

BRIDGING THE GAP: EFFORTS TO MINIMIZE EDUCATION GAPS THROUGH INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS

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<https://doi.org/10.24071/ijiet.v8i2.7341>

received 14 October 2023; accepted 22 July 2024

Abstract

This study intends to explore the efforts to minimize the education gap between urban and rural areas through the implementation of inclusive education. This research uses qualitative methods with an oncoming literature study which is carried out to gain information from various literature sources that are relevant to the issue of inclusive education and educational disparity. The results show that inclusive education has the potential to address existing educational disparities between urban and rural areas. Inclusive education, by prioritizing the accessibility and participation of students with diverse backgrounds and needs, is an approach that promotes equity in education. Collaboration of various stakeholders such as the government, educational institutions, and local communities is important to support the implementation of inclusive education and overcome obstacles faced by students in rural areas. This research offers a foundation for policy recommendations and obvious actions to optimize the implementation of inclusive education as a concrete effort to bridge the education gap.

Keywords: disparity, education, inclusive, rural, urban

Introduction

Disparity of access to education is still a significant challenge in the realm of Indonesian education to date. This gap manifests across multiple dimensions including socioeconomic background, geographic location, gender, ethnicity, and ability. Individuals coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often face barriers in obtaining quality education as financial constraints impact their access to adequate educational resources. With financial limitations, a person is also limited in choosing educational institutions and prefers schools at affordable prices even though they are not the best choice (Anwar, 2022).

Rural and remote areas face different challenges, The educational infrastructure in this region is sometimes only limited to dreams from pictures in textbooks. Majestic school buildings, modern laboratories, or digital libraries are still out-of-reach things. Not infrequently, internet access becomes a rare commodity. Education in rural areas needs to get special attention to detect the gaps



that exist compared to urban areas. Gaps that include accessibility, quality, and equality in education. Rural areas often face challenges of limited infrastructure, accessibility to adequate educational facilities, and availability of qualified teachers. These factors contribute to low participation rates, inadequate quality of learning, and high dropout rates in rural areas (Arnawan, 2016).

Investing resources and special attention to education in rural areas is essential. It is necessary to develop adequate educational infrastructure, teacher training in accordance with regional needs, and provision of sufficient educational resources. In addition, providing incentives for educators working in rural areas can help attract and retain qualified educators.

A holistic and inclusive approach is needed to minimize education gaps. Encouraging local community participation, involving parents in the education process, and understanding the local cultural context are important steps. The active involvement of the government, educational institutions, community organizations, and the private sector is also key to improving education in rural areas. By focusing on equitable access, improving quality, and ensuring equal opportunities, education in rural areas can be a motor of change that brings progress and equality and reduces disparity with urban areas.

Inclusive education in rural areas is a lofty idea that leads to an education system where no child is marginalized (Mahmud et al., 2023, p. 4). In rural areas with accessibility challenges and limited resources, inclusive education affirms that every child, regardless of origin, has the same right to quality education. It is about opening up opportunities for all students, including those with special needs. Promoting inclusive education in rural areas aims to ensure that rural children get justice with full access to quality education.

Justice is not a new thing in human life, it has undergone a very wide development in its history and has been widely discussed in various fields of discourse, theory, and practice. Justice has its paradigm and adapts to the needs of the theory to transform the form of justice. Community development discourses and practices can broaden different perspectives on justice. John Rawls is a phenomenal justice figure and thinker through his work "Theory of Justice". John Rawls' theory of justice focuses on the issue of how justice can be distributed in society fairly, through mutually agreed mechanisms regardless of social status (Amadi, 2012). With regard to inclusive education in rural areas, this theory can be a very relevant foundation to ensure that every child, especially those living in rural areas, has a fair and equal opportunity to get a quality education. Applying Rawls' theory in this context means ensuring that education policy considers the needs and conditions of children in rural areas without discrimination.

This study aims to analyze real efforts that can be made to minimize education gaps in rural and urban areas. Discuss how to create equal opportunities for learning for children and young people in remote villages so that no one is left behind, especially in this often-forgotten region. It is hoped that this research can open discourse to create inclusive education that embraces diversity and empowers every child with the knowledge and skills they need. With inclusive education, every child from various backgrounds and conditions is allowed to achieve their dreams.

