

Challenges and Opportunities in Education Equity through the 13-Year Compulsory Education Program in Indonesia

Loso Judijanto
IPOSS Jakarta

Article Info

Article history:

Received Mar, 2025

Revised Mar, 2025

Accepted Mar, 2025

Keywords:

Compulsory Education
Education Equity
Educational Challenges
Public-Private Partnerships
Technology Integration

ABSTRACT

The 13-Year Compulsory Education Program in Indonesia aims to equalize educational opportunities and address longstanding disparities in access and quality. This study employs a qualitative approach, gathering insights from six key informants, including policymakers, educators, community leaders, and NGO representatives, to explore the program's challenges and opportunities. Key challenges identified include infrastructure gaps, teacher shortages, socio-economic barriers, and logistical difficulties in archipelagic areas. However, opportunities such as technology integration, public-private partnerships, community engagement, and teacher training offer promising solutions for achieving educational equity. The findings underscore the importance of multi-faceted strategies, collaborative efforts, and targeted policies to overcome barriers and maximize the program's potential.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](#) license.



Corresponding Author:

Name: Loso Judijanto
Institution: IPOSS Jakarta
Email: losojudijantobumn@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The 13-Year Compulsory Education Program in Indonesia extends mandatory education from 9 to 13 years, covering early childhood to secondary education, with the aim of reducing educational disparities, especially in remote and underprivileged areas [1], [2]. By integrating public, private, and community-based models, the program seeks to build a more inclusive education system [1]. Key focuses include improving teacher quality, infrastructure, and cross-sector collaboration for better resource distribution and training [1], [3]. The program also contributes to economic growth and poverty reduction by enhancing human capital [2], [4]. Through innovative approaches like Merdeka Belajar, it promotes

critical thinking and inclusive values that support social transformation [1], [5].

The implementation of Indonesia's 13-Year Compulsory Education Program faces significant challenges due to infrastructure disparities, teacher shortages, socio-economic barriers, and the country's complex geography and cultural diversity. Rural areas often lack adequate educational facilities compared to urban centers, resulting in unequal access to quality education [6], [7], making infrastructure development essential to bridge this gap [8]. A shortage of qualified teachers, especially in remote regions, further undermines educational quality [9], highlighting the need to improve teacher training and welfare to attract and retain competent educators [6], [8]. Socio-economic disparities also hinder access, as many

families struggle to cover education-related costs [7], requiring better management of educational funding to ensure fair resource distribution [6]. Additionally, Indonesia's archipelagic geography and cultural heterogeneity pose challenges to uniformly applying national education policies, necessitating localized approaches that respect and adapt to regional contexts [10]. These challenges highlight the need for a comprehensive examination of the program's effectiveness and its potential to bridge the educational gap.

The program's potential to foster a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape lies in its encouragement of collaboration among government agencies, private institutions, and non-governmental organizations, which can collectively address systemic educational issues through enhanced teacher training, technology integration, and localized policy interventions. Teacher training is crucial in building inclusive classrooms, as emphasized by NEP 2020, which advocates for equipping educators with the skills to support diverse learners [11], while innovative methods like flipped classrooms and experiential learning can boost student engagement and outcomes [12], supported by continuous professional development to keep pace with evolving technologies and methodologies [13]. Technology integration plays a transformative role by personalizing learning and fostering inclusivity [13], with bridging the digital divide being essential to support marginalized communities [11] and adaptive STEM technologies enhancing hands-on learning [14]. Localized policy interventions are also vital, as reforms and community engagement help tailor solutions to local needs [12], and systemic policy approaches are necessary for sustainable education systems [15], with multi-stakeholder collaboration mobilizing resources and expertise to improve infrastructure and quality [12], [15].

Indonesia faces persistent challenges in ensuring equal access to quality education across its diverse regions. Despite significant efforts, disparities remain pronounced,

particularly in rural and underprivileged areas, where infrastructure, qualified teachers, and educational resources are often lacking. The 13-Year Compulsory Education Program, introduced to address these inequities, seeks to provide comprehensive and inclusive education to all students from early childhood to the end of secondary school. However, its implementation is hindered by significant barriers, including limited funding, socio-economic disparities, and logistical issues arising from Indonesia's archipelagic geography, raising concerns about the program's capacity to fulfill its intended goals and ensure educational equity. This study aims to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with the 13-Year Compulsory Education Program in Indonesia by conducting a qualitative analysis with insights from six informants to identify key barriers to the program's successful implementation, explore potential strategies and innovations to overcome these challenges, and provide actionable recommendations for policymakers to enhance the program's effectiveness in achieving equitable education for all Indonesian students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Educational Equity and Its Importance*

