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The Distinction of Urban and Rural Education in Primary Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the education gap between urban and rural areas in Indonesia, especially at the primary school level. This difference is significant in various aspects, such as infrastructure availability, teacher quality, access to technology, and learning environment. Using a literature study method with a qualitative descriptive approach, this research collected data from various scientific journals and relevant books. The results show that schools in urban areas are generally more advanced with complete facilities and adequate teaching staff, while rural areas are still faced with infrastructure challenges, limited technology and a shortage of professional teachers. The findings emphasize the need for more inclusive and equitable policies in education development in order to create equitable access and quality of education for all the nation's children, both in cities and villages.

Keywords : *Education gap, Urban, Rural, Education facilities, Education Technology*

1. Introduction

Education serves as a fundamental pillar for national development and social mobility, yet disparities in access and quality remain evident across different geographical contexts. One of the most significant distinctions lies between urban and rural education, particularly at the primary school level,

where foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, and character development are established. Urban schools are often equipped with better infrastructure, advanced teaching facilities, and more highly qualified educators, enabling them to provide students with enriched learning opportunities (Eamon, 2005). Conversely, rural schools frequently face systemic challenges such as inadequate school buildings, limited access to textbooks and digital resources, teacher shortages, and long travel distances for students (Eamon, 2005). These structural and resource-based gaps contribute to variations in student performance, motivation, and long-term educational attainment.

Several studies have highlighted the complex nature of this educational divide. For instance, Williams (2010) emphasized that urban schools tend to benefit from stronger government support and parental involvement, while rural schools often struggle with limited community engagement due to socioeconomic constraints. Similarly, Arwin et al. (2025) found that rural schools in Indonesia face not only infrastructural limitations but also challenges in attracting qualified teachers, which directly impacts the quality of instruction. In China, Chou et al. (2018) reported that rural children often lag behind their urban peers in academic achievement due to differences in resource allocation and teacher training. Meanwhile, research in the United States by Howley et al. (2015) pointed out that although rural schools may foster closer teacher-student relationships and stronger community ties, they are disadvantaged by economic hardships and fewer educational innovations compared to urban schools.

Indonesia is a vast country that has different ethnicities, cultures, and languages and islands from sambang to marauke. So that it often causes a significant inequality and gap in education in Indonesia. With the extraordinary diversity possessed by the Indonesian state, of course, to be able to maintain and preserve it with a quality education for every child who will become the next generation. Education plays an important role in achieving human development and sustainability in today's modern era. With rapid changes in society, technology, and the environment, the challenges facing global society are becoming increasingly complex (Rasyid & Ningsih, 2024).

Education is all learning experiences that take place throughout life in all environments and situations that have a positive influence on the growth of each individual. Education is also a conscious and planned effort to create an enjoyable learning and learning atmosphere so that each learner actively develops his or her potential. Sugiarta et al. (2019) argues that education is a demand in children's lives. The point is that education leads all the forces that exist in nature so that students as humans and members of society can achieve high safety and happiness in life.

The importance of education in national development sourced from the PPN ministry argues that in order to realize the vision of a golden Indonesia 2045, the government is strengthening efforts to develop quality education that is equitable. Human preparation as a development resource is a crucial strategic step, to ensure the success of a nation in facing global challenges and forgiving the opportunities that exist. Addressing this gap, while previous studies have examined urban-rural disparities in education, most focus mainly on infrastructure, resources, or academic performance. However, limited attention is given to how these disparities intersect with Indonesia's cultural diversity and national education goals, creating a gap for context-specific studies that explore equitable and culturally grounded strategies for primary schools.

This study was conducted to further explore the differences in education between urban and rural areas in Indonesia, especially at the primary school level. These differences include various important

aspects, such as the completeness of infrastructure, the quality of teaching staff, easy access to technology, and a conducive learning environment. The issue of education equity in Indonesia is often highlighted given its unique geographical conditions with a diversity of ethnicities, cultures and languages, and spread across thousands of islands from west to east. In fact, education plays an important role in human progress and survival in the current era, especially in responding to increasingly complex global challenges. Therefore, this research is to underline the importance of implementing education policies that are more equitable and just, with the aim of realizing equal educational opportunities and quality for all the nation's children.

