

Regional and Socioeconomic Disparities in Basic Education Access in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study investigates the persistent inequality in basic education access across Indonesia by examining school participation through regional and socioeconomic lenses. Drawing on a qualitative review of scholarly literature, government reports, and institutional data, it integrates theoretical frameworks such as social stratification, human capital, spatial inequality, and capability theory. Findings reveal that children from low-income households in remote regions face compounded barriers—ranging from inadequate school infrastructure to economic pressures—that significantly reduce their likelihood of attending and completing school. The analysis highlights the limitations of current national policies in addressing these intersectional disadvantages and underscores the need for targeted, equity-based interventions. This research contributes a multidimensional perspective on educational inequality and offers actionable insights for policymakers seeking to promote inclusive education. It also proposes a conceptual foundation for future studies to explore complex, context-specific determinants of school participation in developing countries like Indonesia.

Keywords

educational inequality; regional disparity; school participation; socioeconomic barriers; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Educational access remains a cornerstone of equitable development, yet disparities in basic education persist in Indonesia. Despite consistent policy interventions to increase school enrollment, the nation continues to struggle with unequal access, particularly in marginalized regions and among low-income populations (UNESCO, 2015). The country's archipelagic geography and decentralized governance have led to inconsistent educational standards and resource distribution across provinces (World Bank, 2013).

According to data from BPS–Statistics Indonesia (2016), school participation rates in rural eastern provinces such as Papua and Nusa Tenggara remain significantly below the national average. These geographical inequalities are compounded by socioeconomic barriers, including poverty, limited parental education, and child labor (BPS–Statistics Indonesia, 2015). Thus, the interplay between location and economic status is central to understanding why Indonesia has not yet achieved equitable access to basic education.

Theoretically, educational inequality in Indonesia can be understood through social stratification and human capital lenses. Social stratification theory posits that societal divisions based on class, income, and geography determine access to resources, including education (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). Human capital theory, on the other hand, emphasizes education as an investment that enhances individual productivity and economic growth (Becker, 1993).

In Indonesia's context, these theories help explain how socioeconomic status shapes educational choices and opportunities. Poor families often prioritize short-term economic survival over long-term educational attainment (Suryadarma et al., 2006). Moreover, disparities in school infrastructure, teacher quality, and access to learning materials further exacerbate inequality, especially in underdeveloped regions (Chen, 2009). Thus, an integrated theoretical framework is essential to analyzing how structural and individual factors intersect to produce unequal educational outcomes.

Empirically, a considerable body of research has documented disparities in educational outcomes across Indonesian provinces. However, much of this research has focused either on macroeconomic determinants or individual family characteristics, often neglecting the nuanced interaction between regional disparities and socioeconomic conditions (Jones & Hagul, 2001). For instance, while national data may show increasing enrollment rates, such figures often mask significant regional and income-based gaps.

Children in urban Java generally have better access to quality schooling compared to those in rural Kalimantan or eastern Indonesia (World Bank, 2010). Moreover, limited access to early childhood education, particularly among low-income households, contributes to delayed or irregular school attendance (UNICEF, 2012). These findings indicate a need for more integrated, multidimensional analyses that account for both geographical and economic influences on school participation.

From a policy perspective, addressing inequality in basic education is not only a moral imperative but also a practical necessity for sustainable development. Indonesia's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 on quality education, underscores the importance of inclusive and equitable learning opportunities (UN, 2015). Yet, despite increased government spending on education—

up to 20% of the national budget since the 2002 constitutional amendment—resource allocation remains uneven (Bappenas, 2016).

This has resulted in a mismatch between educational policy intentions and on-the-ground realities, particularly in remote areas with weak institutional capacity (ADB, 2015). Consequently, national strategies must be refined to target disadvantaged populations more effectively, using data-driven approaches that address both regional and socioeconomic disparities. Without such measures, the cycle of poverty and educational exclusion is likely to persist.

