

The Education Role in Reducing Social Inequality

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ABSTRACT

The high cost of education is one of the main factors exacerbating social and economic inequality in society. Access to quality education is often limited by the financial means of families, creating a huge gap between the rich and the poor. Students from families with low socio-economic backgrounds are often forced to drop out of school or choose cheaper and less quality education pathways, while students from wealthier families have easier access to higher education and quality. The long-term impact of this inequality limits career opportunities, and widens social and economic disparities in society. Therefore, this research examines how the high cost of education affects the educational and developmental opportunities of individuals based on socio-economic background. The research also highlights the need for more inclusive government policies and solutions based on education equity, such as scholarships and education subsidies for poor families. Efforts to improve the quality of education in areas with limited facilities are also very important to create equal opportunities for all levels of society. By improving access to and quality of education, it is hoped that social and economic disparities can be minimized and social mobility enhanced.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of social and economic inequality has become a major issue facing many countries around the world. These inequalities are often reflected in significant differences in income, access to healthcare, employment opportunities, and quality of life between rich and poor groups, as well as between urban and rural areas. These social inequalities can exacerbate the gap between groups that have access to resources and those that do not, creating a cycle of inequality that is difficult to break. One of the main factors that contribute to exacerbating these inequalities is limited access to quality education (Abdullah et al., 2015). Education, which is supposed to be a tool for empowerment and social mobility, becomes one of the main sources that exacerbate these inequalities when access to it is limited (Kromydas, 2017).

A particular phenomenon that can be observed is the difference in the quality of education received by individuals based on their socio-economic background. People from lower economic backgrounds often find it difficult to access quality education, be it due to cost, distance from educational facilities or lack of adequate

infrastructure. On the other hand, individuals who come from families with higher incomes tend to have better access to better education, whether in terms of facilities, qualified teachers or more complete teaching materials. This inequality exacerbates inequalities in society, as education should be a tool to improve the social and economic status of individuals, but instead creates a widening gap.

The role of education in reducing social and economic inequality is therefore crucial. Research shows that inclusive and quality education can be a powerful balancing factor in socio-economically fragmented societies. By providing equitable access to education to all levels of society, especially marginalized and underprivileged groups, social disparities can be reduced. Education that focuses on technical skills, and on building character and social skills, can open up greater opportunities for individuals to improve their quality of life, increase competitiveness in the labor market, and achieve more equal opportunities in society (Lamont, 2018).

One of the main issues related to social inequality in education is the significant difference in access between urban and rural areas. In many countries, especially in developing countries,

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schools in rural areas often have much more limited facilities compared to schools in urban areas. These limitations include infrastructure deficiencies such as inadequate buildings, a lack of qualified teachers and limited access to information technology that supports teaching and learning. As a result, children living in remote areas tend to have fewer opportunities for quality education, further exacerbating social and economic inequality (Schmidt et al., 2015).

Another issue is related to the high cost of education. In many countries, the rising cost of education is a major barrier for many families from low economic backgrounds to access quality education (Downey & Condrón, 2016). The high cost of education, be it formal school fees, books, or access to additional training programs or courses, results in inequality between those who can and cannot afford the cost. This exacerbates social inequality as those who cannot afford education risk being trapped in long-term poverty, while individuals who have access to higher education can increase their chances of getting better jobs and being more financially established (Chevalier, 2004).

In addition to access and cost issues, the quality of education is also a major issue. Despite efforts to provide education to all levels of society, the quality of education provided is not always equitable. In many places, especially in less developed areas, the quality of teaching is greatly affected by low teacher qualifications, lack of educational resources and curricula that are not relevant to the needs of the labor market (Coady & Dizioli, 2018). This creates a large gap in learning outcomes between richer and poorer groups in society (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2007). As a result, while children in all walks of life may have equal opportunities to learn, they often do not receive equal quality of education, which further affects their chances of social and economic development (Hoebel et al., 2017).

