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Comparative Study: Education Policy in Indonesia Versus Japan in Realizing Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education)

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ABSTRACT

This study compares the education systems and quality in Indonesia and Japan in an effort to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) goal number 4, namely quality education. This study aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each education system, examine the education policies implemented, and examine the role of culture and society in supporting the achievement of quality education. With a descriptive-qualitative approach based on literature studies, this study found that Japan has succeeded in achieving most of the SDGs targets for quality education through consistent education policies, human resource development, and utilization of technology. In contrast, Indonesia still faces various challenges, ranging from regional disparities, teacher quality, to limited education infrastructure. The results of this analysis are expected to provide input for policy makers in Indonesia in improving the quality of national education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main pillars in the development of a nation. Quality education not only has an impact on individual development, but also becomes a driving force for the social, economic, and cultural development of society as a whole. In a global context, the commitment to providing inclusive and quality education is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially the fourth goal: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".

In addition, quality education is also closely related to the use of technology in learning. In the era of the industrial revolution 4.0, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in education is very important. Integration of technology in the teaching and learning process can open access to wider learning resources, enable personalization of learning, and increase the effectiveness of the learning process. However, the digital divide or gap in access to technology is still a major challenge, especially in remote areas [1].

Indonesia, as a developing country with the fourth largest population in the world, has a big challenge in realizing quality education that is evenly distributed throughout the country. Although various policies have been implemented, such as the Smart Indonesia Program, the Independent Curriculum, and increasing education funds in the APBN, there are still various

fundamental problems, such as: (1) there is still a gap in the quality of education between urban and rural areas. Many schools in remote areas still lack adequate learning facilities, qualified teachers, and relevant teaching materials; (2) the teacher recruitment and training system still faces various problems, such as lack of ongoing training, uneven distribution of teachers, and weak supervision and performance evaluation [2]; (3) the curriculum used is often less responsive to local needs and developments. The curriculum still tends to be dense with material and oriented towards cognitive achievement alone, without much space for character development, creativity, and critical thinking skills.

Meanwhile, Japan is known as one of the countries with an efficient education system and is oriented towards character building and mastery of 21st century skills. Japan also has high achievements in global education indicators, such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), with a stable education system, adequate infrastructure support, and high community involvement in the education process. Therefore, a comparison between Indonesia and Japan can provide an overview of the key factors that influence the quality of education in a country.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Quality Education in a Global Perspective

The concept of quality education has become a global concern since the declaration of Education for All (EFA) by UNESCO in 1990, which was later strengthened in the SDGs in 2015. Quality education is defined as education that meets the basic needs of learners, takes into account cultural and local contexts, and is relevant to life and future development.

According to [3], indicators of quality education include:

1. Availability of adequate infrastructure and facilities
2. Competent and trained teachers
3. Relevant curriculum
4. Effective evaluation and assessment system
5. A safe and supportive learning environment
6. Equality of access and participation

Japan has adopted all of these elements in its education system, while Indonesia still faces serious challenges, especially in equalizing the quality of education in disadvantaged, frontier and outermost (3T) regions.

2.2 Education in Indonesia: Structure and Challenges

The Indonesian education system is regulated by Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. Basic education lasts for 9 years (6 years of elementary school and 3 years of junior high school), followed by secondary education and higher education. Since 2013, Indonesia has implemented the 2013 Curriculum, which has now been refined into the Merdeka Curriculum (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

However, several major challenges still remain, including:

1. The quality of teachers is not evenly distributed
2. Low student learning outcomes (Indonesia ranked bottom in PISA 2018)
3. High school dropout rates in 3T regions
4. Inequality in the distribution of infrastructure
5. Lack of integration of digital technology in learning

In response to these challenges, various efforts have been made by the government and other stakeholders. In Indonesia, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes student-centered learning and character building is one step towards more meaningful education. The Teacher Leader and School Leader Program also aims to increase the capacity of educators and educational units in creating active, collaborative, and contextual learning (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

However, to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of these programs, continuous evaluation, strengthening of institutional capacity, and fair and efficient budget allocation are needed. Educational research and innovation must also continue to be developed to formulate strategies that are evidence-based and relevant to the local context. In addition, it is important to build a positive learning culture in the community, where education is seen as a long-term investment and a shared responsibility.

2.3 Education in Japan: Efficiency and Systemic Excellence

Japanese education is renowned for its efficiency and is deeply rooted in moral values, hard work ethics, and discipline. Compulsory education lasts for 9 years, and almost all primary school graduates go on to higher education [4].