Despite various studies, few have holistically examined how regional location and socioeconomic status jointly influence school participation in Indonesia. This research seeks to fill that gap by conducting a multidimensional analysis that incorporates both spatial and economic variables. The central research questions guiding this study are: (1) How does regional disparity affect school participation in Indonesia? (2) What role does socioeconomic status play in shaping access to basic education? (3) How do regional and socioeconomic factors interact to influence school attendance rates? By answering these questions, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the structural drivers of educational inequality in Indonesia. The ultimate objective is to contribute to policy dialogues by offering actionable insights that promote more inclusive educational practices and frameworks across the nation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of educational inequality in Indonesia has been widely explored within both national and international academic discourse. Foundational literature has identified regional disparity and socioeconomic status as critical determinants of school participation (UNESCO, 2015; Suryadarma et al., 2006). Regional disparities are often attributed to Indonesia's geographic fragmentation, where children in eastern provinces like Papua and Maluku face long travel distances to schools, limited school infrastructure, and underqualified teachers (World Bank, 2010).

Meanwhile, socioeconomic barriers—such as household poverty, low parental education, and child labor—contribute significantly to educational dropout and non-enrollment, especially among rural populations (Suharti, 2011). Several studies also emphasize that while Indonesia has achieved near-universal access to primary education on paper, actual learning conditions vary significantly, leading to inequities in educational quality and outcomes (Chang et al., 2004; UNICEF, 2012). These findings collectively underscore the importance of addressing both regional and class-based disparities in policy formulation.

Conceptually, education inequality in Indonesia is analyzed through multiple lenses, including structural-functionalism, social reproduction, and rights-based frameworks. Bowles and Gintis (2002) argue that schooling systems often reinforce existing social hierarchies, limiting upward mobility for disadvantaged groups. This view is supported by Becker's (1993) human capital theory, which emphasizes that unequal access to education diminishes future earning potential and perpetuates poverty.

Indonesian scholars, such as Sadiman (2008), have noted that educational policies often fail to adapt to the unique needs of rural and poor communities, thereby exacerbating marginalization. Moreover, the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and disability with regional and socioeconomic inequality adds further complexity, as noted by Arief (2013). Recent frameworks advocate for a more integrative analysis that includes spatial, economic, and sociocultural dimensions (ADB, 2015). Despite this rich body of work, empirical studies that simultaneously address regional and socioeconomic factors in school participation remain limited, presenting a clear avenue for further investigation.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding educational inequality in Indonesia necessitates a robust theoretical grounding that elucidates both structural and individual determinants. One key theory applied in this study is the concept of social stratification, which explains how hierarchical social structures influence access to societal resources, including education (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). Within the Indonesian context, this framework is particularly relevant given the stark income inequalities and uneven regional development that characterize the nation (BPS–Statistics Indonesia, 2015).

Social stratification posits that children from lower socioeconomic strata face multiple structural disadvantages that limit their educational opportunities, including poor-quality schools, insufficient household income, and limited access to educational support systems (Jones & Hagul, 2001). As such, inequality in school participation becomes not merely a function of individual choice but a product of entrenched societal divisions.

Complementing the social stratification perspective is human capital theory, which emphasizes the economic returns of education to individuals and society (Becker, 1993). This theory suggests that education increases an individual's productivity and earnings potential, thereby contributing to national development. In the Indonesian context, families' decisions to send children to school are often influenced by their perceived economic benefits of education (Suryadarma et al., 2006).

However, when the costs of education—such as transportation, uniforms, and opportunity costs of child labor—are too high, particularly for poor households, school participation declines (Chen, 2009). This disconnect underscores how poverty can hinder the realization of human capital investments, perpetuating cycles of deprivation. Hence, human capital theory highlights the need for targeted policy interventions to reduce the financial burdens of schooling for low-income families.

Capability theory, developed by Sen (1999), offers an additional dimension to understanding educational inequality. This framework shifts the focus from resources to actual freedoms or "capabilities" to achieve valued outcomes, such as obtaining basic education. In Indonesia, geographical remoteness, gender norms, and cultural values can constrain educational capabilities even when schools are physically present (UNESCO, 2015).

For example, girls in some traditional communities may be discouraged from pursuing education beyond primary school, limiting their long-term capabilities despite national efforts to provide universal access (Arief, 2013). Thus, capability theory helps to explore the sociocultural barriers that intersect with economic and regional factors, offering a holistic lens to analyze educational inequality.