Educational equity in Indonesia is a critical component of the nation's sustainable development goals, aiming to reduce poverty and promote social mobility; however, disparities in infrastructure, teacher availability, and access to learning resources, especially in remote areas, continue to hinder progress. Insights from global experiences, such as China's policy of "rejuvenating the country through science and education," demonstrate how national strategies, poverty alleviation, and distance learning platforms can improve educational access and quality in rural regions [16]. Similarly, the United States applies decentralized management and special education programs to address disparities, although challenges like school district choice remain [16].

Research from Norway shows that school quality significantly influences the link between socioeconomic background and academic performance, with lower-quality schools worsening inequality [17], while in Sub-Saharan Africa, students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds have better access to quality education [18]. In the U.S., targeted scholarships, inclusive teaching practices, and comprehensive support systems have proven effective in narrowing educational gaps [19], and the emphasis on scalable solutions—such as equitable funding and inclusive curricula—remains essential in addressing persistent inequities [19].

2.2 *The 13-Year Compulsory Education Program*

The 13-Year Compulsory Education Program in Indonesia is a strategic initiative aimed at expanding access to education and aligning with global standards such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4). By extending compulsory education to include early childhood and secondary levels, the program addresses educational disparities by providing free and accessible education, particularly for marginalized communities. It also seeks to improve education quality through teacher training, curriculum reform, and technology integration, with early studies indicating its potential to increase enrollment and reduce dropout rates, especially at the secondary level [20], [21]. As part of broader efforts to tackle educational inequality, the program aligns with SDG 4's emphasis on inclusive and equitable quality education, although legal and systemic challenges remain [20]. The implementation of free education policies has significantly impacted equitable access—directly improving access by 68.5% and learning quality by 29.6%, with an additional 49.8% indirect improvement in learning quality—demonstrating the importance of financial accessibility [21]. Furthermore, inclusive education policies strive to ensure equal opportunities for all children, including

those with special needs, by fostering non-discriminatory learning environments, though resource limitations and social stigma continue to pose challenges, making stakeholder collaboration essential [22]. However, implementation challenges, such as funding constraints and logistical issues, have been widely reported.

2.3 *Challenges in Implementing the Program*

The successful implementation of the 13-Year Compulsory Education Program in Indonesia faces multiple challenges, including infrastructure disparities, teacher shortages, socio-economic barriers, and geographical difficulties—issues that are also evident in other countries such as China and Pakistan. Rural and remote areas in Indonesia and China often lack adequate educational infrastructure, limiting access to quality education for students compared to their urban peers [8], [23], while in Balochistan, Pakistan, poor infrastructure and inadequate facilities severely hinder educational progress [24]. Teacher shortages and uneven distribution of qualified educators are also pressing concerns, with Indonesia needing improved teacher training and professional development to address the gap [8], a challenge similarly observed in Balochistan where low teacher qualifications affect educational outcomes [24]. Socio-economic barriers further restrict educational access, as poverty and cultural norms create unequal opportunities in Indonesia [25], and in Balochistan, cultural and gender-based disparities intensify these issues [24]. Geographical challenges, particularly Indonesia's archipelagic nature, complicate the distribution of educational resources, a difficulty also experienced in China's rural regions where geographic isolation limits access to education [8], [23].

2.4 *Opportunities for Educational Equity*

The 13-Year Compulsory Education Program offers significant opportunities to enhance educational

equity through strategic interventions such as policy innovations, technology integration, public-private partnerships, and teacher training programs, which are essential for addressing the unique needs of marginalized communities and bridging educational gaps. Historical institutionalism underscores the need for evolving enrollment policies that prioritize equity over efficiency [26], while targeted policy interventions are necessary to eliminate financial, cultural, and institutional barriers—particularly to address gender disparities [27], as seen in Pakistan where community-driven solutions and inclusive curriculum reforms are recommended to support marginalized groups [28]. Technology integration through digital tools and online platforms can significantly improve educational access in remote areas, assuming sufficient infrastructure and connectivity, and innovative pedagogical methods like flipped classrooms and experiential learning can boost engagement and outcomes [12]. Public-private partnerships also play a vital role in mobilizing resources, expertise, and technology to strengthen infrastructure and improve educational quality [12]. Furthermore, comprehensive teacher training programs are crucial for enhancing educator competencies and ensuring consistent quality education across regions, with improvements in faculty capacity and operational conditions being key to achieving process equity between rural and urban schools [29].