It is important to observe social inequality in education due to its significant impact on the social and economic development of a country. When access and quality of education are unequal, the existing social gap will widen. This can exacerbate poverty, slow economic growth and reinforce the cycle of inequality between generations. Children from poor families or remote areas are often denied the opportunity to access quality education, limiting their chances of changing their social and economic status. Therefore, understanding how education can be a balancing factor is crucial to creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

The phenomenon of social inequality in education should be observed as it will impact the quality of human resources available to the country. Quality education serves not only to improve the lives of individuals, but also to build national competitiveness in a global perspective. Countries that fail to provide equitable education will find it difficult to create a competent workforce, which in turn will affect economic development and long-term social stability. Improving educational inequality is an urgent need to ensure that every individual, regardless of socio-economic background, has equal opportunities to reach their full potential.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how differences in access and quality of education between urban and rural areas can contribute to social and economic inequality in society. It also aims to understand the impact of high education costs on the existing disparities in educational opportunities, especially between groups of people with different socio-economic backgrounds. As such, this research is expected to provide deeper insights into the factors that exacerbate social and economic inequality and how they affect equal opportunities for quality education.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is a literature study approach, which aims to collect and analyze various references and findings from previous research on social inequality in education. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the various dimensions of inequality in education without having to conduct primary data collection. The literature study will include scholarly articles, books, government reports and other relevant documents on the differences in access to education in urban and rural areas and the impact of education costs on socio-economic inequality. Literature review is an effective method to identify patterns that have been proven in previous research and integrate the findings to develop a more comprehensive framework of understanding (Hart, 2018).

The literature review will focus on sources that discuss the relationship between education quality, accessibility and its impact on social inequality. We will look for literature that discusses the role of teacher quality, education infrastructure and the use of technology in education to dig deeper into the factors that influence access to education in different walks of life. This study will also analyze research that examines the differences in education costs across countries and how these costs limit access to education for

families with lower economic backgrounds. By utilizing literature from various countries, it is hoped that this study can provide a broader picture of education inequality at the global and local levels.

In analyzing this literature study, the researcher will use a comparative approach to identify the gaps that exist between urban and rural areas and evaluate the factors that contribute to these inequalities. We will analyze literature that discusses government policies related to education in rural areas and how these policies impact access and quality of education (Busemeyer, 2015). Relevant sources will be selected based on strict criteria, i.e. only those that have undergone a peer review process and are recognized within the academic community. Thus, the results of this research are expected to make a significant contribution to understanding and addressing social inequalities caused by unequal access to education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Social disparities between rural and urban communities and between economic strata are complex and interrelated issues, especially in the context of education. Urban communities often have better access to quality education, facilities and resources compared to rural communities. Education participation rates in urban areas are much higher than in rural areas, indicating a disparity in educational opportunities. This creates inequality in access to quality education, which is one of the main factors in maintaining social inequality.

One of the main causes of the education gap between rural and urban areas is inadequate infrastructure in rural areas. Many villages in Indonesia still lack adequate educational facilities, such as proper schools and qualified teaching staff. According to Suharto (2018), the lack of investment in education infrastructure in rural areas results in the low quality of education received by children there. This contributes to low levels of literacy and skills, which in turn limits their chances of getting a good job in the future.

Urban communities have better access to various educational resources, including private educational institutions that often offer better curricula and more complete facilities. According to Murniati (2019), urban schools are often equipped with modern technology and extracurricular programs that support students' skill development. This access gives urban students a competitive advantage, which can affect their chances of continuing their education to higher levels and getting better jobs.

This education gap also contributes to wider economic disparities. Individuals who do not receive adequate education tend to be trapped in a cycle of poverty, where they lack the necessary skills to compete in the job market. Quality education is key to improving social and economic mobility. Without adequate access to education, individuals from lower economic strata, whether in villages or cities, will find it difficult to improve their economic status.

Social stigma can also exacerbate the education gap. In some areas, there is a perception that formal education is not very important, especially among rural communities who rely more on traditional occupations. According to Rahman (2020), this view can inhibit children's motivation to pursue higher education, thus reinforcing the gap between those who have access to education and those who do not. This creates a cycle where the next generation is also trapped in economic powerlessness.

Addressing social disparities between rural and urban communities and between economic strata requires collaborative efforts from the government, communities and educational institutions. Investing in education infrastructure in rural areas, improving the quality of teaching, and scholarship programs for students from underprivileged families can help reduce this gap. According to Sari (2021), a holistic and inclusive approach to education can create more equitable opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their social and economic backgrounds.