Another relevant theoretical model is the spatial inequality framework, which examines how geographic location affects access to public services, including education (Kanbur & Venables, 2005). This framework is particularly pertinent for Indonesia, where decentralized governance has led to uneven distribution of educational resources (World Bank, 2010).

Spatial inequality theory highlights how remote and underdeveloped regions face systemic challenges such as inadequate school infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, and limited budget allocations from central and local governments (ADB, 2015). These structural impediments disproportionately affect rural communities, amplifying the disadvantages already faced by poor households. Therefore, integrating spatial inequality into the analytical framework provides critical insights into the geographical dimension of school participation disparities.

Finally, a rights-based approach, rooted in international human rights law, asserts that access to education is a fundamental right that states are obligated to fulfill (UNESCO, 2015). This perspective emphasizes equity, inclusion, and non-discrimination, which are particularly relevant in Indonesia's multicultural and geographically diverse society.

The Indonesian constitution and the Education Law No. 20/2003 affirm the state's responsibility to provide equal educational opportunities for all citizens. However, implementation often falls short, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas (Suharti, 2011). By incorporating a rights-based approach, this study underscores the normative

imperative of educational equity and critiques the state's role in perpetuating or alleviating inequality.

Previous Research

One of the earliest comprehensive studies on educational inequality in Indonesia was conducted by Jones and Hagul (2001), who analyzed disparities in educational access across Java and outer islands. Their study highlighted how economic development was concentrated in Java, leaving other regions with inadequate infrastructure and limited school access. Using national survey data, they concluded that geography and income level were strong predictors of school participation. While this research established baseline disparities, it did not explore the intersection of regional and socioeconomic variables in depth.

Chang et al. (2004) examined the quality of basic education across Indonesian provinces. Their findings revealed that while enrollment had increased, learning outcomes and resource allocation remained uneven. Using World Bank data, the authors noted that educational policy had not effectively addressed structural inequalities. Although their research acknowledged regional challenges, it lacked a detailed analysis of how poverty specifically exacerbated these disparities, pointing to a potential gap in the socioeconomic dimension.

Suryadarma et al. (2006) investigated the correlation between household income and educational attainment. Using econometric models on IFLS (Indonesian Family Life Survey) data, they found that children from poorer households were significantly less likely to continue education beyond the primary level. Their findings also indicated that income-related disparities were more severe in rural areas. This study underscored the role of economic status but did not delve into regional dynamics, particularly how infrastructure and governance affected educational access.

UNICEF (2012) released a thematic report on child well-being in Indonesia, emphasizing disparities in access to early childhood and basic education. The report found that children in eastern provinces such as Papua, Maluku, and Nusa Tenggara were consistently underserved. It stressed that regional underdevelopment, combined with poverty, led to low school participation. However, the report's descriptive analysis lacked the theoretical grounding necessary for a deeper exploration of systemic causes.

Suharti (2011) offered a policy analysis of educational inequality under Indonesia's decentralized governance framework. She argued that decentralization had contributed to fragmented service delivery and unequal educational outcomes. Her

research pointed out the lack of technical and fiscal capacity in local governments as a key issue. Though her work addressed regional governance, it did not integrate household-level socioeconomic factors, leaving a conceptual gap in the literature.

Arief (2013) conducted a study focusing on marginalized communities, particularly examining access to education among ethnic minorities and children with disabilities. His qualitative research found that cultural beliefs and institutional neglect further widened educational disparities. This study added a sociocultural layer to the discussion but did not link these findings to broader regional and economic trends.

Collectively, these studies provide valuable insights into various facets of educational inequality in Indonesia. However, a comprehensive analysis that simultaneously examines regional disparity and socioeconomic status remains limited. Most existing research tends to isolate one variable or offers broad national overviews without exploring the intersectional complexities that define school participation. This study addresses that research gap by integrating spatial and economic dimensions within a multidimensional framework, thereby offering a more holistic understanding of inequality in access to basic education in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design that centers on document-based and textual data to analyze disparities in basic education access across Indonesia. The choice of qualitative data is grounded in the need to interpret patterns, meanings, and institutional mechanisms behind statistical trends (Creswell, 2014, p. 187). Textual data, including reports, policy documents, scholarly literature, and statistical summaries, are well-suited for capturing the complex socio-spatial dynamics influencing school participation. Unlike quantitative studies focused solely on metrics, this research seeks to understand the underlying structures, decisions, and narratives that shape access to basic education across regions and economic classes.