Research with similar themes has been carried out but this study certainly has differences from previous studies, among the studies that can be correlated with this study is "Investigating Education Disparity in Urban and Rural Communities

Between Kota Baru and Banyusari Districts in Karawang Regency" which compares the condition of education in urban and rural areas reveals that the factor of education disparity in rural areas is the lack of emphasis on the community the importance of education and scholarship programs as well as relatively low rural literacy rates (Gumilar & Ningsih, 2022). "Rural and Urban Education Gaps" reveal the Education gaps that exist in cities and villages. Education in cities is more advanced, supported by adequate facilities and qualified teaching staff, while in rural areas, teachers tend to be less interested in a career in the village because of the lack of access to transportation and poor school facilities are serious factors that must be found solutions. The Bachelor of Education in the Regions (SM3T) Program is a concrete step by the government in efforts to equalize education in rural areas (Vito & Krisnani, 2015). "Villages and Cities in the Portrait of Education" states that education should be a priority for all Indonesians, but education in villages is a luxury that is difficult to obtain. The high cost of education to unaffordable access for rural communities is a serious problem faced. The government through the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System is responsible for providing quality education that is affordable or even free for the community (Anas et al., 2015). This research will focus more on bridging the education gap that exists in urban and rural areas, formulating concrete efforts to minimize existing gaps through inclusive education in rural areas, and providing recommendations for various stakeholders to maximize their role in advancing education in rural areas.

Method

The method in this study uses qualitative methods with a literature study approach (Adlini, 2022). Literature study is a research approach that focuses on collecting data from various literature sources that are relevant and related to the research topic, to analyze, synthesize, and present existing information. The first step in the literature study method is the identification and selection of literature sources relevant to the research topic. These literature sources can be scientific journals, books, articles, theses, and official publications related to inclusive education and education gaps in rural areas.

After the literature sources are identified, a reading and analysis of the content of each literature source is carried out. Information relevant to the research objectives is extracted and compiled systematically. Furthermore, the information is synthesized to form a comprehensive understanding of efforts to minimize education disparities through inclusive education in rural areas.

This research uses a literature study approach because it wants to build a strong and thorough theoretical foundation based on pre-existing findings and thoughts in the literature. This approach is considered appropriate to understand the efforts that have been made in minimizing education disparities through inclusive education in rural areas, to make a valuable contribution in the context of inclusive education, and to motivate further research in this area.

Findings and Discussion

Problems of education in rural areas

Education in rural areas certainly has its problems that are different from those in urban areas, by understanding the social conditions of the community and the problems they face in rural areas will provide an overview to formulate solutions by considering various aspects so that the resulting solutions can be in harmony with the situation or context in the village and run optimally.

The education of children in rural areas is often hindered by economic limitations or income from parents. Many of them experience financial difficulties that have an impact on the fulfilment of their children's education, thus students in rural areas experience difficulties in the accessibility and quality of education (Falah & Hadna, 2022). Educational expenses such as monthly tuition fees, textbooks, uniforms, and stationery can be a heavy burden for families with limited income. Some parents may be forced to choose between meeting the basic needs of the family or paying for their children's education. As a result, children from low-income families in rural areas have a high potential to drop out of school or even never attend formal school by choosing to work to help the family economy. Such conditions create gaps in access to education stemming from the internal conditions of children in rural areas.

In performing the quality education process, it is necessary to pay attention to aspects of infrastructure. Education in rural areas is often hampered by limited infrastructure such as the lack of schools, classrooms that do not meet standards, libraries, laboratories, and sports facilities that are far from feasible. This problem makes it difficult for children in rural areas to access quality education, good schools with adequate infrastructure may be too far away and difficult to reach for those who live in remote areas (Firdaus et al., 2018). Safe and comfortable transportation is very important for them if they have to pass through the shelter area or river. In addition, lack of access to technology and the internet is an obstacle to education in villages because digital resources are needed in today's modern era (Rismayani et al., 2021).

Another challenge that hinders education in rural areas is the inadequate quality of educators available. In rural areas, it is often difficult to attract and retain qualified educators to teach there. Many teachers are reluctant to teach in villages due to limited facilities and infrastructure which results in a lack of adequate and qualified teachers in rural schools. So that the teaching and learning process in the village can be affected. Moreover, teachers who dedicate themselves to rural areas have to face additional challenges such as lack of access to the training and professional development needed to improve the quality of their teaching (Elvira, 2021).

Population migration patterns also influence education in rural areas. Many villagers, especially the younger generation, tend to migrate to urban areas in search of job opportunities and better access to education (Widiawaty, 2019). This has an impact on decreasing the number of students in rural areas and can disrupt the sustainability of education there. This migration can also result in the loss of potential quality human resources in the village because many of the potential talents in the village who migrate and succeed in the city never return from overseas to develop education in their village.

The importance of inclusive education in rural areas

The Liberty Principle formulated by John Rawls states that every individual should have equal rights to the broadest system of fundamental freedoms and be acceptable to all. This underscores the importance of ensuring that every member of society has equal access to fundamental freedoms, one of which is education. This principle explains that individual freedom is an inviolable foundation in a just society, social structures must be designed to ensure that freedom of access to education must be felt by everyone, without exception (Soleh, 2004).