2. Method

This research uses a qualitative study approach or uses a descriptive approach in which the basis of the discussion is the results of literature studies through several book sources, scientific articles from relevant journal sources from previous research results that are in accordance with the topic of discussion. The descriptive approach according to Safitri et al. (2022) is research whose data is in the form of a description of the problems discussed on a topic by providing a description that occurs in real life. The implementation of this research aims to obtain appropriate information and data by focusing on literature review, to obtain data, as well as sources and supporting evidence related to the issues discussed. The technique used in this research is a literature study based on data from previous research from various reputable journals and the results are reviewed and analyzed as supporting material. After the data is collected, a conclusion is obtained as an answer to the results of the discussion.

3. Results

Profile of Education in Urban

In general, schools in urban areas are more advanced than those in rural areas. In terms of facilities, schools in the city have facilities that are sufficient to support learning (Huda, 2021). Schools located in urban areas generally have better access to resources, such as more complete educational facilities, adequate infrastructure and qualified teaching staff (Kuboni & Mawila, 2025).

Schools in urban areas generally have better classrooms, laboratories, better equipped libraries and faster internet access. These facilities support the creation of a more conducive learning environment and can increase students' interest and motivation in learning. In contrast, in rural areas, educational infrastructure is often very limited (Susilawati et al., 2023).

In urban education, where access to schools is very easy and there are many means of transportation that make it easier for children who go to school to reach their destination in a short time. Schools located in urban areas are schools with buildings that are comfortable and safe to live in. Adequate facilities, such as computer rooms, sports facilities, health center rooms and canteens, will make the learning atmosphere very comfortable for students who attend schools in urban areas. In urban areas the number of teaching staff is very adequate and even exceeds capacity, there is even one subject that has two teachers (Lestari et al., 2022).

Where schools in the city have a lot of information available, and also the internet that is worldwide today. Teacher conditions in the city are filled with facilities and conveniences. Schools with good quality because they have competent teachers, complete facilities, and smart students will be even better. Schools that are of good quality because they have competent teachers, complete facilities and smart students will be even better (Anas et al., 2018).

Profile of Rural Education

3T areas have complex challenges, including limited accessibility, minimal infrastructure and socio-economic issues that affect all aspects of people's lives. The education infrastructure in these areas is often far behind that of urban areas, ranging from inadequate school buildings, limited supporting facilities, to minimal access to technology. Many teachers are reluctant to be placed in 3T areas due to inadequate facilities and amenities, difficult access to transportation and lack of adequate technological support for the teaching and learning process (Ratnawulan et al., 2025).

Research by Echazarra & Radinger (2019) highlights several crucial focal points in the profile of rural education that significantly affect the quality and accessibility of learning. First, the issue of limited educational infrastructure remains a persistent challenge, as many remote areas lack sufficient schools, suffer from overcrowded classrooms, and have buildings in poor physical condition, all of which hinder effective teaching and learning processes. Second, the shortage of qualified human resources, particularly trained and experienced teachers, poses another major barrier; the lack of educators with specialized skills restricts the ability to develop diverse and high-quality curricula while also limiting the variety of pedagogical approaches that can be implemented. Third, access and mobility challenges caused by geographical barriers and inadequate transportation networks further exacerbate the situation, as long travel distances to educational institutions discourage consistent student attendance and reduce parental involvement in their children's education. Lastly, limited technology and digital access highlight the growing digital divide, with inadequate telecommunications infrastructure and a lack of technological devices preventing the integration of digital-based learning, thereby leaving rural students at a disadvantage compared to their urban counterparts who benefit more from technological advancements. Collectively, these challenges illustrate the complexity of rural education, showing how structural limitations, human resource shortages, mobility issues, and technological disparities intersect to create systemic inequities that must be addressed through targeted policies and community-driven initiatives.

In rural areas, the situation is very different. Access to the internet and technological devices is still limited, even in some areas, poor internet networks make it difficult for many students to access technology-based educational resources (Mubarok, 2025). Azzahra & Pohan (2025) explains that although the government has tried to provide free internet programs for certain areas, in reality, many schools in rural areas are still unable to take full advantage of this technology. In addition, the limitations of devices such as computers and projectors also limit teachers in using technology-based learning methods, which are increasingly becoming an important necessity in the current era of education.

The use of technology is not only limited to the hardware, but also to the ability of students and teachers to operate the technology. In rural areas, many teachers and students are not yet skilled in using this technology, which results in lagging behind in the learning process. Therefore, more efforts

are needed to improve digital skills among both teachers and students in rural areas so that they can optimally utilize technology to improve the quality of education (Wang et al., 2019).