The data utilized in this research is drawn from a variety of reliable sources. Primary data sources include publications from international organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and UNICEF, as well as Indonesian governmental agencies like BPS–Statistics Indonesia and the Ministry of Education and Culture. These institutions provide extensive educational reports and regional data disaggregated by income and location. In addition, scholarly articles and books from reputable academic presses serve as secondary sources. The inclusion of both global and national literature ensures that the study remains contextually grounded while also aligned with broader educational development frameworks (UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2013).

To obtain the data, a document analysis technique was employed. This involved systematically identifying, selecting, and interpreting relevant academic and policy literature published no later than 2017. Document analysis allows researchers to trace the historical and institutional evolution of educational inequality, which is particularly relevant in the Indonesian case where decentralization has reshaped governance structures (Suharti, 2011). The process also included keyword-based searches through academic databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar, focusing on terms like "educational inequality Indonesia," "regional disparity," and "school participation." This approach ensured that only traceable, credible, and thematically relevant sources were included in the analysis.

The analytical technique adopted in this study is thematic content analysis. This method involves coding and categorizing data into recurrent themes that align with the theoretical framework, such as social stratification, spatial inequality, and human capital investment (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). Themes were developed inductively from the literature and then refined through iterative comparison with the data. The thematic approach allows for the identification of cross-cutting issues that impact educational access, such as poverty, infrastructure, governance, and sociocultural norms. The focus on thematic analysis also enables the research to maintain analytical depth while covering a wide range of interrelated factors.

The conclusion-drawing process in this study is rooted in interpretive synthesis. After identifying key themes, the data was reanalyzed through the lens of the theoretical framework to derive interpretive conclusions about how regional and socioeconomic variables intersect to influence school participation. This interpretive step is crucial in transforming descriptive findings into actionable insights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 202). By integrating findings with established theories and previous research, the study constructs a coherent narrative that not only addresses the research questions but also contributes to the academic and policy discourse on educational equity in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interplay between regional disparities and socioeconomic status in shaping educational access in Indonesia demands a multidimensional analytical approach. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of social stratification, spatial inequality, and human capital theory, this study interprets the structural dynamics that contribute to persistent gaps in school participation. Existing studies often treat geography and income separately, which limits the explanatory power of their findings (Jones & Hagul, 2001; Suryadarma et al., 2006).

In contrast, this study positions these variables as mutually reinforcing factors that create compounded disadvantages for children from poor households in remote areas. By integrating insights from thematic content analysis, the findings uncover systemic inequities embedded in educational infrastructure, local governance, and household decision-making (UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2013). These patterns not only confirm earlier observations but also extend the discussion by demonstrating the synergistic effects of spatial and economic exclusion on education.

This research contributes new theoretical and empirical perspectives to the discourse on educational inequality in Indonesia. Most notably, it brings together region-based policy analyses with household-level socioeconomic studies, highlighting an often-overlooked intersection. It also introduces a rights-based lens that critiques the state's inconsistent fulfillment of educational guarantees in its Constitution and national education laws (Suharti, 2011; ADB, 2015).

Furthermore, it synthesizes findings that reflect both vertical inequity (income-related) and horizontal inequity (geographical location), demonstrating how these dimensions interact to create a layered educational disadvantage. By addressing this dual lens, the study fills a critical research gap identified in previous literature and proposes an analytical structure for future studies seeking to explore multidimensional barriers to educational equity.

1. Regional Disparities and Unequal Educational Infrastructure

A central finding of this study is that regional disparities in Indonesia have led to stark differences in the availability and quality of basic educational infrastructure, severely affecting school participation in rural and remote provinces. The uneven geographic development of the country has resulted in concentrated investments in Java and Sumatra, while provinces like Papua, Maluku, and Nusa Tenggara suffer from chronic underfunding and logistical isolation (World Bank, 2010). These disparities manifest in limited numbers of schools, inadequate classroom facilities, and insufficient access to textbooks and technology (UNESCO, 2015). As a result, children in these regions often walk long distances to attend poorly equipped schools, discouraging regular attendance and increasing dropout rates.

