

INEQUALITIES IN ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN INDONESIA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF STRUCTURAL FACTORS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

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Abstract

Inequality in access to and quality of education in Indonesia is a persistent and multidimensional structural problem, which hinders the realisation of educational equity and social justice for all Indonesians. This article aims to present a systematic review of the structural factors causing inequality in access to and quality of education in Indonesia, as well as to analyse their implications for educational equity. The method employed is a literature review using a systematic review approach. The findings indicate that educational inequality in Indonesia is driven by the complex interaction of geographical factors (archipelagic conditions and remoteness), economic factors (poverty and income inequality), institutional factors (decentralisation and local capacity), policy (budget allocation, school zoning, teacher recruitment), socio-cultural (gender norms, awareness of the importance of education), and governance (accountability and data utilisation). The implications of these structural factors for educational equity include barriers to access for vulnerable groups (3T regions, poor families, people with disabilities, minorities), disparities in the quality of learning and learning outcomes, limited intergenerational social mobility, threats to social justice and national cohesion, and negative impacts on national competitiveness and the achievement of the SDGs. Consequently, educational inequality in Indonesia is not merely a technical issue, but a structural problem requiring fundamental reform in resource allocation, educational governance, affirmative action policies, school leadership, inclusive pedagogy, and social norms. Strong political commitment and cross-sectoral collaboration are prerequisites for realising fair and inclusive educational equity for all Indonesian children.

Keywords: educational inequality, structural factors, educational equity, access to education, quality of education, systematic review, Indonesia, social justice.

Introduction

Education has long been recognised as one of the main pillars of human development and the progress of a nation (Aslan and Sidabutar, 2025); (Fitroh and Aslan, 2026). In Indonesia, the Constitution guarantees every citizen's right to a proper education, as set out in Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution, which states that every citizen has the right to education and that the government is obliged to endeavour to establish and organise a national education system (Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia of 1945). However, behind this normative commitment, the reality on the

ground shows that access to and the quality of education still suffer from significant disparities between regions, social groups and types of school.

Educational inequality in Indonesia is not a new phenomenon, but rather a structural problem that has persisted for several decades. Data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that Indonesia consistently ranks at the bottom in terms of reading literacy, mathematics and science, with average scores far below the average for 'countries'. Even more worrying is the fact that the disparity in scores between provinces within Indonesia itself is very wide, with pupils in DKI Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Bali tending to achieve significantly higher scores than those in Papua, Maluku or East Nusa Tenggara (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020).

This phenomenon indicates that educational inequality in Indonesia is not merely linked to individual or family factors, but is more profoundly influenced by structural factors inherent in the education system itself. Structural factors refer to macro-level and institutional conditions that shape the distribution of resources, opportunities and educational outcomes, including public policy, budget allocation, governance, social norms and institutional practices that can reproduce injustice (J, 2013). In the Indonesian context, the decentralisation of education, which began in 2001, has granted greater autonomy to local governments; however, it has also created wide variations in capacity and commitment regarding the management of education (Bjork, 2005).

One of the most evident manifestations of structural inequality is the uneven distribution of educational resources. A study by the World Bank (2020) shows that schools in urban areas and on Java tend to have better access to certified teachers, adequate infrastructure and high-quality learning materials compared to schools in rural areas and outside Java. This inequality is exacerbated by teacher recruitment and placement mechanisms that are not yet fully needs-based, meaning that underdeveloped, frontier and outermost (3T) regions often suffer from chronic teacher shortages, particularly for certain subjects such as mathematics and science (UNESCO, 2021); (Komari, Aslan dan Rusiadi, 2025); (Itasari, 2020).

In addition to the distribution of resources, national education policy also contributes to the reproduction of inequality. School zoning policies, which were originally designed to reduce social segregation and improve accessibility, in practice often reinforce segregation based on socio-economic status in urban areas (Putri, Qushwa and Hina, 2024). Preferred schools in urban areas continue to attract pupils from middle- and upper-class families through various informal mechanisms, whilst schools in marginalised areas continue to lose high-potential pupils due to their limited reputation and resources. Inequalities in access to and the quality of education are also closely linked to families' socio-economic circumstances. Research by Filmer and Pritchett, (1999), which has become a classic reference in the literature on educational inequality, shows that a family's socio-economic status is a strong predictor of a child's participation in education and learning outcomes. In Indonesia, these findings are

confirmed by various studies showing that children from low-income families are more likely to fail to complete primary and secondary education, and have lower learning outcomes compared to children from more affluent families (Jones and Pratomo, 2016).

