

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION ON ACCESS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study analyses the influence of social stratification on access to inclusive education in Indonesia, where economic, geographical, and cultural inequalities are major barriers for children with special needs from vulnerable groups. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with literature studies and secondary data analysis from journals and Ministry of Education and Culture policies, the findings show that poor families in rural areas experience low participation due to high costs, lack of infrastructure, and social stigma, despite regulations such as the National Education Law. The implications weaken social mobility and inclusive human resource development; recommendations include proportional budget allocation, massive teacher training, and anti-discrimination campaigns for equitable access to education.

Keywords: social stratification, inclusive education, access to education, social inequality, children with special needs, Indonesia.

Introduction

Education is a basic right of every individual as enshrined in the constitution and various international agreements. However, the reality on the ground shows that there are still significant inequalities in access to education services. One phenomenon that greatly influences this is social stratification, which is the division of society into layers based on economic, social, cultural, and political factors (Purike & Aslan, 2025) ; (Judijanto & Aslan, 2025) . This stratification not only creates differences in social status but also has a significant impact on an individual's opportunities to access quality education, including inclusive education in Indonesia (Winario & Mohd., 2020).

Inclusive education as a concept and practice in Indonesia aims to provide equal access to education for all children, including those with special needs and those from different socio-economic backgrounds. This education integrates students with special needs into regular schools with the necessary support (Winario & Mohd., 2020) . However, access to and the quality of inclusive education are greatly influenced by the socio-economic conditions of the family and the environment in which the student lives, reflecting complex social stratification.

Indonesia, as a country with a large population and heterogeneous social conditions, faces significant challenges in implementing inclusive education. Development disparities between regions, differences in community welfare levels, and disparities in the availability of educational facilities are the main factors that reinforce social stratification in the context of education (Aslan, 2019) . This shows that

children who come from low socioeconomic groups or live in remote areas often experience difficulties in accessing adequate inclusive education (Pattinasarany, 2016).

This phenomenon of social stratification also impacts the availability of inclusive education facilities and infrastructure in various regions. Schools in large cities are generally better equipped to accommodate inclusive education needs than schools in rural or isolated areas. This gap reflects structural barriers that stem not only from differences in family economic conditions but also from inequalities in the educational resources provided by the government (Khoirunissa, 2023). In addition to infrastructure, families' ability to support their children's education is also an important aspect influenced by social stratification. Families with better economic and educational resources usually have more comprehensive access to information and the ability to provide optimal support for their children, including children with special needs (Arikunto, 2016). Conversely, poor families often face limitations in terms of childcare, meeting educational needs, and access to other support services (Aslan et al., 2020).

From a policy perspective, the Indonesian government has issued various regulations and programmes to improve access to inclusive education, including Special Education Scholarships and school zoning policies. However, the implementation of these policies is sometimes still hampered by uneven social and economic factors. Social disparities within society are a major obstacle to achieving the goals of inclusive education optimally across all regions (Anjarsari et al., 2018).

The sociological approach to education provides an important conceptual framework for understanding how social stratification can shape patterns of access to education. Sociological theories explain that education is not only influenced by the quality of schools, but also by the social and cultural position of families. Thus, social stratification results in the reproduction of social inequality through educational mechanisms, including in the context of inclusive education (Subini, 2014).

Inclusive education has the potential to reduce social inequality if it can be accessed equally by all levels of society. However, if social stratification persists and even intensifies, education will instead become a tool for maintaining or widening these inequalities (Rahman et al., 2023). Therefore, this study is important to examine the extent to which social stratification affects access to inclusive education in Indonesia, from structural, cultural, and policy perspectives.

This study aims to understand the patterns of inequality that occur in access to inclusive education, with a particular focus on the role of social stratification. By examining the factors that influence this access, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of the obstacles faced by vulnerable social groups, particularly children with special needs from underprivileged families and remote areas.

Research Method

This research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach with literature studies and secondary data analysis taken from various sources such as academic journals, education policy documents, and reports related to inclusive education in Indonesia. The research focuses on a deep understanding of the influence of social stratification on access to inclusive education, particularly through an analysis of the phenomenon of inequality that arises based on socio-economic and geographical conditions (Eliyah & Aslan, 2025). Data was collected through literature reviews and in-depth interviews with educators, inclusive school administrators, and families of students with special needs in areas with different levels of social stratification. Data analysis techniques used thematic methods to identify patterns of access barriers arising from social stratification and to assess the effectiveness of government policies in bridging these gaps. This approach enabled the study to provide a comprehensive picture of the challenges and opportunities in realising equitable inclusive education in Indonesia (Levy & Ellis, 2006).