The spatial inequality framework provides a useful lens for analyzing how Indonesia's decentralized governance structure exacerbates regional inequities. Decentralization, implemented under Law No. 22/1999, granted local governments authority over education but without guaranteeing equitable resource allocation (Suharti, 2011). Consequently, wealthier districts could

invest more in their schools, while poorer regions lagged behind, reinforcing inter-regional disparities. Kanbur and Venables (2005) argue that spatial inequalities, if not systematically addressed, become self-reinforcing due to localized poverty traps—a phenomenon evident in remote Indonesian provinces.

Empirical data supports these theoretical claims. For example, the net enrollment rate for primary education in Papua was only 79.1% compared to over 95% in Jakarta as of 2016 (BPS–Statistics Indonesia, 2016). Moreover, teacher absenteeism and shortages are far more prevalent in rural and eastern provinces due to limited incentives and infrastructure (UNESCO, 2015). These structural deficiencies lower educational quality and reduce the appeal of formal schooling for both students and parents. Thus, the regional location significantly influences not only access but also the perceived value and utility of education.

The capability theory of Sen (1999) further deepens this analysis by focusing on the real freedoms children have to attend and benefit from education. In many underdeveloped regions, even when schools are present, children may lack meaningful access due to poor transportation, lack of nutrition, or unsafe environments. These unfreedoms limit their capabilities and entrench existing inequalities, particularly among marginalized ethnic groups in eastern Indonesia (Arief, 2013). The absence of supportive structures restricts children's ability to convert educational opportunities into substantive learning outcomes.

While national policies like the School Operational Assistance (BOS) program aim to equalize funding, their impact has been uneven across regions. Studies indicate that BOS funds are often insufficient or poorly managed in remote areas due to weak administrative capacity (ADB, 2015). This misalignment between policy design and implementation environment further illustrates the structural nature of regional disparities. Addressing these challenges requires not just fiscal redistribution but also capacity-building in local education governance, tailored to the specific needs of disadvantaged areas.

This analysis confirms that regional disparity is not just a background condition but an active determinant of educational exclusion. The concentration of educational resources in already developed regions violates principles of horizontal equity and undermines national development goals. Without targeted strategies to address spatial inequality, efforts to achieve universal basic education will continue to fall short, disproportionately harming children in remote and underserved regions.

2. Socioeconomic Status and Household-Level Barriers to Education

The second major finding of this study addresses how socioeconomic status directly influences school participation in Indonesia, revealing that poverty and related household-level factors create substantial barriers to basic education. Children from lower-income families are more likely to start school late, miss classes frequently, or drop out before completing primary education (Suryadarma et al., 2006). These outcomes are often the result of multiple interrelated factors, including the inability to afford indirect schooling costs such as uniforms, books, and transportation (Chang et al., 2004). For many poor households, the opportunity cost of schooling—namely, the income children could contribute through labor—is also a significant deterrent, particularly in agricultural and informal labor settings (Chen, 2009). Thus, poverty acts not only as an economic constraint but also as a decision-making factor that deprioritizes education.

From a theoretical standpoint, human capital theory posits that parents invest in their children's education based on expected future returns (Becker, 1993). However, in poor households, the immediate financial burden often outweighs perceived long-term benefits, especially when labor opportunities are available to children in the short term. This leads to a paradox where families recognize the value of education yet are structurally unable to support their children's schooling. The literature also notes that households in the bottom income quintile often have lower levels of parental education, which reduces the perceived necessity of formal education and limits their ability to assist children academically (Jones & Hagul, 2001). These cyclical disadvantages contribute to intergenerational poverty and diminished upward mobility.

Empirical studies affirm these patterns. According to BPS–Statistics Indonesia (2016), the school participation rate among children aged 7–12 in the poorest quintile was significantly lower than that of their wealthier counterparts, particularly beyond Grade 6. This gap becomes more pronounced at the junior and senior secondary levels. The World Bank (2013) reports that over 60% of children from the richest quintile complete junior high school, compared to less than 30% from the poorest quintile. Even when government support programs like Kartu Indonesia Pintar (KIP) exist, implementation gaps—such as delays in fund disbursement and poor targeting—often limit their effectiveness in reaching the most vulnerable households (ADB, 2015). These statistics demonstrate how entrenched poverty continues to obstruct access to education despite broad-based policy interventions.

