face limited access to learning technology ²⁸ .
		A Bridging the Digital Divide in Education: Disparities in Google Classroom Utilization and Technical Challenges among Urban and Rural Teachers	Astari and Yulianto's (2025) study on the digital divide in the use of educational technology found that teachers in rural areas face greater technical barriers and lower levels of utilization of digital learning platforms (such as Google Classroom) than teachers in urban areas. This survey of 395 teachers showed that unequal access to technological infrastructure and internet connectivity are the main factors differentiating the quality of digital learning implementation between urban and rural areas. This study confirms that strategies for educational equity in the digital era require an approach that is adaptive to regional contexts, including tailored digital literacy training and proportional distribution of devices ²⁹ .

Table 4. Factor 3: Inequality in Education Policy and Budget Allocation.

1.2 Synergy and Reproduction of Inequality

The three structural factors outlined above, unequal distribution of teachers and infrastructure, disparities in household income, and disparities in policies and budgets, do not stand alone as separate causes. A synthesis of 17 key articles reveals that these three factors are systemically interconnected, forming a powerful dynamic.

²⁷ [Imami, Panggih Cahyo, Rina Taurisia, Saguh Miliarto, and Nurkolis](#). "Transformasi Perencanaan Sekolah: Implementasi Siklus IRB Berbasis Rapor Pendidikan." *Didaktika: Jurnal Kependidikan*, vol 14, no. 4 (November 2025): hlm. 7351-7366, <https://doi.org/10.58230/27454312.2378>

²⁸ [Faisal Rahman Dongoran and Reza Aditia](#), "The Reproduction of Educational Inequality in Indonesia: An Examination of Hindering Factors and Digital Access in Rural and Urban School Settings," *International Journal of Indonesian Education and Teaching*, vol 10, no. 1 (January 2026): hlm. 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.24071/ijiet.v10i1.12907>

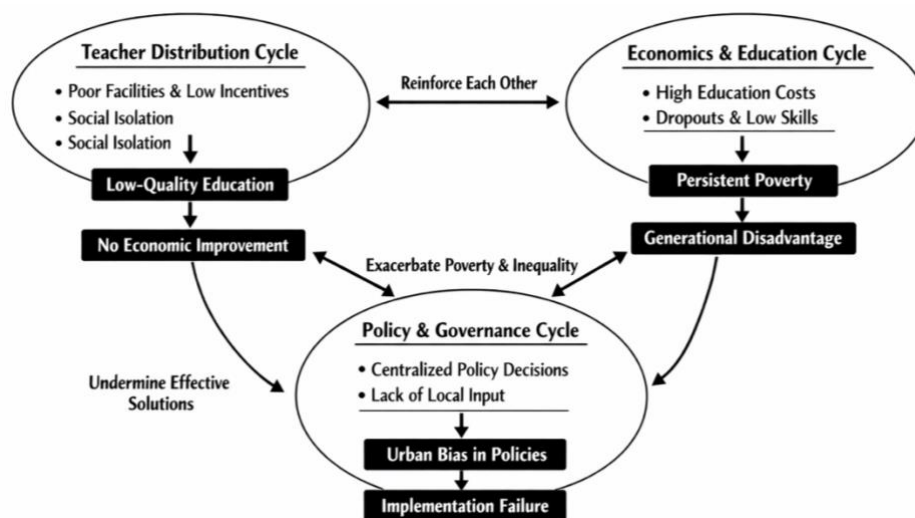
²⁹ [Astari and Dwi Yulianto](#), "Bridging the Digital Divide in Education: Disparities in Google Classroom Utilization and Technical Challenges among Urban and Rural Teachers," *Journal of Education Technology* 9, no. 2 (2025): hlm. 1-12, <https://doi.org/10.23887/jet.v9i2.92897>

For example, unequal distribution of teachers in rural areas leads to low-quality learning, which in turn reinforces economic disparities because graduates are less competitive and find it difficult to find decent jobs. The low quality of education in rural areas also renders affirmative action policies such as teacher placement ineffective, as teachers are reluctant to work in areas with poor facilities, limited access, and low parental support. Conversely, urban-biased policies, such as higher allocations of BOS and DAK funds per student in cities, exacerbate infrastructure inequality, perpetuating the cycle of inequality.

This finding has important implications: partial policy interventions, only addressing one factor without addressing the others, are guaranteed to be unsuccessful. To date, various affirmative action programs such as teacher placement, the School Operational Assistance (BOS), and school digitalization have tended to operate independently, without adequate coordination between ministries and without an integrated approach. As a result, despite the continued increase in education budgets and the launch of various programs, the gap between urban and rural areas has not narrowed. Another important point is that efforts to achieve educational equality must be holistic, simultaneous, and contextual, they cannot be implemented sectorally or top-down.

Why do these three factors reinforce each other and create persistent inequality? Based on a literature synthesis, three interrelated causal mechanisms have been identified. First, the dynamic cycle of teacher distribution begins when qualified teachers are reluctant to work in villages due to poor facilities, low incentives, and social isolation. As a result, rural schools lack teachers and the quality of learning suffers, making village graduates uncompetitive in the job market. This leads to no improvement in the village economy, which in turn leads to a lack of facilities and incentives, thus preventing teachers from returning. This cycle continues without simultaneous interventions on incentives, infrastructure, and career development. Second, the dynamic cycle of economics and education exacerbates the situation. Poor rural families cannot afford the indirect costs of education, such as transportation, uniforms, books, and tutoring. Children drop out of school or are forced to attend low-quality schools, leaving graduates with inadequate skills. They remain poor or are forced to work in the informal sector, and their children are also deprived of a good education. Thus, poverty is reproduced across generations. Third, the dynamic cycle of policy plays a role. Policies are designed centrally in Jakarta without involving local communities and without data on the actual needs of each school. Implementation also failed due to inconsistencies with the geographic and sociocultural context. Evaluations were based solely on gross enrollment rates (APK, APM), rather than on the quality of learning and equality of learning outcomes. As a result, subsequent policies remained urban-biased and repeated the same mistakes, while policy failures were not evaluated honestly and transparently. These three vicious cycles operate

simultaneously and interlock, making the educational gap between urban and rural areas in Indonesia difficult to overcome.