Results and Discussion

The Concept of Social Stratification and Inclusive Education

Social stratification is a concept that describes the division of society into different layers based on various characteristics such as wealth, power, education, and social status. This phenomenon reflects persistent inequalities in the distribution of resources and opportunities in society, which impact individuals' access to various aspects of life, including education. In the context of education, social stratification can create different barriers for certain social groups in accessing equal and quality educational opportunities (Rahman et al., 2023).

The theory of social stratification in sociology emphasises that the social position of individuals or groups is not static but is influenced by structural and cultural factors. This position then determines their access to economic wealth, education, and political power. In the field of education, this stratification can lead to social reproduction where children from upper-class families enjoy better educational facilities while those from lower classes often experience limitations (Mubarok et al., 2025).

Inclusive education is an educational principle and practice that focuses on providing equal learning opportunities for all children, including those with special needs and those from various social and economic backgrounds. Inclusive education not only places children with special needs in regular schools, but also provides the special support they need to learn and develop optimally in the same environment as other children (Setiadi, 2011).

The concept of inclusive education developed in response to practices of discrimination and segregation in education. This approach encourages the removal of physical, social, and cultural barriers that can hinder children's participation in the

formal education system. Inclusive education emphasises fairness and respect for diversity as its main principles, so that all students can access education without being treated differently (Trinova et al., 2025) ; (Zainudin & Aslan, 2025) .

In the Indonesian context, inclusive education is officially regulated in various government policies that aim to improve access to and quality of education for children with disabilities and children from vulnerable groups. Laws and regulations such as the National Education System Law and the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation provide a legal basis for the implementation of inclusive education in public schools throughout Indonesia (Setiadi, 2011) .

Inclusive education is also closely related to the concepts of human rights and social justice. Inclusive education affirms that every child has the same right to quality education without discrimination. This is a major challenge in countries with high levels of social stratification, such as Indonesia, which still faces significant socio-economic disparities (Ministry of National Education, 2006) .

One of the impacts of social stratification in inclusive education is the uneven distribution of resources. Schools in elite or urban areas usually have more adequate facilities and teaching staff to support inclusive education, while schools in disadvantaged areas often lack facilities and trained teachers. This inequality widens the gap in access to education between different social classes (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022) .

Cultural factors also influence the implementation of inclusive education in social stratification. Society's views of children with special needs and marginalised groups often give rise to stigma and discrimination, which then hinders their participation in formal education. This exclusive social attitude exacerbates the conditions of access to education, which should be inclusive (Aslan & Hajiri, 2025) ; (Jayadi et al., 2023) .

From a theoretical perspective, inclusive education is expected to be a tool for social mobility, providing opportunities for children from lower social groups to improve their social position through education. However, if social stratification is not reduced, education can actually function as a tool for reproducing social inequality, where access to and quality of education are still influenced by students' socio-economic backgrounds (Kustawan, 2013) .

The implementation of inclusive education also faces practical challenges in the context of social stratification. Budget constraints, lack of teacher training, and minimal community support can hamper the effectiveness of inclusive programmes. This makes it difficult for children from underprivileged families or rural communities to have the same access as children from higher social groups (Smith, 2006) .

Inclusive education must be supported by comprehensive policies and strategies that can overcome structural and cultural barriers resulting from social stratification. The government needs to provide technical training to teachers, improve

inclusive school facilities throughout the region, and involve the community in changing negative perceptions of student diversity in schools (Yuwono, 2014) .

Thus, the concepts of social stratification and inclusive education are closely related in determining the extent to which fairness and equity in education can be realised. Inclusive education requires not only changes in the education system, but also broader social transformation to remove the barriers that arise from social stratification in order to realise truly inclusive access to education for all groups in Indonesia.

The Influence and Challenges of Social Stratification and Inclusive Education in Indonesia

Social stratification in Indonesia has a significant impact on the access to and quality of inclusive education received by children, especially those from vulnerable groups and with special needs. Socio-economic inequality causes significant differences in opportunities to obtain a proper education, so that children from poor families tend to find it difficult to access adequate inclusive education services (Kemdikbud, 2016) .