Differences in Education Access and Quality between Urban and Rural Areas to Improve Social and Economic Inequality

Differences in access to and quality of education between urban and rural areas have long been a significant problem in many countries (Lamont, 2018). In many developing countries, urban areas tend to have greater access to better educational facilities, such as well-equipped schools, qualified teachers and adequate teaching materials. In contrast, rural areas often face limitations in terms of education infrastructure, including the number and quality of teachers, poor facilities and lack of other resources. These inequalities lead to large disparities in the quality of education received by children in urban areas compared to those living in rural areas (Aikman & Davies, 2016).

Geographical and economic factors strongly influence access to quality education. In rural areas, many schools lack adequate facilities and infrastructure to support effective teaching and learning. For example, physical facilities such as inadequate classrooms, lack of access to educational technology and lack of

learning aids are common problems (Coady & Dizioli, 2018). In rural areas, there is often a shortage of trained and experienced teachers. This leads to lower quality teaching, which in turn affects student learning outcomes in these areas (Kromydas, 2017). As a result, children in rural areas are less likely to have equal opportunities for quality education, which has direct implications for their ability to compete in the workforce (Schmidt et al., 2015).

Meanwhile, in urban areas, access to quality education is relatively easier. Urban areas have more resources available, including schools with state-of-the-art facilities, experienced teaching staff, and better access to extracurricular programs that support skills development (Abdullah et al., 2015). In addition, with their proximity to centers of economic activity, children in urban areas also have more opportunities to interact with professional environments, which increases their chances of getting better jobs in the future (O'Keefe, 2017). This creates a social and economic gap between children educated in urban areas and those trapped in limited access to education in rural areas (Downey & Condrón, 2016).

These social and economic inequalities arising from educational disparities affect individuals and have implications for the broader social structure. When access to quality education is limited, poorer and marginalized groups, often living in rural areas, have little opportunity to improve their social status (Hoebel et al., 2017). This leads to greater social class differences, as those with access to higher education in urban areas are more likely to get better jobs, while those without quality education remain trapped in low-income jobs with limited opportunities (Chevalier, 2004). This exacerbates social inequality in society, creating a growing gap between the rich and the poor.

Education should serve as a tool to improve social and economic mobility, but this inequality of access exacerbates the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Children growing up in poor families in rural areas have few opportunities to improve their social status due to their limited access to quality education. This underscores how important it is for governments and educational institutions to focus on equalizing education across regions so that no group is left behind in the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the world of work (Busemeyer, 2015).

In the face of these access disparities, it is important to consider long-term solutions that include improving the quality of education in rural areas. This can include improving school facilities

and infrastructure, training teachers and developing a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of the local community. Education technology can be a very useful tool to improve the quality of education in isolated areas. The use of e-learning or internet-based learning can help overcome the problem of limited physical facilities and provide wider access to quality educational materials.

However, while education technology can help reduce the gap between urban and rural areas, its successful implementation depends heavily on supportive infrastructure and policies. In many rural areas, the biggest challenge is limited access to the internet and adequate technological devices. Therefore, the role of government policies that prioritize equitable distribution of education resources will be critical to creating a more equitable and inclusive education system, and reducing existing social and economic inequalities.

Impact of tuition fees on educational opportunities based on socio-economic backgrounds

The high cost of education can exacerbate inequalities in educational opportunities between groups from different socio-economic backgrounds. In many countries, education costs, both direct costs such as tuition fees, books and stationery, and indirect costs such as transportation and accommodation, are a heavy burden on low-income families. This creates a significant barrier for children from poor families to access quality education. This gap will exacerbate social inequality because education should be a tool to facilitate social mobility, not a factor that widens the gap between the rich and the poor (Chevalier, 2004).

At the primary and secondary education levels, the cost of education often leads to the dropout of students from poor families, who cannot afford the cost. This is especially problematic in developing countries, where free or subsidized education is often limited (Downey & Condrón, 2016). As tuition fees increase, low-income families are forced to choose between meeting basic needs or paying for their children's education. Many children are forced to work to support the family economy, or choose not to pursue higher education (Lamont, 2018). As a result, the educational opportunity gap is widening between those who can afford to pay for education and those who cannot (Hoebel et al., 2017).