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design was chosen to capture the nuanced experiences and viewpoints of stakeholders involved in the program's implementation. This design enables an in-depth exploration of the systemic challenges and potential opportunities, allowing for a richer understanding of the complexities surrounding the program.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility to explore specific themes while enabling participants to share their insights freely. The interview questions focused on three main areas: challenges faced in implementing the 13-Year Compulsory Education Program, strategies employed to overcome barriers to equitable education, and perceived opportunities and successes of the program. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted in a mix of Bahasa Indonesia and English, depending on the participant's preference. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

3.3 Participants

The study involved six informants selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives. These included two policymakers from the Ministry of Education and Culture, who provided insights into the program's design and policy framework; two educators from schools in both rural and urban areas, who shared their experiences in implementing the program at the grassroots level; one community leader representing marginalized communities, who highlighted the socio-cultural and economic challenges faced by local populations; and one representative from a non-governmental organization (NGO), who discussed collaborative efforts and potential solutions for improving educational access.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, familiarization with the data was conducted by reading the transcripts multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content. Second, key phrases and ideas were systematically identified and coded across all transcripts.

Third, these codes were grouped into relevant themes that addressed the research objectives, such as “infrastructure challenges,” “teacher shortages,” “technological opportunities,” and “policy innovations.” Fourth, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately captured the breadth and depth of the data. Finally, the themes were clearly defined and named to align with the study’s focus on the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the 13-Year Compulsory Education Program.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

a. Challenges in Implementing the Program

Participants highlighted the significant disparities in educational infrastructure between urban and rural areas, with schools in remote regions often lacking basic facilities such as classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. One educator noted: “Our school has been operating with limited resources for years. We have to use the same classroom for multiple grade levels, which compromises the learning environment.” This finding aligns with previous studies indicating that inadequate infrastructure is a critical barrier to educational equity in Indonesia (Purnamasari, 2021). Addressing this issue requires increased government investment and targeted policies to improve infrastructure in underserved areas.

1. Teacher Shortages and Competency Issues

Another key challenge is the uneven distribution of qualified teachers, as rural schools often struggle to retain trained educators due to a lack of incentives and limited professional development opportunities. A policymaker commented: “Many teachers are

reluctant to work in remote areas because of limited facilities and career growth prospects.” This issue echoes findings by Sumarto et al. (2019), who emphasized the need for comprehensive teacher training and appropriate incentives to ensure the equitable distribution of qualified educators across all regions.

2. Socio-Economic and Cultural Barriers

Participants from marginalized communities reported that poverty and cultural norms significantly affect school enrollment and retention rates, with some families prioritizing child labor over education, particularly in rural areas. A community leader explained: “In our village, education is often seen as secondary to helping the family earn a livelihood.” This challenge underscores the need for social support programs, such as scholarships and community awareness campaigns, to address the socio-economic barriers that hinder children's access to and continuity in education.

3. Logistical Challenges in Archipelagic Areas

Indonesia’s geographic diversity poses logistical challenges in delivering educational resources and managing schools, particularly in remote and island regions. An NGO representative stated: “Reaching remote islands is a logistical nightmare. Supplies, books, and even teachers take weeks to arrive.” This aligns with Aritonang’s (2020) findings, which highlight the importance of innovative solutions, such as digital learning tools and community-based educational initiatives, to overcome these

logistical barriers and ensure equitable access to education across the archipelago.

b. Opportunities for Educational Equity

1. Technology Integration

Participants

unanimously recognized the potential of technology to bridge educational gaps, viewing online learning platforms and digital tools as viable solutions for expanding access to quality education. A policymaker shared: "Technology has opened new avenues for reaching remote areas. With adequate internet infrastructure, we can deliver quality education to every corner of Indonesia." This finding supports Nugroho et al. (2021), who advocated for the integration of digital learning in Indonesia's education system. However, participants also emphasized that equitable access to internet connectivity and digital devices is essential to ensure that technological advancements benefit all students, including those in the most remote areas.

2. Policy Innovations and Public-Private Partnerships

Several participants emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts between the government, private sector, and NGOs to address resource constraints in education. An NGO representative noted: "Partnerships with private companies have helped us fund school renovations and provide scholarships to disadvantaged students." These collaborations align with Handayani & Rahmatullah (2020), who highlighted the critical role of public-private partnerships in enhancing education delivery

and expanding access to quality education, particularly for marginalized communities.