Characteristics of the Japanese education system:

1. Integrated and continuously updated national curriculum
2. Teachers undergo ongoing training and certification tests
3. Widespread use of technology in learning
4. A clean, safe school environment that supports character building
5. Learning activities are not only academic, but also social and emotional.

2.4 PISA and Education Quality

PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) conducted by [5] provides an important picture of the quality of education. The results of PISA 2018 show:

1. Japan: Ranked 6th for mathematics and 11th for reading out of 79 countries.
2. Indonesia: Ranked 72nd for reading, 73rd for math, and 71st for science.

This shows a large gap in student outcomes between the two countries.

2.5 **Theory of Educational Quality**

Some of the theories used as the basis for analysis include:

1. [6]: Quality education is seen from input (resources), process (teaching), and output (learning outcomes and social contributions).
2. Human Capital Theory [7]: Education as an investment in human resources that increases economic productivity.
3. Constructivism Theory (Piaget & Vygotsky): The quality of education depends on the active involvement of students in the learning process and the role of the social environment.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research method [8]. This study does not use primary data, but secondary data collected from reliable sources such as scientific journals, academic books, international institution reports [3], [5], and official government data with data sources consisting of:

1. Primary sources: Official government documents (National Education System Law, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Strategic Plan, PISA and SDGs reports) [9], [10].
2. Secondary sources: Accredited international and national journals, academic textbooks, scientific articles.

Data selection criteria:

1. Published by an official institution or university
2. Relevant to the topic of quality education

3.1 Data Analysis Techniques

Data is analyzed through steps including data reduction, namely selecting information relevant to the focus of the research, presenting data by compiling findings based on sub-themes (policies, teachers, curriculum, etc.), and finally drawing conclusions, namely interpreting data based on theory and actual context.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Comparison of Indonesian and Japanese Education Policies

Indonesia has set education as a national priority, reflected in the constitutional mandate that stipulates 20% of the APBN for education. Therefore, Indonesia implements a sustainable education development policy. This is reflected in policies such as 12-Year Compulsory Education, the Smart Indonesia Program, and the Independent Curriculum as real efforts by the government to support the SDGs of quality education.

However, policy implementation in the field is often hampered by the following things:

1. Lack of synergy between central and regional governments
2. Weak supervision and evaluation of education programs
3. Lack of community involvement in education planning

For example, even though BOS (School Operational Assistance) is widely allocated, its use is still hampered by bureaucracy and lack of school management capacity [11].

Japan implements an education policy based on evaluation and consistency. Japan has a very structured education system under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [12]. Education policies in Japan are very consistent from the center to the regions, supported by:

1. National Curriculum Standardswhich applies uniformly
2. Strict supervision of curriculum implementation and evaluation of results
3. Support for regional governments that are autonomous but in line with national policies

Japan has also long implemented character education (tokkatsu) at all levels of primary and secondary education [13].

4.2 Analysis of SDGs Goal 4 (Quality Education) Achievement

a. Access and Participation in Education

Indonesia has shown an increase in the net enrollment rate (APM), but still faces a gap between urban and rural areas. The APM for SMA/MA equivalent in 2022 only reached around 65% nationally, lower in eastern Indonesia [14].

Japan, on the other hand, has achieved almost 100% participation for all levels of compulsory education and has a secondary to higher education transition rate above 80% [15].

b. Quality and Learning Outcomes

In international test results such as PISA, as discussed earlier, Japan always excels, showing that their academic achievements are very high.

In contrast, Indonesia's PISA achievements are consistently low [5], indicating systemic problems in:

1. Learning methods that focus too much on memorization
2. Lack of competency-based teacher training
3. Resource gaps between regions

c. Teacher Quality and Education Personnel Training

In Indonesia, the challenge of teacher professionalism is still a big problem. Although teacher certification has been implemented since 2005, the results have not been significant in improving the quality of learning [16].

Main constraints:

1. Training is not sustainable and lacks relevance
2. High administrative burden
3. The distribution of teachers is uneven (more in cities than in villages)

In Japan, a strict recruitment and training system is implemented for those who want to become teachers. Teachers in Japan are recruited through a very strict national and local selection system. After graduating, they undergo annual training required by [13]. This approach creates a culture of high professionalism among teachers. In addition, Japan has a mentoring system for new teachers (NITS program), which is very helpful in improving the quality of teaching [4].

d. Curriculum, Innovation, and Educational Technology

The curriculum in Indonesia tends to be flexible, this can be seen from the Merdeka curriculum. The Merdeka curriculum in Indonesia gives teachers and schools room to adapt materials to the local context and needs of students. However, implementation is still limited, because teachers have not been well trained in local curriculum design and the gap in access to learning technology devices still occurs in the field [11].