Families with higher socio-economic backgrounds can afford to pay for education, and have access to better quality education, such as international schools or renowned universities. Children from these wealthy families benefit from a

supportive educational environment with better facilities, qualified teachers, and access to professional networks that can help them get better jobs. This further exacerbates social inequality, as quality education becomes limited to the elite, while low-income groups are marginalized in terms of access to education (Schmidt et al., 2015).

The high cost of education also impacts the quality of education received by students from low socio-economic backgrounds. High-cost schools tend to have richer curricula, more interactive teaching and more opportunities for extracurricular activities (Coady & Dizioli, 2018). Meanwhile, low-cost schools, which are often an option for poor families, may not have adequate facilities, limited resources and often have lower levels of teaching quality. These differences in education quality contribute to inequalities in learning outcomes and ultimately affect the future employment opportunities of these students (Busemeyer, 2015).

High education costs can affect the type of education chosen by students and their parents. Many parents from low-income families tend to choose cheaper and faster education, such as vocational schools or technical jobs, even though it may not match their child's interests or abilities. Meanwhile, children from wealthier families are more likely to choose higher education at top universities or longer education programs that can open up more opportunities in the world of work. This creates greater differences in the skills possessed by individuals and exacerbates inequality in a knowledge-based economy (Ginsburg, 2016).

The rising cost of education also affects the equitable distribution of educational opportunities on a global level. Developing countries with low per capita income find it difficult to afford quality education for all their citizens. With the high cost of education in the tertiary sector, many potentially talented individuals from poor families in developing countries do not have the opportunity to continue their studies. As a result, they are unable to contribute to the socio-economic development of their countries in an optimal manner. The education gap between developed and developing countries is widening, creating inequalities in the distribution of knowledge and expertise around the world (Hart, 2018).

Government policies play a crucial role in addressing the negative impact of high education costs. To achieve this goal, the government needs to increase education subsidies, especially for poor families so that all children, regardless of economic background, can access quality education. The

provision of scholarships and low-interest education loans is essential to ease the financial burden. Policies that support universities and schools in disadvantaged areas will also help improve the quality of education and reduce existing disparities. By implementing these measures, it is hoped that gaps in educational opportunities can be minimized, making education an effective tool for improving social mobility. When access to quality education is expanded, individuals from diverse backgrounds can reach their potential, which in turn contributes to the overall development of society. Education becomes a right, and a means to create a more just and prosperous society (Busemeyer, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The high cost of education has a significant impact on disparities in educational opportunities between different socio-economic groups. Families with low incomes often face significant barriers to accessing quality education, which in turn exacerbates social and economic inequalities. Children from poor families are forced to choose between continuing their education or meeting other basic needs, which often leads to dropping out of school. Meanwhile, those from wealthier families have greater access to better education, which gives them a greater chance of success in the future. This disparity creates a widening gap in terms of employment opportunities and economic well-being.

As a follow-up, it is important for the government to take concrete steps to reduce the impact of high education costs. One solution that could be considered is the provision of education subsidies or scholarships for students from underprivileged families so that they can access quality education without being burdened by high costs. It is also important to improve the quality of education in low-cost schools so that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, have equal opportunities to develop their potential.

Policies that are more inclusive and based on equitable access to education are essential in addressing social inequality. Improving the quality of education relates to facilities and infrastructure, as well as to the quality of teaching and human resources in schools. Government programs that support higher education through low-interest student loans or income-based repayment schemes can also help improve access to higher education for the financially disadvantaged.

It is important to engage the private sector and educational institutions to create a joint solution to this problem. Partnerships between the government,

schools and the private sector can help create greater opportunities for students from poor families to pursue higher education. Communities also need to be empowered to understand the importance of education as a tool to improve the quality of life so that the awareness to fight for equal and quality education for all can grow collectively. With these steps, education can become a bridge to reduce the existing socio-economic disparities and provide more equitable opportunities for all levels of society.

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