

## **The Exclusion Process in Education in Indonesia: an Analysis of Social and Policy Deprivation Factors**

**Dede Sunarya**


*Universitas Indonesia*

*Email: dedesunarya@gmail.com*

### **ABSTRACT**

This study discusses social exclusion in the context of education in Indonesia, emphasizing that the gap in access to education is not only caused by economic factors alone, but also by structural factors such as non-partisan policies, access inequality, unequal regional development, and discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, and culture. Using a qualitative approach based on an extensive literature study, this study maps the relationship between social exclusion and deprivation both relative and absolute that hinder access to education for vulnerable groups. The results of the study show that although the government has launched various affirmative programs such as scholarships, operational assistance, and the Independent Learning-Independent Campus (MBKM) program, their implementation often creates new forms of exclusion. These programs are considered to have not fully touched the structural and cultural roots of the causes of educational exclusion. Therefore, this study recommends the need for an inclusive, critical, and participatory policy approach, as well as the improvement of the evaluation and transparency system of education programs so that they are not only symbolic but able to create equal access to education for all levels of society.

**Keywords:** social exclusion, social deprivation, education

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Understanding the concept of social exclusion and its relation to the educational context is very important (Morgan et al., 2013; Sutopo, 2015). The urgency is that the concept can be used as a reference to measure the complexity of the gap and how to implement education policies oriented to overcome the gap (Habibi & Juliawan, 2018; Hidayati, 2021; Purcell, 2013). In addition, understanding the exclusion process opens the eyes that other problems such as *poverty/inequality–underclass/discrimination* always hinders the process of affordability of Indonesian people in achieving education (Jyoti & Bharti, 2023).

Although there has been a lot of literature that explores exclusion and education, such as Whitty (2001), Hick, et.al (2007), Ford (2016), Abigail (2013), Fainstein (2014), and Mitler, et.al (2002), the problem of inequality in education is difficult to alleviate, and even tends to change gradually. (Fainstein, 2014; Ford & Sirait, 2016; Friendly, 2013). This is because the problems at the level of the country's locality vary and the gap layer is so thick.

In addition, efforts to cut the dropout rate are also always discussed in various forums (Wang, 2011). However, because the understanding of the form of social exclusion is not good, the regulation is like a pendulum that swings here and there, and often even spins in places, resulting in a new form of exclusion that is repeated in the realm of education (Marin, 2020).

Previous studies have highlighted how social exclusion manifests within educational systems. For example, Preece (2006) explored the intersections between lifelong learning and social exclusion in post-colonial contexts, revealing how marginalized groups continue to face

institutional barriers. Similarly, Rumberger and Lim (2008) analyzed the causes of dropout in American schools, identifying structural inequality as a major contributing factor. However, limited empirical research has been conducted in the Indonesian context that comprehensively addresses the multidimensional nature of exclusion—particularly its intersection with ethnicity, religion, gender, and decentralization-induced disparities. The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to empirically map the patterns and mechanisms of exclusion in Indonesia's educational system, showing that exclusion is not merely economic, but is deeply rooted in structural, cultural, and policy-driven dynamics. By examining the Indonesian case, this study contributes to global debates on education equity with a localized lens.

The objective of this study is to analyze how social exclusion in Indonesia's education system occurs, focusing on structural, policy-based, and identity-related factors such as gender, ethnicity, and religion. The study aims to uncover the mechanisms by which exclusion is perpetuated in schools, policymaking, and access. The benefit of this research is its contribution to developing a more inclusive educational framework by providing evidence-based insights for policymakers, educators, and civil society. By identifying the roots of exclusion, the study aims to support the formulation of equitable educational policies and promote inclusive practices that bridge the gaps caused by systemic inequality in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

In general, the method used in this study is qualitative with an extensive literature study approach (Hudha & Salim, 2024). Extensive literature studies are used because it makes it easier to conduct literature searches, collect, select, map, and analyze the process of exclusion in education in Indonesia. The data collection techniques in this study were obtained from various books and journals obtained through software *google scholar*, *taylor & francis*, and other reference search engines. Meanwhile, the literature analysis technique is carried out manually.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

It is undeniable, that certain groups of people are always excluded from accessing education, even though the impact and level of discrimination vary. Therefore, it can be said that social exclusion in the face of education in Indonesia is twofold. For example, individuals are often found who are excluded because of ethnicity. There are also those who experience exclusion because of their gender, or are excluded because they are in rural areas (Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2016).

Social exclusion in education in Indonesia does not occur without cause. In reality, the social exclusion that occurs goes hand in hand with social deprivation. Deprivation is not only related to poverty, but also to psychological health, region, policy, economy, and access to education (Pettigrew, 2015). The deprivation that emerges also tends to be relative and absolute, not only related to poverty and powerlessness, but also intersects with access to education itself.

Meanwhile, the relative deprivation that occurs in the realm of education generally occurs due to economic inability (Häbig et al., 2022). These unevenly distributed resources in the later phases give birth to feelings of frustration that lead to distorted behavior of individuals and views that see themselves marginalized from the group (Wang, 2011). In relative deprivation,

Individuals may feel similarities with others based on their environment or community, but on the one hand feel a feeling of inequality in economic terms (Nieuwenhuis & Chiang, 2021).

In addition, relative deprivation causes individuals to lose confidence because they constantly compare their condition with others (Colombo et al., 2024). In the later phases, even an individual tends to do everything by means including violence, in order for his existence to be recognized by the group (Torikova et al., 2022). On this basis, cases of violence in the face of education in Indonesia have never faded. Relative deprivation also undermines the efforts of educational institutions and educators to embody the values of solidarity (Raufelder & Kulakow, 2022). Meanwhile, absolute deprivation in the education sector occurs due to unaffordable access to quality education (Momo et al., 2021).