Inclusive education is an act to ensure that every member of society has an equal opportunity to receive quality education, without discriminating between children with special needs and children in general. The purpose is that all children can access proper and quality education to prepare for future life (Darma & Rusyidi, 2015). Inclusive education in rural areas is an educational approach that focuses on the full involvement and participation of every member of the village community in the Education process. This approach promotes the spirit of equality, diversity, and acceptance of individual differences.

In rural contexts, inclusive education encourages all children to have the right to adequate quality education regardless of their social background, abilities, or deficiencies. Inclusive education in rural areas also takes into account the unique characteristics of the village environment and the understanding of educational needs that are certainly different from urban areas as well as adjustments to cultural values and local norms. With full involvement and support between teachers, parents, and the community, it is hoped that it can provide an understanding of the importance of education, and create a conducive environment for learning to realize equitable, fair, and meaningful education for every member of society (Gutama & Widiyahseno, 2020).

Inclusive education becomes especially important when discussing affordability and better accessibility, especially in rural settings. In many cases, rural areas tend to experience limited access to quality education. By ensuring that every child has equal opportunities to receive education, inclusiveness brings great hope to addressing the disparity between rural and urban areas.

By extending access spaces and designing inclusive education systems, children in rural areas not only have the opportunity to learn but also to grow and develop according to their unique potential. This is a progressive step leading to broader social change and better educational justice for all children.

Strategies to improve inclusive education in rural areas

In improving inclusive education in rural areas, the first thing to do is to identify and evaluate needs. This process requires an in-depth assessment to understand the challenges and needs faced by children in rural areas with their diverse backgrounds. By recording and analyzing the needs of education, facilities, and social support needed, especially for children who have limited access. It is also important to understand the social, cultural, and economic context of rural communities that can affect inclusive education. The data obtained from this identification and evaluation will form the basis for designing appropriate and effective inclusive education programs, and assist in the appropriate allocation of resources to meet the diverse educational needs of rural areas (Ardea, 2023).

Developing a learning plan that is accessible to all children is a key step in developing inclusive education in rural areas. Learning plans should take into account the different needs of each child, including children with special needs, and ensure that each child can access the curriculum and learn in a way that suits their abilities and needs (Ariastuti & Herawati, 2016). This can be achieved by adapting teaching methods, content, and assessment to ensure that all children can be effectively involved in the learning process. Teachers should be given training to equip them with the knowledge and strategies needed to teach students, including inclusive teaching strategies, good classroom management, and utilization of educator technology so that teachers have a deep understanding of the unique needs of each of their students and can devise plans appropriate to their skill level and interests (Rahim, 2016).

In addition to teachers, parents who are guardians of students need to be empowered so that inclusive education can be optimal. Parents have a central role in supporting the educational development of their children. In rural contexts, they are often the backbone of informal education and the first to interact with their children's educational process. Therefore, empowering them with knowledge, understanding, and active involvement in the educational process can have a great impact (Atnawi, 2019).

Effective inclusive education requires significant parental involvement. By coaching on the importance of inclusive education they can support children and participate in educational decision-making. Parents should also be involved in identifying their children's needs and planning solutions accordingly. So, a collaboration between school and family is very important (Esmeralda & Kristiana, 2018). A successful inclusive education program in rural areas must build bridges of communication between schools and parents. By empowering parents, they can be effective partners in ensuring meaningful, inclusive education for children in rural areas.

The supporting aspects of education also include infrastructure. Therefore, improving physical accessibility in rural areas must be considered to ensure that educational facilities and infrastructure can be easily accessed by all children. Repair and renovation of school buildings to the procurement of other educational facilities in the village are needed so that every child, including those who come from families with economic limitations, can comfortably and freely access education. Increased physical accessibility also creates an inclusive environment that allows for optimal academic growth for all children. Therefore, the role of the government is needed to provide equal access to education in rural and urban areas according to their needs. Designing a more physically inclusive educational environment can open opportunities for every child to maximize their potential in the world of Education (Noor, 2023).

Ultimately, improving inclusive education in rural areas is a journey toward equal and meaningful access to education for every individual. Promoting physical accessibility, empowering parents, developing inclusive learning plans, and building close partnerships with communities are some of the strategic pillars that must be well integrated. All these steps should be summarized in a comprehensive plan, in which appropriate policies and efficient resource management play a major role.