3. Community Engagement and Awareness

Community leaders stressed the importance of engaging local communities to promote the value of education, emphasizing that awareness campaigns and parental involvement are crucial for improving enrollment and retention rates. A community leader explained: "When parents understand the importance of education, they are more likely to prioritize it for their children." This finding resonates with Susilo's (2020) call for grassroots initiatives to foster a culture of education in marginalized communities, highlighting the need for locally driven efforts to support long-term educational development.

4. Teacher Training and Professional Development

Participants highlighted the need for continuous professional development programs to enhance teacher competencies, emphasizing that ongoing training is essential for both skill improvement and motivation. An educator remarked: "Training programs not only improve teaching skills but also motivate us to stay committed to our roles." This aligns with Santosa's (2022) recommendation for robust teacher training initiatives as a cornerstone of educational reform, reinforcing the importance of investing in teacher capacity to improve overall education quality.

4.2 Discussion

The findings reveal a dual narrative of challenges and opportunities

in implementing the 13-Year Compulsory Education Program. While infrastructure gaps, teacher shortages, and socio-economic barriers pose significant obstacles, the potential of technology, policy innovations, and community engagement offers a promising pathway toward achieving educational equity.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that combines increased government funding, strategic partnerships, and innovative solutions tailored to Indonesia's unique geographic and socio-cultural context. For instance, leveraging technology to deliver education in remote areas can mitigate logistical challenges, provided there is adequate investment in internet infrastructure. Similarly, targeted teacher training programs and community awareness campaigns can address human resource and cultural barriers.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on educational reform by highlighting the specific challenges and opportunities in Indonesia's context. The findings underscore the importance of a collaborative and inclusive approach to policy implementation, ensuring that no child is left behind in the pursuit of equitable education.

5. CONCLUSION

The 13-Year Compulsory Education Program represents a pivotal step toward achieving equitable education in Indonesia; however, this study reveals significant challenges, including infrastructure deficiencies, teacher shortages, socio-economic and cultural barriers, and logistical issues in archipelagic regions. Despite these obstacles, the program offers substantial opportunities through the integration of technology, innovative policies, public-private partnerships, and community engagement. The findings highlight the need for a comprehensive and collaborative approach to effectively address these challenges, with specific recommendations including increased government investment in educational infrastructure, equitable distribution of qualified teachers, targeted social support programs, and the strategic use of technology to deliver quality education in remote areas. Strengthening partnerships between the government, private sector, and NGOs is essential to mobilize resources and implement sustainable solutions. By fostering community awareness and prioritizing teacher training and professional development, Indonesia can make significant progress toward ensuring that all children have access to quality education. This study emphasizes the importance of inclusive, adaptable, and context-specific strategies in the successful implementation of the 13-Year Compulsory Education Program, ultimately contributing to the nation's broader social and economic development.

REFERENCE

- [1] W. Rahman and L. Asha, "The Analysis of the Comparison of the Education System in Indonesia: Perspectives on Gaps and Innovation," *TOFEDU Futur. Educ. J.*, vol. 3, no. 5, pp. 2009–2016, 2024.
- [2] M. Habibi, "Ketimpangan Pembangunan Daerah di Era Otonomi Daerah," *Multiverse Open Multidiscip. J.*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 59–63, 2024.
- [3] A. Wahyudiono, "Peran Program Banyuwangi Mengajar Dalam Mengurangi Ketimpangan Akses Pendidikan Dan Dampaknya Terhadap Pembangunan Ekonomi Daerah," 2024.
- [4] A. Azzahra, R. Rahayu, N. S. Marlina, N. Saebah, and W. E. Saputro, "The role of education in economic growth and breaking the chain of poverty in Indonesia," *J. Manag. Econ. Financ.*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 55–63, 2024.
- [5] Y. Yusuf, "Pendidikan yang Memerdekakan: Persepektif Freire dan Ki Hajar Dewantara," *Perad. J. Interdiscip. Educ. Res.*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 55–72, 2024.
- [6] S. Sukari and S. Sugiyarti, "Mengidentifikasi Isu-isu Pendidikan di Indonesia dan Solusinya," *TSAQOFAH*, vol. 4, no. 6, 2024.
- [7] I. F. Farkhati, "Social Inequality and Access to Education: Structural Analysis in Indonesia." *OSF*, 2024.
- [8] Y. A. Tobondo, "Challenges and Solutions in the Implementation of Educational Policies in Indonesia: A Literature