Educational disparities in Indonesia also have a very strong geographical dimension. Indonesia's territory, comprising more than 17,000 islands with diverse geographical, demographic and socio-cultural characteristics, presents unique challenges in delivering equitable and high-quality education (Aslan, 2019). A study by Hidir *et al.*, (2026) shows that physical distance to schools, the state of transport infrastructure, and the availability of educational services in remote areas constitute significant barriers to educational participation, particularly in the regions of Papua, Maluku and Nusa Tenggara. Furthermore, educational inequality in Indonesia also has dimensions based on social identity, including gender, disability and minority groups. Although significant progress has been made towards gender equality in access to primary education, disparities remain at secondary and tertiary levels, particularly in regions with strong social norms that restrict women's roles (Pugu and Aslan, 2025). Children with disabilities also continue to face structural barriers to accessing inclusive education, with only a small proportion of schools possessing adequate facilities and teaching staff to support inclusive learning (UNICEF Indonesia, 2020).

From a social justice perspective, educational inequality is not merely a technical or administrative issue, but a moral and political issue that touches on the very core of the ideal of social justice for all the people of Indonesia. The theory of educational justice from Rawls, (2016) emphasises that injustice can only be tolerated if it provides the greatest benefit to the least advantaged. In this context, systematic and structured educational inequality clearly contradicts the principle of justice as fairness, as it actually reproduces and deepens existing social inequalities.

The implications of this educational inequality are also long-term and intergenerational. Unequal education not only limits individuals' opportunities to improve their standard of living, but also hinders social mobility and reinforces the intergenerational cycle of poverty (Kim, 2021). At the macro level, educational inequality also reduces a nation's competitive potential, as much of its talent and human potential remains underutilised due to structural barriers to accessing quality education (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020).

It is therefore important to systematically review the structural factors underpinning inequalities in access to and the quality of education in Indonesia, and to analyse their implications for educational equity. A systematic review of the empirical and conceptual literature can provide a more comprehensive picture of the patterns, mechanisms and magnitude of the effects of various structural factors, thereby informing policies and practices that are more equity-oriented.

Research Methodology

This study employs a literature review using a systematic review approach to identify, evaluate and synthesise findings from various empirical and conceptual studies relevant to inequalities in access to and quality of education in Indonesia, as well as the structural factors influencing them. Primary data sources were obtained from indexed academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, Garuda, and others. The literature selection process began with an initial identification, followed by screening based on inclusion and exclusion criteria (studies addressing educational inequalities in Indonesia, containing an analysis of structural factors, and published in Indonesian or English), an assessment of suitability, and final inclusion. The collected data were analysed using a thematic-narrative approach to identify patterns, mechanisms, and the extent of the influence of structural factors on educational inequality, as well as their implications for educational equity, thereby producing a comprehensive and reliable synthesis to serve as a basis for policy recommendations and further research (Zed, 2008); (Eliyah and Aslan, 2025).

Results and Discussion

Structural Factors Causing Inequality in Access to and Quality of Education

The structural factors causing inequalities in access to and quality of education in Indonesia can be understood as macro-level and institutional conditions that shape the distribution of resources, opportunities and educational outcomes in a systematic and sustained manner. Within the theoretical framework of the sociology of education, structural factors refer to the social, economic, political and cultural patterns that are institutionalised within the education system and wider society, which indirectly or directly restrict or facilitate individuals' and groups' access to quality education (Ball, 2008). In Indonesia, these factors do not operate in isolation but interact within a complex dynamic, thereby creating and reproducing persistent educational inequalities across regions, social groups and school types (Bjork, 2003).

One of the most fundamental structural factors is Indonesia's geographical condition as an archipelago comprising more than 17,000 islands spread across a vast area. These geographical conditions create significant logistical and infrastructural challenges in providing equitable educational services, particularly in eastern Indonesia, such as Papua, Maluku and Nusa Tenggara (Hidir *et al.*, 2026). Long distances between settlements and schools, limited access to transport, and poor road and bridge infrastructure often prevent children in remote areas from accessing education on a regular basis. Studies by the World Bank (2018) and Fahmi (2020) show that barriers relating to basic infrastructure—such as road access, transport facilities, electricity and internet connectivity—are fundamental factors that prevent educational services from being accessed equitably by all sections of society, particularly in 3T regions (underdeveloped, frontier and outermost areas).