Social stratification in rural communities has a direct impact on access to education. A family's position in the social hierarchy often determines the educational opportunities available to their children. The economic conditions of rural communities significantly affect access to education. In addition to cost constraints, education infrastructure in rural areas is often in poor condition. Many schools lack basic facilities such as adequate classrooms, teaching aids and access to technology. This makes the quality of learning less than optimal and exacerbates the education gap between rural and urban areas (Zhang, 2006)

Comparison of Urban and Rural Primary School Education

Urban Education

According to the formulation of the Team for the Preparation of Guidelines for Educational Media Standardization of the Ministry of Education and Culture, what is meant by educational facilities are all the facilities needed in the teaching and learning process, both movable and immovable, so that the achievement of educational goals can run smoothly, regularly, effectively and efficiently (Bamburg & Andrews, 1991).

Comparison of City and Village In urban areas, especially primary schools in the city center or those that are privately run, school buildings are generally more modern, strong and in very good condition. The number of classes is usually up to standard and some classes are even air-conditioned. Most buildings have better sanitation facilities, such as separate toilets for boys and girls, and a more secure supply of clean water.

Primary schools in urban areas usually have better facilities, for example: a library with a more diverse and updated collection of books. Sometimes there are also computer or science laboratories. For sports, there is usually a decent volleyball, basket or soccer field. When it comes to technology, there are computers, projectors, maybe even smartboards, plus a stable internet connection. Top private schools may even have state-of-the-art multimedia equipment. There is also a hall or multipurpose room that is used for various events. Other important facilities include a clean cafeteria and a functioning School Health Unit (UKS). The facilities provided by schools in the city are excellent and comprehensive. They have representative classrooms, laboratories, resource-rich libraries, fast internet, computer labs, sports facilities, UKS, and canteens. The existence of these resources creates a conducive learning atmosphere, which further encourages students to explore their interest in learning and increase their motivation to excel.

In addition to the existing facilities and infrastructure, the location of the school is very advantageous as it is in the middle of the city. There are various transportation options that make it easier for students to get to their destinations more efficiently. School buildings in urban areas generally also provide a sense of comfort and security. In terms of teaching staff, urban schools have an adequate, if not excessive, number of teachers and are supported by competent educators. Moreover, easy access to, for example, the internet is an added value that encourages the improvement of the quality and teaching and learning process in informed schools. In contrast, rural areas often

have inadequate educational infrastructure, indicating limited resources and facilities. This is a major factor leading to differences in the quality of education between urban and rural areas.

In urban areas, especially private primary schools, a wide range of extracurricular activities are offered, tailored to students' interests and talents. For example, arts include traditional/modern dance, music (vocals, musical instruments such as piano, guitar, violin), painting, theater and choir. Sports include basketball, soccer/futsal, badminton, swimming, table tennis, athletics, and martial arts (karate, taekwondo, pencak silat). Science and technology includes KIR, coding (especially in flagship schools), science club, and robotics. Language areas include English and Mandarin clubs. Others include journalism, chess, scouting (compulsory), PMR, and Paskibra (although more common in junior/high schools, some elementary schools also have them). The availability of qualified trainers/instructors and adequate resources support these varied options.

Rural Education

In contrast, many primary schools in rural or underdeveloped areas still have inadequate physical facilities, some even in poor condition (according to data, 60% of primary school classrooms in Indonesia will be in disrepair by the 2024/2025 school year). There is often an insufficient number of classrooms, leading to student overcrowding or a shortage of classrooms in some schools. Sanitation conditions and clean water are often poor and difficult to obtain. Basic education in villages is minimal: the library's collection of books is small and often outdated. laboratories? Almost none. Sports fields are often just fields. Internet connections are often unreliable or non-existent. Computers or projectors are also rare, if any. This makes using digital learning methods very difficult. Canteens and health centers are often absent or not functioning properly.

In rural areas, extracurricular activities in primary schools are more limited, focusing on subjects and mandatory activities that can be carried out with existing resources. Scouting: almost always present and a compulsory extracurricular activity (although Permendikbud Ristek No. 12 of 2024 removes compulsory scouting, many schools still make it the main activity). Basic sports: such as volleyball or soccer with limited equipment. Simple traditional arts: if there is local talent and teachers who can teach, there may be regional dances or karawitan. Religious activities: reading and writing the Quran (for faith-based primary schools). Limited resources (trainers/teachers), inadequate supporting facilities (for example, no swimming pools) and limited operational funds also provide limited options.

