

# A Comparative Study of Education Equity Policy in Remote Areas in Indonesia and Malaysia

Supianto, Sri Marmoah, Jenny Indrastoeti Siti Poerwanti, Siti Istiyati, Hasan Mahfud, Sukarno

Universitas Sebelas Maret  
[supianto@staff.uns.ac.id](mailto:supianto@staff.uns.ac.id)

**Abstract.** *This research aims to compare the education equity policies in remote areas of Indonesia and Malaysia to identify the differences, similarities, and effectiveness in addressing socioeconomic disparities between urban and remote regions. The study examines policy documents, government reports, and previous research using a qualitative comparative approach. Indonesia employs a regional autonomy approach, while Malaysia adheres to a centralized system in education policy. Both countries have adopted financial assistance programs to increase the participation of students from low-income families in remote areas. Critical challenges in policy implementation include limited facilities and infrastructure, demanding access to transportation, limited human resources, and sociocultural barriers. The study finds that policy successes are evident in increased student participation, improved infrastructure accessibility, provision of teaching staff, and community support. However, budget constraints and human resource limitations remain significant obstacles. The research concludes that effective education equity policies require proactive government involvement, active community participation, and periodic monitoring and evaluation to enhance policy effectiveness.*

**Keywords:** Education Equity, Public Policy, Remote Areas, South-East Asian Study, Indonesia and Malaysia

## INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main pillars of the development of a nation and is the key to improving the quality of human resources (Ningsih et al., 2022). Equitable access to education in all regions of a country is a significant challenge that must be overcome to minimize socioeconomic disparities between urban and remote areas (Muttaqin, 2018). In Indonesia and Malaysia, two countries with different geographical and social characteristics, efforts to realize equal access to education, especially in remote areas, have become the focus of the government's attention (Sawalludin et al., 2020; Thamrin, 2020).

Both face various obstacles in implementing policies to equalize access to education in remote areas, including limited facilities and infrastructure, demanding access to transportation, and sociocultural challenges that affect the quality of learning (Ardi et al., 2008; Romlah et al., 2023). Therefore, this research will conduct a comparative study of education equity policies in remote areas in Indonesia and Malaysia, hoping to identify differences, similarities, and the successes and failures of each country to achieve the goal of equal access to education.

Education development in Indonesia and Malaysia has undergone significant changes over time. Education has been in the spotlight in Indonesia since the Dutch colonial period. After independence in 1945, the government tried to increase access to education by establishing education as a right for every citizen (Sopia et al., 2023). However, equity challenges remain, especially in remote areas far from urban centers. Geographical factors, inadequate infrastructure, and economic differences between large and small islands are the main issues in equitable access to education in Indonesia (Priatama et al., 2022).

On the other hand, Malaysia experienced a shorter educational development than Indonesia but has recorded rapid progress in the education sector. Since its independence in 1957,

the Malaysian government has committed to providing equal access to education for all its people (Symaco, 2014). Nonetheless, there are challenges in realizing equal access to education in remote areas, such as geographical factors and remoteness that affect the accessibility and quality of learning. Even though the government has adopted various policies and initiatives to improve access to education in remote areas, inequality remains a significant issue.

The Indonesian government has adopted various policies to increase equity in access to education in remote areas. The regional autonomy program that has been in effect since 1999 allows local governments to manage education according to local needs (Karolina et al., 2021). In addition, the Smart Indonesia Program (PIP) and Smart Indonesia Card (KIP) provide financial assistance to students from low-income families, thereby increasing the participation of students in remote areas in education (Mashur, 2023).

On the other hand, the Malaysian government has adopted the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025, which aims to improve the quality of education and reduce disparities between urban and remote areas. Programs such as community-based schools have been launched to accommodate local needs and increase student participation in remote areas of education (MOE, 2013).