Economic factors are also very strong structural determinants of access to and the quality of education. Poverty and income inequality between provinces and across

social groups create disparities in families' ability to finance their children's education, despite the existence of support programmes such as the Kartu Indonesia Pintar (KIP) (Jones and Pratomo, 2016). Research by Filmer and Pritchett, (1999) , which has become a classic reference in the literature on educational inequality, shows that a family's socio-economic status is a strong predictor of children's participation and learning outcomes; these findings have been confirmed in Indonesia by various studies indicating that children from low-income families are more likely to fail to complete primary and secondary education and to achieve lower learning outcomes. This economic inequality also interacts with geographical factors, whereby regions with a low Human Development Index (HDI) generally also exhibit limited access to basic education and an unequal distribution of schools (Aslan, 2024).

The uneven distribution of the education budget across provinces is another structural factor that contributes significantly to educational inequality. Although the constitution mandates a minimum allocation of 20 per cent of the State Budget (APBN) and Regional Budget (APBD) for education, its implementation at the regional level varies greatly due to differences in regional fiscal capacity (Purwaningsih, 2026). Provinces with high fiscal capacity, such as DKI Jakarta, East Kalimantan and the Riau Islands, are able to provide higher-quality facilities and teaching staff compared to provinces with low fiscal capacity, such as Papua, Maluku or East Nusa Tenggara. Fund distribution formulas such as the General Allocation Fund (DAU) and the Special Allocation Fund (DAK) for education also often fail to take into account the real needs of local areas, thereby reinforcing existing disparities (Muhammad and Wiguna, 2023).

The decentralisation of education, which began in 2001 through Law No. 22 of 1999 on Regional Government, has granted greater autonomy to district and city governments in managing education; however, it has also created wide variations in capacity and commitment regarding educational management (Bjork, 2005). Regions with strong institutional capacity and human resources are able to plan and implement more effective education programmes, whilst regions with limited capacity often face difficulties in managing educational resources optimally (Sari, 2023). These disparities in regional capacity are exacerbated by weak coordination between central and local governments, as well as a lack of effective oversight and accountability mechanisms to ensure that regional autonomy is used to improve the quality of education equitably (World Bank, 2020).

The uneven availability and distribution of teachers is a crucial structural factor in determining the quality of education across different regions. Data show that schools in urban areas and Java tend to have better access to certified, highly qualified and experienced teachers compared to schools in rural areas and outside Java (UNESCO, 2021). The phenomenon of 'teachers being selective about where they teach' remains common, with the majority of teachers preferring to teach in urban areas with better facilities and incentives, whilst very few are willing to teach in remote areas (Aslan and Setiawan, 2019) . Consequently, 3T regions often suffer from a chronic shortage of

teachers, particularly for certain subjects such as mathematics, science and English, which has a direct impact on the quality of learning and pupils' achievements (Aslan, Setiawan and Hifza, 2019).

Uneven teacher quality is also a serious structural problem. Although the teacher certification programme has been in place for over a decade, its impact on improving the quality of learning remains limited, particularly in remote areas (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). A study by the World Bank (2020) shows that many teachers in remote areas lack adequate pedagogical and subject-specific competencies, and have limited opportunities to participate in continuous professional development (CPD). The 'Merdeka Mengajar' platform, launched by the government to enhance teachers' competencies through online learning, has also not been fully effective in reaching teachers in areas with limited internet connectivity, thereby widening the gap in teacher quality between regions (Yelliza *et al.*, 2025); (Triyuni, Aslan and Astaman, 2024).

Inadequate educational infrastructure in rural areas and 3T regions is also a significant structural factor in creating disparities in educational quality. A shortage of suitable classrooms, laboratories, libraries and other supporting facilities hinders effective learning and reduces pupils' motivation to learn (Itasari, 2020). A study by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2022) shows that only 34 per cent of state schools in Eastern Indonesia have adequate computer laboratories, compared with 78 per cent in Java and Bali, reflecting a vast digital infrastructure gap. This disparity is becoming increasingly critical in the digital age, where access to technology and digital literacy are essential prerequisites for quality learning and students' readiness to meet the demands of the 21st century (Komari, Aslan and Rusiadi, 2025).