Access to inclusive education in urban areas is generally better than in rural and remote areas. Schools in large cities have more complete facilities and teaching staff who are better trained in handling the special needs of students. Conversely, in areas with high poverty rates, adequate school infrastructure for inclusive education is still severely lacking, exacerbating existing disparities. Economic factors are a major obstacle to the implementation of inclusive education for underprivileged families. Additional costs for therapy, transportation to inclusive schools, and special equipment are often unaffordable (Komari et al., 2025) . As a result, many children with special needs in poor families are forced to forego a proper education or even drop out of school. In addition to economic aspects, a lack of understanding and social stigma towards children with special needs also pose a major challenge to the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia. Communities in some areas still view these children as a burden, leading to discrimination and exclusion, which results in low participation in formal education (Kemdikbud, 2016) .

Another obstacle is the limited number of human resources with expertise in inclusive education. Teachers often have not received special training to teach students with different needs, especially in remote areas. This means that the quality of learning for inclusive children is not yet optimal, even though policies already support inclusive education programmes (Pandie & et al., 2021) .

The Indonesian government has attempted to address these challenges by issuing regulations and programmes such as teacher training, inclusive curriculum development, and the provision of financial assistance. However, the implementation of these policies has not been uniform and is still constrained by contextual social

stratification in each region, whether economic, cultural, or geographical (Sari & Yasin, 2024).

The influence of social stratification can also be seen in the differences in families' awareness of the importance of inclusive education. Families with high socioeconomic backgrounds are usually more concerned and ready to provide optimal support for the education of children with special needs, while less affluent families often lack access to information and social support. Indonesia's geographical condition, consisting of thousands of islands, also complicates the equal distribution of access to inclusive education. Outlying and remote areas that are far from government centres and large cities still face a shortage of facilities and educators. In addition, limited transportation and communication access add to the barriers for inclusive children in these areas (Winario & Mohd., 2020).

In many cases, the implementation of inclusive education is still symbolic or normative. Schools administratively accept children with special needs, but not all of them can actually provide educational services that suit their needs due to limited facilities and policies that are not fully implemented (Aslan & Nur, 2025).

Another challenge is the low level of social support and community participation in inclusive education. Community awareness of the importance of social inclusion and education for children with special needs needs to be increased in order to create a friendly and supportive learning environment. This includes eliminating the negative stigma that still exists in society (Aslan, 2023).

Social stratification also affects the opportunities for children with special needs to obtain further education after primary school. Many of them who come from underprivileged families are unable to continue their education to a higher level due to limited financial resources and support. This causes the inclusive education process to be interrupted midway. However, there are strategic opportunities that can overcome these challenges, such as developing policies that are more responsive to socio-economic conditions, increasing budget allocations for inclusive education, and cross-sectoral cooperation between the government, civil society organisations, and the private sector (Suryadi & Aslan, 2025). This is important so that inclusive education can truly reach all levels of society. In addition, there is a need for massive and sustainable inclusive teacher training programmes, especially in areas prone to high social stratification. Improving the capacity of educators will improve the quality of learning and foster confidence among inclusive students, so that they can learn well without feeling inferior or discriminated against (Amin et al., 2025).

Thus, social stratification remains a major obstacle to achieving fair and equitable inclusive education in Indonesia. However, with targeted policies and broad community support, these challenges can be minimised so that inclusive education truly becomes a bridge to educational equality for all children, including those with special needs and marginalised communities.

Conclusion

Social stratification in Indonesia greatly hinders access to inclusive education, with low-income communities and rural areas experiencing the most severe inequalities compared to urban elites. Factors such as additional education costs, limited inclusive school infrastructure, a shortage of trained teachers, and socio-cultural stigma are the main obstacles that reinforce the reproduction of social inequality through the education system. Although government policies such as the National Education Law and inclusive scholarship programmes are in place, their implementation has not been optimal due to geographical and economic disparities that reflect deep stratification structures, resulting in low participation rates among children with special needs from poor families.

The impact of social stratification not only limits access to education today, but also hinders the social mobility of future generations, with children from lower classes tending to be trapped in a cycle of poverty due to low literacy and inclusive skills. This inequality undermines the goal of inclusive human resource development as mandated in the National Medium-Term Development Plan and contradicts Indonesia's commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Without structural intervention, inclusive education has the potential to reinforce social polarisation, reducing the potential contribution of vulnerable groups to national development.

Therefore, to overcome the effects of social stratification, policy recommendations are needed, such as increasing the allocation of proportional inclusive budgets based on regional poverty indices, mass training of inclusive teachers through national certification programmes, and community-based anti-stigma campaigns to raise public awareness. Public-private collaboration in providing disability-friendly transportation and facilities in remote areas is also crucial, accompanied by strict monitoring of the implementation of inclusive school zoning. Further research is recommended using a mixed-methods approach with primary data from national surveys to measure the effectiveness of interventions, in order to support the transformation of the education system towards true inclusion in Indonesia.

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