Previous research has shown improvements in student participation and quality of learning in remote areas due to policies on equal access to education. Financial assistance programs launched by the government, such as the Smart Indonesia Program in Indonesia, have helped reduce the economic burden on low-income families and increased student enrollment rates in remote areas (Ninghardjanti et al., 2023). However, several challenges need to be overcome in implementing educational equity policies. One is the challenge of recruiting and retaining quality teachers in remote areas. Remoteness and the quality of educational infrastructure can affect teachers' interest in teaching in remote areas, so efforts are needed to improve facilities and incentives for teachers.

In addition, the government's role in formulating sustainable policies oriented to local needs is also an essential factor in achieving equal access to education. The governments of Indonesia and Malaysia need to collaborate with various stakeholders, including communities, businesses, and educational institutions, to create an inclusive and equitable educational environment (Nirzam & Ramadhan, 2023; Reza, 2016).

A comparative study of education equity policies in remote areas in Indonesia and Malaysia is crucial to understanding the challenges and opportunities in increasing access to education for people in remote areas. With advances in technology and globalization, the two countries need to continue to innovate and collaborate in dealing with existing challenges.

The main objective of this research is to conduct a comprehensive comparative study of the education equity policies in remote areas of Indonesia and Malaysia. This study aims to identify the differences, similarities, and effectiveness of these policies and to understand the successes and challenges faced by both countries in achieving equitable access to education. Through this analysis, the research seeks to provide insights and recommendations for policymakers to enhance educational equity in remote areas, contributing to the broader goal of minimizing socioeconomic disparities and improving the quality of education for all children.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a comparative method to study education equity policies in remote areas in Indonesia and Malaysia. The comparative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to analyze differences and similarities in implementing education policies between the two countries. This method will help gain a deeper understanding of the strategies and challenges faced by each country to achieve the goal of equal access to education in remote areas.

This study uses secondary data as the primary source of information. Secondary data was obtained from various sources, including official government reports and publications, previous

research reports, and statistical data on education in Indonesia and Malaysia. The data was collected over multiple years so that the analysis could reflect the current situation in education policy in both countries.

Research also uses the document analysis method to identify the central policies that the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia have implemented to realize equal access to education in remote areas. Document analysis allows researchers to investigate the history of policies, goals, and strategies each country has adopted to overcome educational equity challenges.

**Table 1. Aspects and Indicators in Document Analysis**

Aspects	Indicators
Document Identification	Document Title
	Publisher
	Publication Date
Policy Content	Document Purpose
	Policy Objectives
	Policy Targets
Implementation Aspect	Strategies and Programs
	Implementation Plan
	Relevant Parties
Achievements and Impacts	Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms
	Success Indicators
	Achievement Reports
Challenges and Constraints	Social and Economic Impacts
	Technical Obstacles
	Social and Cultural Barriers
	Economic Barriers

The data that has been collected is analyzed in depth to identify patterns, themes, and differences in the implementation of education equity policies in remote areas. During the research process, researchers used triangulation analysis techniques to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. This technique involves using multiple data sources or analytical methods to verify research findings. Thus, the results of this study will be more reliable and have the power to provide a comprehensive picture of education equity policies in remote areas in Indonesia and Malaysia.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Comparison of Education Equity Policy

Education is one of the critical aspects of the development of a nation. The governments of Indonesia and Malaysia are highly aware of the importance of equal access to education, especially in remote areas, which often face challenges in terms of accessibility and quality of education. These two countries have adopted policies to increase equity in access to education in remote areas. However, the approaches and strategies used by Indonesia and Malaysia in implementing education equity policies have differences and similarities that are interesting to discuss.

#### *Autonomy vs. Centralization Approach*

One of the main differences in education equity policies in Indonesia and Malaysia is the government approach. In Indonesia, the government applies a regional autonomy approach, in which local governments are given the authority to manage education according to local needs (Erdayani et al., 2023). This approach allows local governments to adapt education policies to local conditions and facilitates community participation in education-related decision-making.