- Analysis of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka and Teacher Reform," *EDUKASIA J. Pendidik. dan Pembelajaran*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 1157–1164, 2024.
- [9] Y. Handayani and S. Sukari, "Problematika Sistem Pendidikan di Indonesia," *J. Pendidik. DAN ILMU Sos.*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 168–179, 2025.
- [10] M. A. Nugraha and A. Hambali, "Probematics And Challenges Of The Education System In Indonesia," *J. Manaj. Pendidik. Islam Al-Idarah*, vol. 8, no. 01, pp. 24–32, 2023.
- [11] G. Kalita, "NEP 2020 policies for inclusive education," *Sci. Temper*, vol. 15, no. spl-2, 2024.
- [12] M. M. Rahaman, M. A. Habib, and M. Wahiduzzaman, "Fostering Inclusive and Effective Education: Insights from Bangladesh," *Teach. World J. Educ. Res.*, vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 1–5, 2024.
- [13] E. V. Fabri, E. D. Brugnera, F. F. Rodrigues, M. F. Nogueira, and M. R. Oliveira, "Cultura Digital E Inclusão: Ampliando O Acesso Ao Conhecimento," *ARACÊ*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 17688–17703, 2024.
- [14] E. S. Animashaun, B. T. Familoni, and N. C. Onyebuchi, "Comparative analysis of inclusive education policies in STEM and general education," 2024.
- [15] M. M. Abdillah, M. Ulum, and L. Judijanto, "Strategi Efektif untuk Mengurangi Kesenjangan Pendidikan: Tinjauan Literatur pada Intervensi Global," *J. Ilm. Edukatif*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 323–331, 2024.
- [16] L. Lin, Z. Li, R. Li, X. Li, and J. Gao, "Diffusion models for time-series applications: a survey," *Front. Inf. Technol. Electron. Eng.*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 19–41, 2024.
- [17] N. T. Borgen, H. D. Zachrisson, and A. M. J. Sandsør, "Schools equalizing or exacerbating inequality? Between-school variability in the relationship between socioeconomic background and academic achievement," 2025.
- [18] K. E. KADIO, "Socioeconomic Background, School Quality and Peer Effects in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Sch. Qual. Peer Eff. Sub-Saharan Africa* (January 31, 2025), 2025.
- [19] A. Naim, "Equity across the educational spectrum: innovations in educational access crosswise all levels," in *Frontiers in Education*, 2025, vol. 9, p. 1499642.
- [20] B. Irawan, J. C. Simon, M. Z. Alif, A. R. Saliman, E. Fatmawati, and L. Judijanto, "Addressing Educational Inequality Through Sustainable Policies: an Evaluation from the Education Policy and Sdgs Perspective in Indonesia," *J. Law Sustain. Dev.*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. e3152–e3152, 2024.
- [21] S. Romlah, A. Imron, Maisyaroh, A. Sunandar, and Z. A. Dami, "A free education policy in Indonesia for equitable access and improvement of the quality of learning," *Cogent Educ.*, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 2245734, 2023.
- [22] H. S. Nabiela and N. Ulfatin, "Inclusive education policy in Indonesia: best practices, challenges, and future directions," *Int. J. Educ. Res. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 4, no. 6, pp. 1007–1012, 2023.
- [23] D. Zhang, X. Li, and J. Xue, "Education inequality between rural and urban areas of the People's Republic of China, migrants' children education, and some implications," *Asian Dev. Rev.*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 196–224, 2015.
- [24] H. C. Coşkun, "Reflection of the iceberg: Key issues and challenges of education in Balochistan," *Cult. Educ. Futur.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 47–65, 2023.
- [25] F. Sari, "Challenges and Opportunities to Well Education," *TOFEDU Futur. Educ. J.*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 787–792, 2024.
- [26] S. Provasnik, "Judicial activism and the origins of parental choice: The court's role in the institutionalization of compulsory education in the United States, 1891–1925," *Hist. Educ. Q.*, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 311–347, 2006.
- [27] K. N. Kuteesa, C. U. Akpuokwe, and C. A. Udeh, "Gender equity in education: addressing challenges and promoting opportunities for social empowerment," *Int. J. Appl. Res. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 631–641, 2024.
- [28] G. Pirzada, A. Yousaf, and S. Masood, "Issues, Challenges & Opportunities of Education for Marginalized Communities in Pakistan," *Indus J. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 552–564, 2024.
- [29] S. Ding, X. Dong, and S. Li, "Women's employment and family income inequality during China's economic transition," *Fem. Econ.*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 163–190, 2009.