National education policy also contributes to the reproduction of structural inequalities. The school zoning policy, implemented since 2017, whilst intended to reduce social segregation and improve accessibility, in practice often reinforces segregation based on socio-economic status in urban areas (Putri, Qushwa and Hina, 2024). Preferred schools in urban areas continue to attract pupils from middle- and upper-class families through various informal mechanisms such as false residency claims or address changes, whilst schools in marginalised areas continue to lose high-potential pupils due to limitations in reputation and resources (Ainuri and Wijaya, 2026). Furthermore, frequent changes to curriculum policy without comprehensive evaluation also create confusion at school level, particularly in areas with limited teacher and management capacity (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024).

Social and cultural factors also play a structural role that cannot be ignored in determining access to and the quality of education. In some regions, particularly in rural communities and certain indigenous communities, traditional views persist that regard education as a low priority, especially for girls (Judijanto and Aslan, 2025). Social constructs that prioritise women's domestic roles often hinder girls' access to secondary and higher education, even though gender equality in education has been

recognised in principle (Pugu and Aslan, 2025). Furthermore, low public awareness of the importance of education and a lack of parental support for their children's learning also constitute significant structural barriers, particularly in families where parents have a low level of education (Fitriyanti and Aslan, 2025).

Children with disabilities also face systematic structural barriers to accessing high-quality inclusive education. Although Indonesia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities through Law No. 19 of 2011, the implementation of inclusive education on the ground remains very limited, with only a small proportion of schools having accessible facilities, specialised support teachers, and adapted curricula (Syifa, 2024). A study by UNICEF (2020) shows that the majority of children with disabilities in Indonesia still attend special schools (SLB), which are limited in number and often located in major cities, making them inaccessible to children with disabilities in rural and remote areas. This disparity reflects a systemic failure to provide inclusive and equitable education for all children, regardless of their physical or cognitive conditions.

Inequality in access to digital technology is also an increasingly critical structural factor in the era of digital learning. The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically exposed the deep digital divide in Indonesia, where pupils from low-income families and in remote areas lack adequate access to digital devices, internet connections and the digital literacy required for online learning (Yajie, Liu and Gaoming, 2023). Access to digital technology in education remains highly stratified according to socio-economic status, geographical location and social class, with economic capital being the strongest determinant. These structural barriers are not limited to infrastructure, but also encompass digital literacy, parental educational capital and schools' institutional capacity to manage digital learning (Wu, 2024).

Weak governance and accountability within the education system are also structural factors that reinforce inequalities. Existing school evaluation and accreditation mechanisms are often insensitive to local contexts and focus more on administrative compliance than on the actual quality of learning (Bjork, 2003). Data from education information systems such as Dapodik and Rapor Pendidikan, whilst available, are often not utilised optimally by local authorities and schools for evidence-based and equity-oriented decision-making (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). A lack of transparency and public participation in the oversight of education management also reinforces information asymmetry and reduces the accountability of education providers to the public (World Bank, 2020).

Overall, the structural factors causing inequalities in access to and the quality of education in Indonesia interact within a complex and mutually reinforcing dynamic. Challenging geographical conditions interact with infrastructure constraints, exacerbated by disparities in local fiscal capacity and the uneven distribution of resources. Economic and socio-cultural factors are interlinked in determining access to and participation in education, whilst inconsistent education policies and weak

governance reinforce existing cycles of inequality. Therefore, efforts to address educational inequality in Indonesia require a holistic and systemic approach, focusing not only on technical interventions but also on fundamental structural reforms within the education system and wider society.

Implications of Structural Factors for Educational Equity

The implications of structural factors for educational equity in Indonesia are multidimensional and interrelated, encompassing aspects of access, quality, learning outcomes, opportunities for further education, and social justice more broadly. To understand these implications in depth, it is important first to distinguish between the concepts of equality and equity in education. Educational equality refers to the equal treatment of all pupils regardless of their differing starting points, whilst educational equity emphasises the provision of differentiated support according to the needs of each individual or group to achieve fair outcomes (Sen, 2006). In the Indonesian context, the structural factors discussed earlier not only create inequalities in access to and the quality of education, but also systematically hinder the realisation of genuine educational equity, as those who are already in a disadvantaged position fall even further behind due to unfair structures (Ball, 2008).