On the other hand, Malaysia adheres to a centralized approach to education policy (Lee & Samuel, 2019). The central government has greater control over determining education policies in

all regions of the country, including in remote areas. Policy decisions are made by the central government and implemented uniformly throughout the country, including in remote areas.

#### *Financial Assistance Program for Equal Access*

Despite their different approaches, Indonesia and Malaysia have adopted financial assistance programs to increase student participation in remote areas. In Indonesia, the Smart Indonesia Program (PIP) and Smart Indonesia Card (KIP) provide financial assistance to students from low-income families to help reduce their economic burden and increase their educational opportunities (Afiefa & Ahmad, 2023). PIP and KIP admissions are based on poverty data, providing opportunities for low-income students to obtain a better education.

In Malaysia, a program called "Skim Bantuan Pelajaran" (Education Assistance Scheme) has been implemented to support student participation in remote areas (Rashid & Samat, 2018). This scheme offers financial aid to students from low-income households, aiming to incentivize their engagement in schooling. Providing financial support intends to alleviate economic barriers and foster tremendous enthusiasm among students in remote regions to pursue education.

#### *Policy Focus and Implementation Strategy*

Although the general objective of an education equity policy in remote areas is to increase education participation and quality, the focus of the policy and implementation strategy may differ between Indonesia and Malaysia. In Indonesia, equity in access to education in remote areas often emphasizes improving infrastructure and providing adequate educational facilities (Muttaqin, 2018; Romlah et al., 2023). School construction programs and improving accessibility are the main focus to achieve educational equity.

Meanwhile, Malaysia emphasizes improving education quality and ensuring equitable access continuity (MOE, 2013). Curriculum development programs, improving teacher quality, and learning innovation are the main strategies for achieving educational equity in remote areas. The Malaysian government is also focusing on strengthening the role of society and involving parents in supporting their children's education.

#### *Policy Evaluation and Monitoring*

Evaluation and monitoring of education equity policies can also differ between the two countries. In Indonesia, evaluating educational equity programs involves monitoring the availability of infrastructure and student participation. Local governments play an essential role in overseeing the implementation of policies at the local level (Agus et al., 2024).

In Malaysia, the evaluation of educational equity policies is more focused on improving the quality of learning and student learning outcomes (Salleh & Woollard, 2019). Using academic evaluation metrics and school performance assessments is essential to improving the quality of education in remote areas.

### **Challenges in Policy Implementation**

Implementing education equity policies in remote areas in Indonesia and Malaysia is difficult, and various complex challenges are faced. Even though both countries firmly commit to improving the accessibility and quality of education in remote areas, infrastructure, accessibility, human resources, and sociocultural challenges are some of the main factors that influence the successful implementation of these policies.

#### *Limited Facilities and Infrastructure*

The main challenge in implementing education equity policies in remote areas is the limited educational facilities and infrastructure. Remote regions have limited access to adequate educational facilities and infrastructure (Karolina et al., 2021). Schools in remote areas often face poor building

conditions, a lack of classrooms, and limited learning facilities. This can hurt the learning quality and student motivation to attend school.

In Indonesia, limited educational facilities and infrastructure in remote areas are a severe obstacle to achieving equal access (Pereira, 2016). In addition, there are significant differences between urban and rural areas regarding the availability of educational infrastructure, which can exacerbate the education gap between these areas.

#### *Difficult Transportation Access*

Remote areas are often difficult to reach due to limited transportation access. Damaged roads or lack of adequate public transportation are the main obstacles to students' school access (Suraharta, 2021). Difficult access to transportation can cause students to walk long distances to reach school, impacting the level of participation and regularity of student attendance.

This condition can also affect the mobility of teachers and educators. For teachers teaching in remote areas, challenges in access to transportation can make it difficult for them to reach school on time and consistently. This challenge is one of the contributing factors to the difficulty of recruiting and retaining quality teachers in remote areas.