Patterns of cooperation and stakeholder involvement

Inclusive education in rural areas can only be realized with the collaboration of various parties. Two important elements can be used as a foundation for developing inclusive education in rural areas, namely the group dynamics of Kurt Lewin's theory (Susetyo, 2021, p. 14) and Wilbert More's social change theory (Goa, 2017). Group dynamics refers to the interactions and processes that occur among group members who have a common interest in achieving inclusive education. Group dynamics includes how to form social structures and establish communication between one party and another. In rural environments, group dynamics influence how collaboration and interaction between individuals and groups can shape inclusive and mutually supportive educational environments.

Meanwhile, social change refers to the transformation of values and norms in society. Inclusive education requires a change in people's perceptions, attitudes, and actions towards inclusive education for children. Factors such as innovation in inclusive teaching methods, dissemination of information on the benefits of inclusive education, and the role of technology can drive social change that supports inclusive education in rural areas. Understanding group dynamics and social change is an important aspect of building a sustainable, inclusive education system in rural areas.

Successful inclusive education in rural areas is a reflection of collaboration between government stakeholders, educational institutions, and local communities. Inclusion is not just about ensuring access, it's also about empowering individuals to reach their maximum potential without any restrictions. All children should have equal opportunities to obtain quality and relevant education.

Government involvement has a very important role in developing inclusive education in rural areas. As a regulator and policy provider, the government can make policies in the education sector that ensure all future generations of the nation get fair and equitable access to education. Through its authority, the government can allocate sufficient funds and resources to build inclusive education infrastructure in rural areas. This includes building schools that are accessible to all students, training teachers to understand and implement inclusive methods, and providing facilities and teaching materials that suit the needs of diverse students (Astawa, 2017).

The importance of government involvement also lies in its role in increasing public awareness of the importance of inclusive education. By counseling the importance of education, the government can build a better comprehension of inclusion, get rid of stigma, and guide communities in supporting the implementation of inclusive education in rural areas.

Educational Institutions are the main foundation for developing inclusive education in rural areas, so the involvement of Educational Institutions is absolute. Educational institutions, as the spearhead of the education system, must play an active role in shaping an inclusive and welcoming learning environment for all students. Educational institutions can develop inclusive education policies and programs that suit the needs of students in rural areas.

Educational institutions can comprehend the characteristics and challenges faced by rural students. With this comprehension, they can build effective strategies to ensure that all students can keep up with education well. Educational institutions also have a crucial role in preparing and training teaching staff to implement an

inclusive approach. The training includes an in-depth understanding of the needs of diverse students and appropriate teaching methods. By preparing teachers to teach inclusively, educational institutions make a major contribution to the quality of education and the well-being of all rural communities (Nurmalasari, 2020).

Inclusive education is not only the responsibility of educational institutions or governments but also a shared responsibility of all members of society. Local communities have in-depth knowledge of the needs and potential of every child in rural areas. The involvement of local communities enables the development of inclusive education that is appropriate to the local context and can address education problems in villages more effectively.

Local community leaders can play an active role in promoting a culture of inclusion around them by increasing public awareness and knowledge about inclusive education. Communities can also play a role in monitoring and advocacy by monitoring and evaluating inclusive education policies and programs implemented in their areas and providing valuable feedback to educational institutions and governments. They can also be advocates for positive change in making inclusive education programs in rural areas a priority and getting sufficient support from various parties (Normina, 2016).

Collaboration with various stakeholders is the key to realizing inclusive education in rural areas and at the same time reducing education disparity. Inclusive education cannot be achieved effectively without the involvement of all parties. Close collaboration allows the sharing of knowledge, resources, and expertise from various stakeholders (Pitri, 2016). Educational institutions can provide insight into the challenges and opportunities they face in implementing inclusive education in rural settings. The government can play a role in developing policies that support inclusive education and allocate adequate budgets. While local people have in-depth knowledge of the special needs and characteristics of children in their environment.

By promoting close and sustainable collaboration, inclusive education can become a better reality in rural areas. This will lead to a reduction in educational disparity, creating a more equitable and equal education system for all children, regardless of their background or condition.

Conclusion

Educational disparity between urban and rural areas is a serious problem that requires special attention. Efforts to develop inclusive education in rural areas and encourage collaboration among different parties are key to overcoming this disparity. Inclusive education focuses on ensuring that every student, especially in rural areas who often experience limited access and resources, has an equal opportunity to receive quality education.

Collaboration with various parties including governments, educational institutions, and local communities allows integration of resources and knowledge to design appropriate and effective solutions. By prioritizing the development of inclusive education in rural areas and working together to overcome these barriers, we can reduce longstanding education disparity. Equitable and equitable inclusive education is the key to unlocking opportunities and maximizing the potential of all future generations in rural areas and ensuring that they can contribute maximally to the progress of the nation and achieve equality in access to education and learning.

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