Compared to Indonesia, the Japanese Curriculum is national, consistent, and project-based. The Japanese national curriculum focuses not only on academics, but also on social skills, moral values, and fitness. Learning materials are also always linked to global issues, including the SDGs. Innovation is also marked by the use of ICT in learning since elementary school [12].

e. Learning Environment and School Culture

The condition of the learning environment in Indonesia is more varied and fragmented. This can be seen from the condition of schools in Indonesia which vary greatly, from very advanced to very underdeveloped. So the main problem in Indonesia is inadequate facilities such as tables, chairs, laboratories, internet that do not meet standards or are no longer suitable for use. In addition, the school environment is not always safe or comfortable for learning, which is reflected in the minimal involvement of parents in working together to create the intended environment [17].

Meanwhile, in Japan, the culture of discipline and collectivity has been well-cultivated and implemented. The learning environment in Japan is characterized by high discipline and cleanliness maintained by the students themselves. These values are instilled early on through activities such as eating together, cleaning, and collective class activities. This culture encourages order, responsibility, and social cohesion in learning [18].

f. Evaluation and Educational Achievements

The learning evaluation system in Indonesia is still dominated by national and summative exams, although it has now begun to shift to minimum competency assessments (AKM). However, challenges such as academic honesty and resource gaps complicate fair implementation

(Center for Education Assessment, 2022).

In contrast to Japan, which relies more on formative and diagnostic evaluations conducted by teachers periodically, with a direct feedback system to students and parents. Evaluation is not only for grades, but also social and emotional development. This results in more comprehensive learning reporting and has an impact on students' long-term development [4].

5. CONCLUSION

Based on a comparative analysis of the education systems in Indonesia and Japan in the context of achieving quality education (SDGs 4), the following main points can be concluded:

a. Education Policy

Japan shows consistency and effectiveness of education policies from the central to local levels, supported by strong structures and disciplined implementation. In contrast, Indonesia has the spirit of curriculum reform and strengthening access, but still faces challenges in implementation and equity.

b. Teacher Quality

Japan has a systematic and strict teacher recruitment, training, and development system. Teaching is considered a prestigious profession with high competency standards. In Indonesia, teacher certification efforts have not been able to significantly improve teaching competency as a whole, especially in the 3T areas.

c. Curriculum and Learning

The Japanese curriculum emphasizes a balance between academic knowledge and character development, with project-based and contextual learning. Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum has moved towards flexibility and contextualization, but its implementation is not yet uniform.

d. Utilization of Technology

Japan has long integrated technology into learning, including the use of tablets and digital learning management systems. Indonesia still faces a gap in digital infrastructure and skills, even though the government continues to develop educational digitalization initiatives.

e. Educational Evaluation

The Japanese evaluation system is formative and in-depth, focusing on the holistic development of students. Meanwhile, Indonesia is still in a transition period from national exam-based evaluation to minimum competency assessments that are more oriented towards critical thinking skills.

f. Achievement of SDGs

Overall, Japan has done very well in meeting most of the SDG 4 indicators. Indonesia has shown progress in access, but still needs significant improvements in quality, equity, and monitoring systems.

6. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and conclusions above, the following are policy and strategy recommendations that can be taken by Indonesia to improve the quality of national education:

a. Strengthening Policy Implementation

1. Ensure consistent implementation of the national curriculum across all regions
2. Enhancing the role of regional education offices in monitoring and evaluation
3. Providing management training to school principals to be more visionary and professional

b. Improving Teacher Professionalism
1. Building a sustainable training system based on good practices such as the mentoring system in Japan
2. Developing digital pedagogical training and adaptive technologies
3. Ensure equitable distribution of teachers through special incentives in remote areas

c. Needs-Based Curriculum Transformation
1. Encourage project-based learning and student-centered learning approaches
2. Incorporate character, ethics, and citizenship education more explicitly into the curriculum
3. Simplifying the administrative burden on teachers to focus on the learning process

d. Equity in Technology and Digital Access
1. Providing internet connectivity and digital learning devices in all schools
2. Training teachers and students in the use of open-source educational technologies
3. Developing a national platform for inclusive and adaptive online learning

e. Student Development Oriented Evaluation
1. Improving teacher capacity in formative and diagnostic assessment
2. Eliminating evaluation practices that are solely oriented towards final grades
3. Involve parents in regular child development reports

f. International Collaboration and Adaptation
1. Adopting best practices from Japan, such as tokkatsu and the trained substitute teacher system
2. Developing bilateral cooperation in education between Indonesia and Japan in the fields of teacher training, student exchanges, and educational research.

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