In the issue of education, the concept of depravity cannot be used as the only analytical knife to map the problems that occur (Sen, 2011). Therefore, the relationship between the concept of exclusion and deprivation is like two sides of the coin, where the approach of the concept of social exclusion is offered to see the reality of deprivation itself, and then the depravity approach is useful to see the social exclusion that occurs (Mon, 2011). Comprehensively, the concept of social exclusion tries to conduct a comprehensive analysis with consideration of power, culture, social processes, and the overall time span of depravity. The link between social exclusion and deprivation in education issues lies not only in the weak ownership of material, but also in social institutions such as the participation of the state to be responsible (Bellani & D'Ambrosio, 2011) .

In the realm of education, exclusion occurs in the poor who cannot get access to higher education. After graduating from junior high school or high school, children who are born poor tend to choose to work as laborers in order to meet their daily basic needs, instead of continuing higher education. This state of absolute deprivation is repeated and gives birth to social exclusion, that it is not only poverty that causes an individual to be unable to gain access to higher education, but also the mental condition of the family caused by the poverty (Rupavath, 2023; Torikova et al., 2022).

In addition to poverty, the process of decentralization also leads to exclusion in education (Mihai et al., 2015). Decentralization gives birth to uneven development, resulting in uneven distribution of access to schools, technology distribution, and uneven quality of teachers (Colombo et al., 2024). In the end, education in the regions became lagging behind. Sadly, the central government seems to allow this education gap by constantly issuing centralistic policies.

In addition, the exclusion of education in Indonesia is also caused by relative deprivation. This relative deprivation occurs in minority groups that are prone to discrimination and are supported by cultural processes (Batty, 2013; Momo et al., 2021). For example, in the culture that develops in rural areas, there is still a lot of assumption that women do not need to go to high school. In addition, discrimination against ethnic minorities in public schools also continues to occur (Haidir & Setyari, 2024; Yasir et al., 2024).

The Government of Indonesia through the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) has actually launched various programs as a form of state concern for education. The government has disbursed quite a lot of state budgets to create various scholarship affirmation programs, so that people can access higher education starting from bidikmisi, Smart Indonesia Card (KIP), school operational funds, LPDP, and most recently

through the MBKM program. The government also collaborates with many parties across stakeholders and the private sector to participate in setting aside their income to alleviate exclusion in the realm of education through assistance in improving educational facilities and educational scholarships.

However, social exclusion alleviation programs in education in practice actually create new exclusions. For example, a scholarship program that requires applicants to conduct an English language proficiency selection. In fact, we know that many people have difficulty getting access to foreign language learning so they do not have the ability to speak English. In addition, there is also an exclusion in the practice of fieldwork or MBKM internships, where students from well-known universities have a greater chance of being accepted for internships.

If referring to Byrne's concept of ideas, an individual's higher education status can result in a better ability to participate in social as well as economic activities (Pettigrew, 2015; Wang, 2011). Through education, a person will have the capacity and social capital invested so that he or she becomes more. Good education can strengthen an individual's resilience and help them avoid marginalized conditions (Häbig et al., 2022; Raufelder & Kulakow, 2022). An educated individual can prevent himself or herself from getting into an exploitative relationship due to improved cognitive abilities (Hudha & Salim, 2024).

The presence of the Indonesian government to improve education inequality through the provision of scholarships and a series of other programs opens up opportunities for people to achieve higher education. However, these programs in reality fail to address other factors that cause exclusion. For example, scholarship programs are in fact unable to improve girls' access to school because of cultural aspects that are never touched by policymakers.

In addition, other policies such as the MBKM program designed to minimize economic deprivation and bridge individuals into the world of work, ultimately widen the gap and result in an education system that perpetuates *privilege, prestige*, and power for the capitalists. In addition, there is an inequality that occurs, when campuses with unprominent names and accreditation have to face difficulties in getting partners.

In addition, with the MBKM program, universities are forced to unite the world of education with the demands of the rapidly changing world of work. Universities ultimately do not have educational autonomy that places their orientation based on learning. It is clear that the MBKM program, which is supposed to create educational inclusivity, actually strengthens the practice of capitalization in the field of education.

If referring to Freire's pedagogy which argues that education is a learning medium for critical thinking, fostering collectivity, and developing skills, then the MBKM policy is not the right program to advance education, let alone alleviate social exclusion. The concept of MBKM actually makes education no longer a means to think critically in transforming the form of punishment, no longer an egalitarian and democratic arena, where everyone can be involved in the learning process.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion obtained from the discussion of social exclusion in education in Indonesia is that the implementation of education still needs a lot of improvement and the alleviation of exclusion must continue to be carried out. So far, the presence of the state through the policy of providing scholarships, MKBM, and other programs has given hope. But on the

other hand, these policies actually give rise to new exclusions in the form of access inequality when trying to obtain the program itself. Therefore, the protection program against social exclusion needs to emphasize the process of critical, inclusive, and participatory thinking. In addition, the social protection provided by the nature of *top-down* So that it does not have a significant influence in overcoming social exclusion. In fact, the policies that have been implemented so far, their implementation can strengthen inequality itself. Therefore, it is imperative that we identify social exclusion, deprivation, and patterns of social inequality in order to design and implement appropriate educational programs. In addition, monitoring and evaluation in the implementation of education programs must be made transparent and accountable. Programs must be carried out consistently by siding with the essence of education itself, as well as replacing policies that are not on target.

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