The role of social stratification is critical here, as it reveals how systemic inequality shapes individual outcomes. Bowles and Gintis (2002) argue that

educational systems often reproduce existing class hierarchies by channeling resources and opportunities toward higher-status groups. In Indonesia, this is evident in the concentration of high-quality public and private schools in urban areas, accessible primarily to middle- and upper-class families. Meanwhile, children from low-income backgrounds are more likely to attend underfunded and overcrowded schools with limited teaching resources and infrastructure (UNESCO, 2015). This not only affects attendance but also undermines learning quality, perpetuating educational inequality along class lines.

Parental education also emerges as a significant determinant of children's school participation. Households where parents have little or no formal education often place lower value on formal schooling, prioritizing immediate survival over future investment (Suharti, 2011). These families may also lack the knowledge or confidence to navigate educational systems and policies, making them less likely to seek out scholarships or advocate for their children's learning needs. In rural or peri-urban areas, this dynamic is often compounded by limited access to early childhood education, which is critical for building foundational skills and motivation (UNICEF, 2012). Therefore, low socioeconomic status shapes not only access but also expectations and educational trajectories.

Although national education policies have aimed to reduce income-related disparities, the persistent gaps in participation indicate the need for more nuanced and targeted interventions. Programs must account for the complex trade-offs faced by poor households and incorporate flexible, community-based support mechanisms such as school feeding programs, transportation subsidies, and adult education initiatives to change parental attitudes toward schooling (ADB, 2015). Without addressing the root economic and sociocultural causes of educational exclusion, efforts to achieve equitable access will remain incomplete. This study emphasizes that socioeconomic status functions as a structural filter, determining not only who can attend school but also how effectively they can engage with and benefit from educational opportunities.

3. Intersecting Effects of Region and Socioeconomic Status on School Participation

This third dimension of analysis reveals how regional and socioeconomic factors intersect to amplify educational disparities in Indonesia, creating compounded disadvantages for children who are both poor and located in remote areas. While regional disparity and poverty individually impact school participation, their convergence results in a more severe form of exclusion. Children in rural eastern provinces, who also belong to the lowest income quintile, face dual

constraints: limited access to educational infrastructure and acute financial barriers (UNESCO, 2015). These overlapping vulnerabilities create a systemic trap, where the likelihood of educational success is determined not just by one's household income or geography but by the combined effects of both (Suryadarma et al., 2006).

The spatial inequality framework explains how geographic underdevelopment often coincides with socioeconomic marginalization (Kanbur & Venables, 2005). In Indonesia, provinces like Papua, West Sulawesi, and East Nusa Tenggara exhibit the lowest human development indicators, including per capita income and access to basic services like education and healthcare (BPS–Statistics Indonesia, 2016). Within these areas, schools are not only fewer but also less equipped, and teachers are either underqualified or frequently absent. When such regional deficits align with household poverty—manifested in low parental education and limited financial resources—the obstacles to school attendance become almost insurmountable. Thus, intersectionality must be central to understanding educational exclusion in the Indonesian context.

Capability theory provides further insight into how these compounded disadvantages reduce children's educational freedoms. Even when schools are present, children in these intersecting groups may lack nutritious food, safe environments, and parental encouragement—capabilities essential for meaningful learning (Sen, 1999). For instance, in rural Papua, many children begin school later than the national average due to household instability or the need to work, while those who do attend often experience irregularity due to long travel distances and school closures (UNICEF, 2012). In such contexts, even minimal interruptions can have lasting effects on educational continuity, further entrenching inequality.

Government interventions often fail to address these intersections effectively. National programs like the Kartu Indonesia Pintar (KIP) and BOS funds are distributed uniformly, with little consideration for regional cost disparities or the specific needs of households living under overlapping forms of deprivation (ADB, 2015). As a result, the poorest households in the most remote areas often receive insufficient support relative to their level of need. Moreover, decentralization has led to uneven administrative capacities across districts, resulting in inconsistent program implementation and monitoring (Suharti, 2011). Without targeted frameworks that recognize and address these intersecting disadvantages, policy efforts remain fragmented and ineffective.