#### *Limited Human Resources*

Limited human resources are a severe challenge in implementing education equity policies in remote areas. Remote areas tend to experience a shortage of qualified teachers and educators (Mitchell et al., 2022). Teachers in remote areas often face challenges regarding accessibility to training and professional development, which can impact the quality of learning delivered to students. The problem of teacher shortages can also affect the workload of teachers in remote areas. With a limited number of teachers, a teacher often has to teach several levels and subjects at once, reducing the quality and focus of learning.

#### *Sociocultural Challenges and Isolation*

Sociocultural aspects and geographical remoteness are significant challenges in implementing education equity policies in remote areas. Some communities in remote areas have different mindsets and traditions regarding education, which can affect community participation and support for educational equity programs (Shaeffer, 2019). The government recognizes the importance of the community's role in supporting education equity policies, but challenges in building awareness and active community participation are often obstacles (Roslan et al., 2017). In addition, different customs and languages in remote areas can also affect communication and understanding between the parties involved in implementing policies.

#### *Supervision and Coordination of Policy Implementation*

Monitoring and coordinating the implementation of education equity policies is crucial to ensure these programs' success. Challenges in coordination between the central government and local governments often become obstacles to implementing procedures (Ata et al., 2021). Strengthening the mechanism for monitoring and reporting on policy implementation in remote areas must be improved to ensure that educational equity programs run well.

### **Policy Successes and Weaknesses**

The policy of equal distribution of education in remote areas is an essential step in achieving the goals of inclusive and just education development. This policy aims to improve the accessibility and quality of education in remote areas so that every child has the same opportunity to get a quality education. However, the successful implementation of education equity policies in remote areas cannot be separated from several supporting factors and challenges that must be overcome.

#### *The Success of Education Equity Policy*

One indicator of the success of an equal education policy in remote areas is an increase in student participation in schools. Implementing financial assistance programs such as the Smart Indonesia Program (PIP) in Indonesia and Skim Bantuan Pelajaran has increased the involvement of students from low-income families in remote areas (MOE, 2013). Financial assistance gives children from low-income families more significant opportunities to attend school and access better education.

The education equity policy has also contributed to increasing the accessibility of educational infrastructure in remote areas. The governments of Indonesia and Malaysia have implemented programs to build and repair school facilities in remote areas (Pereira, 2016). The construction of new schools and improvements to educational facilities have helped reduce the infrastructure gap between urban and rural areas.

The success of the education equity policy can also be seen in the government's efforts to provide quality educators in remote areas. Teacher transfer and placement programs in remote areas have increased the availability of teachers in regions that previously experienced teacher shortages (Mitchell et al., 2022). With adequate teaching staff, the quality of learning in remote areas can be improved.

The success of education equity policies in remote areas also depends heavily on the support and active participation of the local community. Participatory programs that involve communities in planning and implementing policies have helped to strengthen the commitment and implementation of policies at the local level. Community support also plays an essential role in maintaining the continuity of the education equity program in remote areas.

#### *Weaknesses in Education Equity Policy*

One of the main weaknesses of education equity policies in remote areas is budget constraints (Arianto et al., 2018). Even though the government has allocated funds for education equity programs, the amount is often insufficient to address all the problems faced in remote areas. In some cases, the funds allocated were not on target or less efficient in achieving educational equity goals.

The policy of equal distribution of education in remote areas also faces obstacles in terms of human resources. The limited quality of teachers in remote areas is a severe obstacle to improving the quality of education (Febriana et al., 2018). The quality of teachers in remote areas can be affected by limited access to training and professional development and unfavorable working conditions.

Sociocultural challenges and geographical remoteness are weaknesses in implementing education equity policies in remote areas. Differences in the mindset and traditions of people in remote areas can affect participation and support for educational equity programs (Harsono, 2018). In addition, different customs and languages can also affect communication and understanding between the parties involved in implementing policies.

Monitoring and coordinating the implementation of education equity policies in remote areas often faces challenges. Weak coordination between central and regional governments can lead to inconsistencies in policy implementation. Inadequate oversight can also result in a lack of accountability and transparency in using funds and implementing educational equity programs.