Fundamentally, the problems of education in the 3T areas and rural areas stem from the lack of accessibility and adequate infrastructure. Inadequate school infrastructure, lack of essential resources and limited access to modern technology are evidence of this. As a result, fewer teachers are willing to work in these areas, which exacerbates the problem of skilled labor shortages. The main obstacle is not just the presence or absence of equipment, but also the competence of teachers and learners in utilizing technology. Since many of them are not proficient in using technology, their learning process is sub-optimal. Thus, it is important to improve their digital literacy so that technology can be best utilized to support the learning process.

4. Discussion

The findings indicate a clear disparity between urban and rural education, with urban schools benefiting from more comprehensive resources, facilities, and human capital, while rural schools face systemic challenges in infrastructure, technology, and teacher quality. These inequalities not only create gaps in academic achievement but also in the overall development of students, as urban learners have broader opportunities to explore extracurricular talents and digital competencies compared to their rural counterparts. This aligns with Eamon (2005), who found that children in urban settings have greater access to enriched educational environments, while rural students are constrained by limited resources.

While urban schools demonstrate an environment that fosters motivation, innovation, and competitive excellence, rural schools often struggle with fundamental issues such as overcrowded classrooms and limited access to basic educational tools. Similar challenges were highlighted by Makmur & Saksono (2021), who emphasized that inadequate infrastructure and teacher shortages remain major barriers to quality education in Indonesian rural areas. The digital divide remains one of the most pressing challenges, as rural students are increasingly disadvantaged in an era where technological literacy is essential for future success. Olanrewaju et al. (2021) also found that weak internet connectivity and limited digital devices hinder rural schools from integrating technology into the learning process, further widening the gap with urban schools that benefit from advanced technological support.

Moreover, teacher shortages and the reluctance of educators to work in rural areas exacerbate the problem, limiting pedagogical diversity and innovation. Azano & Stewart (2015) argued that teacher quality and willingness to serve in rural communities directly affect the breadth of curricula and the application of diverse teaching methods. Similarly, Salehzadeh Niksirat et al. (2025) reported that teachers in 3T regions face professional isolation and limited access to professional development, reducing the effectiveness of classroom practices.

These disparities suggest that policies should not only focus on improving rural infrastructure but also on strengthening teacher development, digital literacy, and community-based educational strategies. Addressing socio-economic barriers is equally important to ensure equitable access to education for all children. Williams (2024) emphasized that strong community involvement and government support are vital in narrowing the urban–rural educational gap. Without targeted interventions, the educational gap between urban and rural areas will continue to hinder national efforts toward achieving equitable, quality education in line with Indonesia's vision of Golden Indonesia 2045.

Previous studies on urban and rural education have largely emphasized disparities in infrastructure, teacher availability, technological access, and student achievement across different contexts. These works provide important insights into the structural inequalities that shape learning environments, but they often present findings in broad or context-specific terms focusing either on Western countries, China, or general Indonesian rural settings. However, limited attention has been given to a comprehensive and comparative analysis of primary school education in both urban and rural Indonesia, especially in light of current educational reforms and the nation's vision of Golden Indonesia 2045. The present study seeks to fill this gap by examining not only infrastructural and

human resource differences but also how these distinctions impact learning opportunities, digital literacy, and equity in Indonesian primary schools.

5. Conclusion

The differences in education between urban and rural areas in Indonesia are evident, reflected in significant differences in facilities, infrastructure, human resources and access to technology. Schools in urban areas generally enjoy well-equipped facilities, adequate internet access and qualified teaching staff, creating a conducive learning environment. In contrast, rural areas, especially 3T areas, face severe limitations in education infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, access and mobility challenges, and limited digital technology. The socio-economic conditions of rural communities also exacerbate these inequalities. Further efforts are needed to improve the digital skills of rural teachers and students to optimize the use of technology for education quality improvement.

The disparity between urban and rural primary schools is a reflection of the inequality of development in Indonesia. Compared to their urban counterparts, urban primary schools generally have better infrastructure, access to technology, and options for out-of-class activities that allow students to further develop themselves, while rural primary schools still face fundamental deficiencies that affect the quality and equity of education.

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