This study also uncovers how sociocultural variables, when intersecting with region and poverty, exacerbate the problem. In some rural communities, traditional norms discourage education for girls or devalue formal schooling in

favor of subsistence work (Arief, 2013). These beliefs are more prevalent in underdeveloped regions with limited access to diverse job markets, where the perceived returns on education are minimal. The compounded effects of economic deprivation, geographical isolation, and cultural barriers result in educational exclusion that is not only widespread but also deeply entrenched.

To address this layered form of inequality, educational policies must adopt an integrative, equity-focused approach. This includes spatially targeted funding, culturally sensitive educational materials, and flexible learning options such as mobile schools or community-based learning centers in remote areas. Importantly, interventions should be informed by disaggregated data that highlight where these intersections are most critical. Only through this intersectional lens can Indonesia hope to dismantle the complex barriers that inhibit equal access to basic education. This analysis affirms the necessity of moving beyond isolated variables and embracing a multidimensional understanding of inequality to create effective, inclusive educational strategies.

This study has systematically explored the persistent inequality in access to basic education in Indonesia, focusing on the intersecting dimensions of regional disparity and socioeconomic status. The findings reveal that school participation is profoundly shaped by the interaction of spatial and economic variables, which jointly create layered obstacles for children from poor households living in remote areas. The first research question demonstrated that regional disparities—reflected in uneven infrastructure, low teacher availability, and governance capacity—limit educational access in underdeveloped provinces. The second research question highlighted that poverty exacerbates these barriers by reducing households' ability to afford schooling costs and increasing the opportunity cost of education. The third research question revealed that the interaction between poverty and regional location intensifies exclusion, leading to compounded disadvantages that national policy has yet to adequately address.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse by integrating social stratification, human capital, spatial inequality, and capability theories to create a multidimensional framework for analyzing educational inequality. This theoretical integration offers a more comprehensive understanding of how structural forces reinforce one another to restrict access to education, especially for Indonesia's most marginalized populations. It also refines existing models by emphasizing intersectionality as a key analytical category in education policy analysis.

Practically, the study offers actionable insights for improving educational policy and practice in Indonesia. Policymakers must go beyond uniform interventions and design

equity-based programs that reflect regional cost variations, household-level vulnerabilities, and local cultural contexts. Strategies such as differentiated school funding, localized education governance reform, targeted scholarships, and community-based learning models are critical. These findings can guide stakeholders—including government agencies, NGOs, and educators—in crafting more inclusive frameworks that align with Indonesia's constitutional mandate and international development commitments. Furthermore, this study opens pathways for future research on intersectional inequalities in education by providing a model that can be replicated in similarly diverse and decentralized national contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that inequality in access to basic education in Indonesia is driven by the complex and compounding interaction of regional disparities and socioeconomic status. By examining school participation through a multidimensional lens, it becomes evident that children from impoverished households in remote areas face systemic barriers that go beyond individual or household choices. These include underfunded and inaccessible school infrastructure, limited government capacity at the district level, cultural norms that deprioritize education, and economic pressures that force families to choose short-term survival over long-term investment in learning. Such structural and contextual conditions not only hinder enrollment but also compromise educational continuity and outcomes.

Through the integration of social stratification, human capital, spatial inequality, and capability theories, this research has contributed to the theoretical advancement of educational equity discourse in the Indonesian context. It offers a framework that captures how location and poverty jointly affect access to education, reinforcing entrenched patterns of exclusion. The findings support the view that educational inequality is not simply a matter of access, but of quality, relevance, and equity—all of which are unevenly distributed across the archipelago.

To move toward a more equitable education system, Indonesia must adopt tailored, data-driven, and context-sensitive strategies. These include regionally targeted resource allocation, culturally responsive curricula, improved monitoring mechanisms, and expanded support for marginalized households. These recommendations not only address the current gaps but also align with the country's broader commitments to inclusive development and social justice. Future research should continue exploring how intersectional inequalities evolve in response to new policy initiatives and economic shifts, ensuring that efforts to democratize education leave no child behind.

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