#### **Government Role and Community Involvement**

The policy of equal distribution of education in remote areas is a complex effort and requires the government's active role and the local community's involvement. The government's role is crucial in designing, implementing, and supervising education equity policies to ensure that access to and quality of education is evenly distributed throughout the country. Meanwhile, the involvement of the local community is also a determining factor for the success of this policy because the community has an essential role in supporting and maintaining the continuity of education equity programs in remote areas.

#### *The Government's Role in Education Equity Policy*

The government's first role in the education equity policy is designing it. The government must conduct an in-depth analysis of education in remote areas, identify existing challenges and gaps, and design policies that suit local needs (OECD, 2012). In addition, the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including local governments, educational institutions, and communities, must also be considered in designing policies to ensure alignment and the necessary support.

The government is essential in implementing education equity programs in remote areas. This includes budget allocation, placement and transfer of teachers, construction and repair of school infrastructure, and implementation of financial assistance programs for the community (Sulasmı et al., 2023). Program implementation must be carried out effectively and efficiently considering local conditions and each remote area's needs.

The government's role also includes monitoring and evaluating policies on the equal distribution of education in remote areas. Effective oversight can ensure that educational equity programs are carried out according to the plans and objectives set. Periodic evaluations are also needed to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of policies and identify areas that need improvement. The results of this evaluation can be used to make policy changes that align with existing needs and challenges.

#### *Community Involvement in Education Equity Policy*

The active involvement of the local community is the key to the success of a policy of equal distribution of education in remote areas. Communities support and strengthen policy implementation (Nugroho & Fimmastuti, 2020). Community support can be in the form of participation in planning and decision-making related to education, participation in school activities and equity programs, and help in efforts to improve the quality of education in remote areas.

The role of parents in supporting children's education is also significant in the context of educational equity. The involvement of parents in assisting and supporting children's education can increase student motivation and discipline in learning (MOE, 2013). Parents can also become partners for teachers and schools in supporting learning at home and ensuring their children's school attendance and regularity.

The community can also play a role in supervising the implementation of educational equity policies. Communities have a role as stakeholders who can provide input and feedback regarding implementing policies. Public participation in monitoring implementation can increase government accountability and transparency in using funds and implementing educational equity programs.

Community involvement also includes efforts to raise awareness about the importance of education in remote areas. Socialization programs and campaigns about the benefits of education for children and the community can help change people's mindset and culture toward education (Santoso et al., 2019). With increasing public awareness, it is hoped that there will be an increase in participation in and support for educational equity programs.

## **CONCLUSION**

The comparison of the Education Equity Policy between Indonesia and Malaysia reveals distinct approaches to enhancing access to education in remote areas. Indonesia employs a regional autonomy approach, allowing provincial governments to manage education according to local needs, whereas Malaysia follows a centralized system with greater control exercised by the central government. Both countries implement financial assistance programs—Indonesia's Smart Indonesia Program (PIP), the Smart Indonesia Card (KIP), and the Education Assistance Scheme—to support students from low-income families and promote educational participation.

Despite these efforts, both countries face significant challenges, including limited facilities, difficult transportation, inadequate human resources, and sociocultural barriers. Overcoming these obstacles requires comprehensive strategies that address education's infrastructural and qualitative aspects. Indonesia focuses on improving infrastructure and providing adequate educational

facilities, while Malaysia emphasizes enhancing the quality of education and engaging community support.

Effective implementation of education equity policies demands proactive government intervention and active community participation. Governments must diligently design, implement, and monitor policies to meet their goals. Concurrently, community support and involvement are crucial in sustaining educational initiatives and fostering a culture that values education.

To further improve educational equity, governments should enhance policy monitoring and evaluation. Increasing public awareness about the importance of education in remote areas is essential to change mindsets and cultural attitudes towards education. Future research should explore the long-term impacts of these policies and identify best practices that can be shared between countries to overcome common challenges.

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