Picture 2. Interlocking Dynamics Cycle of Rural Education Inequality.

Within the framework of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the above findings can be understood as a mechanism of social reproduction through educational institutions. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that schools do not function as neutral tools for social mobility; rather, they tend to reinforce and perpetuate existing inequalities in society. This study finds empirical evidence supporting Bourdieu's claims in the Indonesian context, while also offering constructive critique.

Specifically, three of Bourdieu's concepts are relevant to explaining these findings:

1. Cultural capital: Children from middle-class urban families inherit reading habits, internet access, private tutoring, and highly educated parents. Urban schools, with qualified teachers, laboratories, libraries, and digital facilities, tend to reward this cultural capital, making urban children even more advantaged. In contrast, rural children who do not inherit such cultural capital (because their parents are not accustomed to reading, lack access to books, and have no tutoring) are considered "less prepared" by the school system, even though this is not due to innate factors. This study shows that schools make no effort to accommodate differences in cultural capital; instead, they impose uniform standards.
2. Reproduction through credentials: Urban school graduates obtain better diplomas, exam scores, and portfolios, which serve as tickets to prestigious universities and high-paying jobs. Rural graduates with less competitive credentials, even though they may have equal potential, become trapped in

second-tier higher education or informal employment. Thus, education perpetuates an unequal class structure rather than transforming it.

3. **Habitus:** Bourdieu uses the term habitus to refer to the dispositions, ways of thinking, tastes, and habits ingrained in a person from childhood through family socialization. Rural and urban children develop different habitus. When rural children enter school with a habitus that does not align with formal school demands (e.g., less familiarity with extended writing, critical discussion, or public speaking), they tend to be labeled as "less intelligent" or "untalented." Schools make no effort to understand or bridge these differences in habitus; instead, they penalize them with low grades.

This study confirms that education in Indonesia has not yet become a tool for social mobility; instead, it functions as a tool for reproducing intergenerational inequality. However, unlike Bourdieu, who tended to be pessimistic and deterministic, as if social reproduction were inevitable, this study finds that simultaneous intervention on all three structural factors (teacher distribution, household economics, and policy or budget allocation) has the potential to break the vicious cycle. In other words, inequality is not destiny but the result of policies that can be changed. This finding offers a glimmer of hope that with a holistic and equitable approach, education can return to its true function: as a means of social mobility, not the reproduction of inequality

1.3 Policy Implications

Based on an analysis of three structural factors and their synergistic mechanisms, the educational disparity between urban and rural areas in Indonesia will not be resolved if policy interventions are partial. A holistic approach is needed that simultaneously addresses all three factors. The following policy implications are proposed:

Policy implications	Description	Target
Teacher distribution reform based on real needs	The teacher placement policy uses school needs data (not provincial quotas), accompanied by progressive incentives based on the level of geographical difficulty and village development index.	Kemendikbudristek, BKN
Simultaneous improvement of basic infrastructure	The education budget for underdeveloped areas is directed not only towards school construction, but also towards access to electricity, internet and transportation.	Kementerian PUPR, Kominfo, Kemendikbudristek
Reformulation of BOS and DAK fund allocations	Fund allocation has shifted from a per-student or per-area approach to a needs-based approach with greater weighting for indicators of regional underdevelopment.	Kementerian Keuangan, Kemendikbudristek

Integration of education policy with poverty alleviation	Educational assistance programs (PIP, KIP Kuliah) are integrated with family-based poverty alleviation programs (PKH, BPNT).	Kemendikbudristek, Kementerian Sosial
Contextual curriculum development and adaptive digitalization	National standards allow for a curriculum based on local wisdom. Digitization, for example, in areas without internet access, should utilize offline approaches and adaptive blended learning, along with digital literacy training for teachers in rural areas.	Kemendikbudristek, Kominfo

Table 5. Policy Implications

CONCLUSION

This study finds that educational inequality between urban and rural areas in Indonesia is caused by three interrelated structural factors: unequal distribution of teachers and infrastructure, household economic disparities, and inequality in policy and budget allocation that tends to be urban-biased. These three factors do not stand alone but form a mutually reinforcing vicious cycle. Within Bourdieu's framework, this mechanism functions as social reproduction: children from affluent urban families inherit cultural and economic capital that is then strengthened by quality schools, while rural children with limited capital are trapped in low-quality schools, causing inequality to reproduce across generations. To break this vicious cycle, a holistic approach is required that simultaneously reforms teacher distribution based on real needs (accompanied by progressive incentives based on the village development index), improves basic infrastructure (electricity, internet, transportation) in disadvantaged areas, reformulates the allocation of School Operational Assistance (BOS) and Special Allocation Funds (DAK) using a needs-based approach, integrates education policies with poverty alleviation programs, and develops contextual curricula and adaptive digitalization. This study has limitations as it only analyzes indexed literature and does not conduct field research. Further research is recommended to conduct cross-provincial comparative studies or ethnographic studies in disadvantaged areas to enrich understanding of the experiences of educational actors at the local level.

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