The most direct implications of structural factors on educational equity are evident in the dimension of access, where the most affected groups are those in 3T areas (underdeveloped, frontier and outermost regions), low-income families, children with disabilities, and minority groups (Setyawan, Khotimah and Febri, 2025). Structural barriers such as physical distance to schools, limited transport infrastructure, unaffordable education costs, and discrimination based on gender or disability create various forms of educational exclusion, including not attending school at all, dropping out early, delayed school entry, or limited access only to low-quality schools (Munawir, Ibrahim and Islamiah, 2024). Studies by the World Bank (2020) and BPS (2022) show that children from the poorest households in Indonesia are 5–7 times more likely not to complete primary education than children from the wealthiest households, reflecting a systemic failure to guarantee equal access for all citizens without discrimination.

In terms of the quality of learning and learning outcomes, structural factors also have very serious implications for educational equity. Inequalities in the distribution of teachers, infrastructure and high-quality learning materials are directly correlated with disparities in literacy, numeracy and 21st-century skills across regions and social groups (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). Data from PISA 2018 show that the score gap between pupils in DKI Jakarta and Papua exceeds 100 points in reading literacy, which is equivalent to a difference of 3–4 years' learning (Fathurohman and Hikmah, 2025). The implications of this disparity in learning outcomes are not limited to short-term academic performance; they also affect students' readiness to progress to higher education, enter the labour market and participate fully in a democratic

society, thereby reinforcing the cycle of intergenerational inequality (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020).

The long-term impact of educational inequality driven by structural factors is also evident in barriers to social mobility and the intergenerational reproduction of poverty. Education should serve as the primary instrument for enhancing vertical social mobility, enabling individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds to improve their status through educational attainment (Kim, 2021). However, in Indonesia, structural inequalities in education actually reinforce existing social stratification, as children from affluent families have better access to quality education, which in turn opens up opportunities for higher-paying jobs and income, whilst children from poor families remain trapped in a cycle of low educational attainment and low-paid informal work (Jones and Pratomo, 2016). A study by Kim, (2021) , shows that intergenerational social mobility in Indonesia remains relatively low compared to neighbouring countries such as Thailand and Malaysia, largely due to persistent inequalities in access to and the quality of education.

From the perspective of social justice and national cohesion, systematic and structured educational inequality poses a serious threat to the ideal of social justice for all the people of Indonesia, as enshrined in Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. Rawls, (2016), emphasises that injustice can only be tolerated if it provides the greatest benefit to the least advantaged; however, the reality of educational inequality in Indonesia demonstrates the opposite: those who are already disadvantaged are being further marginalised by an unjust structure (Rawls, 2016). Prolonged educational inequality also has the potential to create social discontent, a sense of injustice, and even horizontal conflict between social groups who feel marginalised, particularly in regions with stark development disparities such as Papua and Maluku (Munawir, Ibrahim and Islamiah, 2024) .

The implications of educational inequality for national competitiveness and economic development cannot be ignored either. In the era of a knowledge-based economy, the quality of human capital is a key determinant of a nation's competitiveness in the global arena (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020). Educational inequality, which results in the majority of human talent and potential remaining underutilised due to structural barriers to accessing quality education, in turn reduces aggregate productivity, hinders innovation, and slows inclusive economic growth (Syah and Wahyudi, 2026). A study by Hanushek and Woessmann, (2020), shows that a uniform improvement in the quality of education can increase GDP per capita growth by up to 1–2 per cent per year in the long term, meaning that reducing educational inequality is not merely a matter of justice, but also a strategic economic imperative.

Educational inequality driven by structural factors also has serious implications for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030 (UNESCO, 2021). Indonesia has committed to achieving the SDG 4 targets; however,

persistent inequalities in access, quality and educational outcomes resulting from structural factors are hindering progress towards these targets, particularly in terms of achieving universal primary and secondary education, improving literacy and numeracy, and reducing disparities based on gender, disability and geographical location (Ananda *et al.*, 2025). Failure to address educational inequalities will also impact the achievement of other SDGs, such as poverty reduction (SDG 1), good health (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5), and the reduction of inequality (SDG 10), as education forms the foundation for holistic and sustainable human development (Rohmani, Budiana and Subhani, 2025).

In the context of policy and practice, the implications of structural factors for educational equity call for a reformulation of approaches that are more oriented towards justice rather than mere equality. At the macro level (national/regional), this means reformulating education funding allocation schemes to be more progressive and needs-based, whereby regions and schools facing more challenging conditions receive a greater proportion of resources to address the structural barriers they face (Benufinit *et al.*, 2025). Strengthening regional capacity in the planning, implementation and oversight of education is also imperative, particularly to ensure that regional autonomy does not actually widen disparities, but is instead used to improve the quality of education equitably (Bjork, 2003). Affirmative policies that are sensitive to disadvantaged groups and regions, such as special scholarships for pupils from poor families, specific incentives for teachers in 3T areas, and programmes to accelerate educational infrastructure in underdeveloped regions, also need to be strengthened and evaluated regularly to ensure their effectiveness.

At the school and community levels, the implications of structural factors for educational equity require a justice-oriented model of school leadership, in which headteachers and teachers do not merely focus on average academic achievement, but also actively identify and address the barriers faced by pupils from disadvantaged groups (J, 2013). Collaboration between schools, communities and local government is also key to overcoming local barriers to access, such as free school transport schemes for pupils in remote areas, partnerships with community organisations to support out-of-school children in returning to school, and the mobilisation of local resources to improve school infrastructure (Maharani, 2025). The use of school data from systems such as Dapodik and Rapor Pendidikan also needs to be optimised for the identification of at-risk pupils, the targeted allocation of resources, and the evaluation of evidence-based interventions (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020).

At the pedagogical and curricular levels, the implications of structural factors for educational equity call for an inclusive and responsive approach to learning that accounts for student diversity, whether in terms of ability, socio-economic background, culture, language, or physical and cognitive conditions (UNESCO, 2021). A curriculum that is relevant to the local context whilst maintaining national standards needs to be developed to ensure that pupils not only master core competencies but also

understand and can contribute to the development of their communities (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024). Strengthening character and citizenship education is also vital to support equity, by emphasising the values of justice, empathy, social solidarity and respect for diversity as the foundation for an inclusive and democratic society (Rawls, 2016).

Overall, the implications of structural factors for educational equality in Indonesia are systemic, multidimensional and mutually reinforcing, requiring policy responses and practices that are equally systemic and coordinated. Educational inequality is not merely a technical or administrative issue that can be resolved through piecemeal interventions, but rather a structural problem that touches on the very core of social justice and the ideals of holistic human development in Indonesia (J, 2013). Therefore, efforts to achieve educational equity in Indonesia require strong political commitment, fundamental structural reforms within the education system and wider society, as well as cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration to ensure that every Indonesian child, without discrimination, has a fair opportunity to access quality education and realise their full potential.

Conclusion

Inequalities in access to and the quality of education in Indonesia constitute a complex and multidimensional structural phenomenon, driven by the dynamic interplay of geographical, economic, institutional, socio-cultural and policy factors. These inequalities are neither random nor temporary, but rather systematic and persistent, with consistent patterns across regions (Java versus outside Java, urban versus rural, 3T regions), across social groups (based on economic status, gender, disability, and minority status), and across school types (state versus private, favoured versus marginalised). Structural factors such as the unequal distribution of resources, varying local fiscal capacities, education policies that are not yet fully equity-oriented, and discriminatory social norms reinforce one another in reproducing educational inequality from one generation to the next.

The implications of structural factors for educational equity in Indonesia are profound and far-reaching, encompassing barriers to access for vulnerable groups, disparities in the quality of teaching and learning outcomes, limited intergenerational social mobility, threats to social justice and national cohesion, and negative impacts on the nation's competitiveness and the achievement of the SDGs. Educational inequality, which should be based on the principle of fairness, instead sees the most disadvantaged becoming increasingly marginalised by an unjust structure. Therefore, efforts to achieve educational equity in Indonesia require a holistic and systemic approach, one that focuses not only on technical interventions such as financial aid or teacher training, but also on fundamental structural reforms within the education system, governance, resource allocation, and the social norms that perpetuate inequality.

Thus, educational inequality in Indonesia is not merely a technical or administrative issue, but a moral, political and developmental issue that touches on the very core of the ideal of social justice for all the people of Indonesia. The structural reforms required include a more progressive and needs-based reallocation of educational resources; strengthening regional capacity in education management; affirmative policies that are sensitive to disadvantaged groups and regions; school leadership oriented towards equity; inclusive pedagogy; and a curriculum relevant to the local context. Strong political commitment, cross-sectoral collaboration and civil society participation are essential prerequisites for ensuring that every Indonesian child, without discrimination, has a fair opportunity to access quality education and realise their full potential as productive and dignified citizens.

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