

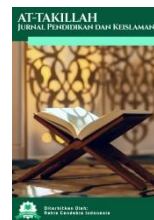


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Education Budget Politics And Access Inequality In Underdeveloped Regions

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to analyze the relationship between the politics of education budgeting and access inequality, with a focus on the effectiveness of budget allocation in promoting educational equity in underdeveloped areas. In the context of national development, education should be a key instrument in addressing social and economic disparities. However, the reality shows that education budget distribution has not fully reached the areas that need it most. This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical study, supported by secondary data from policy documents, budget reports, and national education data. The findings indicate that the political process in determining the education budget is often influenced by elite interests and does not entirely prioritize distributive justice principles. Uneven budget allocation leads to limited infrastructure, shortages of educators, and low-quality education services in underdeveloped areas. The study concludes that the effectiveness of education budgeting will be achieved if the budgeting process is conducted transparently, based on needs, and focuses on regions with low development indices. This research recommends a reformulation of education budget policies that are more equitable and data-driven to ensure true educational access equity.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main pillars in national development that has a strategic role in reducing social and economic inequality. Equal access to education throughout Indonesia is very important to realize social justice. Although the Indonesian education budget has been stipulated in the 1945 Constitution which mandates a minimum budget allocation of 20% of the state budget, in reality there is still a significant gap in access and quality of education, especially in disadvantaged areas (Nasution, 1986). This reflects an imbalance in the distribution of the education budget that is often not on target. Disadvantaged areas, both in terms of infrastructure, economy, and human resources, are often the most marginalized areas in the allocation of the education budget. Political factors that influence the distribution of this budget are often one of the main causes of this inequality. Determination of the education budget is often influenced by political interests that do not always prioritize the principle of justice, but rather focus more on areas with a large voter base or those with more political influence. As a result, areas that objectively need more attention, such as underdeveloped areas, actually receive minimal allocation. (Dawous et al., 2022)

The importance of analyzing the effectiveness of education budget allocation in underdeveloped areas is urgent. If the allocated education budget is not effective and efficient in improving the quality of education in the area, then the goal of equalizing education will be difficult to achieve. (Sumual et al., 2025) Therefore, this study aims to analyze the relationship between education budget politics and the gap in access to education, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of budget allocation in supporting equal education in underdeveloped areas.

This study is expected to contribute to understanding the dynamics of education budget politics in Indonesia, as well as provide recommendations that can be used by policy makers in formulating budget policies that are fairer and favor areas that need them more. (Mulatsih, 2021) Thus, it is hoped that equitable and quality education can be realized throughout Indonesia, without exception. The formulation of the problem in this study is as follows:

1. How do political dynamics influence the process of allocating the education budget in Indonesia?
2. To what extent is the effectiveness of the allocation of the education budget in supporting equal access to education in disadvantaged areas?
3. What are the structural constraints that cause the education budget to be less than optimal in reaching disadvantaged areas?
4. What policy strategies can be implemented to ensure a fairer and more equitable distribution of the education budget?

This study is different because it not only analyzes how much the budget is allocated, but also explores how political interests influence this distribution, and evaluates the extent to which the budget addresses the real needs of education in disadvantaged areas. (Dahyanti et al., 2025)

The novelty of this study lies in its approach that connects the political aspects of the education budget with the gap in access in disadvantaged areas, and analyzes the effectiveness of budget distribution through the lens of justice and spatial equity. Different from macro and generalist budget studies, this study focuses on areas that have been marginalized in education fiscal policy. (Teknologi, 2025) Thus, this study not only contributes empirical understanding, but also encourages the agenda for budget policy reform based on needs and regional justice.

Previous studies discussing the education budget generally focus more on quantitative aspects, such as analysis of the amount of budget allocation against the achievement of national education indicators. Some others only focus on budget use at the micro level, such as in certain educational units or regions. (Anggraini et al., 2025) However, there are few studies that specifically examine the relationship between the dynamics of budget politics and inequality of access to education in disadvantaged areas, especially with a critical approach to how budget allocation decisions are influenced by political factors and power structures. In addition, studies that integrate the perspective of distributive justice and the effectiveness of budget implementation in disadvantaged geographic contexts are also still very limited.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical type. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on an in-depth understanding of the political process in budget decision-making, as well as its impact on the gap in access to education in disadvantaged areas. The analysis was carried out critically on policies, budget allocation data, and their implementation in the field. (Saprianto et al., 2023)

The study was conducted in several areas categorized as disadvantaged areas by the Indonesian government based on data from the Ministry of Villages, Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration. These areas were selected using purposive sampling, taking into account the limitations of access to education and relevance in the context of budget distribution. (Ayu et al., 2024) The units of analysis in this study include:

1. National and regional education budget policies
2. Data on allocation of the APBN/APBD for the education sector
3. Conditions of infrastructure and education services in disadvantaged areas

Data Collection Sources and Techniques

1. Primary Data
 - a. a In-depth interviews with Education Office officials, budget planners, academics, and education observers.

- b. b Limited field observations in disadvantaged schools that are the location of the case study.

2. Secondary Data

- a. a Budget policy documents (APBN Law, Ministerial Regulations, RKPD, RPJMD, etc.)
- b. b Budget allocation and realization reports from BPS, Kemdikbudristek, and Kemenkeu
- c. c Human development index (HDI) data, school participation rates, and educational inequality data (Qolbiyah et al., 2022)

Data analysis was carried out using the content analysis method for policy documents and budget reports, and thematic analysis for interview data. The analysis process includes:

1. Data reduction: Filtering information relevant to the research focus
2. Theme categorization: Grouping data based on key issues, such as budget equity, policy effectiveness, and regional inequality
3. Critical interpretation: Interpreting findings with the perspective of budget politics, distributive justice theory, and governance

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, source triangulation was carried out (comparing primary and secondary data), as well as member checking (confirming interview results with informants). In addition, peer debriefing was carried out with academics or other researchers to verify the findings and interpretations. (Baidlawi, 2006)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

This study produces several important findings that illustrate how budget politics plays a role in creating or exacerbating the gap in access to education, as well as how effective the allocation of the education budget is in responding to the needs of disadvantaged regions. These findings are grouped into the following four main themes:

1. Inequality in Education Budget Allocation between Regions

The data shows that although the government has allocated at least 20% of the APBN for the education sector, the distribution is uneven. Disadvantaged regions tend to receive a smaller portion of the budget than developed regions, especially in terms of education infrastructure development and human resource procurement. For example, several disadvantaged districts only receive an allocation of education capital expenditure of less than 10% of total regional spending, while districts/cities in Java and Sumatra with high development indexes receive a much larger portion. (Hajriyah, 2020)

2. Political Influence in Determining Budget Allocation

The study found that the decision-making process for the education budget at the central and regional levels is not entirely based on real needs in the field. In practice, budget allocation is heavily influenced by political considerations, such as the power of regional legislative lobbying, regional head development priorities, or electoral interests ahead of elections. Several respondents from bureaucrats and academics said that areas with weak political power are often ignored in budget distribution, even though they are objectively in great need.

3. Budget Effectiveness on Equal Access to Education

The impact of this budget inequality is reflected in the low access and quality of education in disadvantaged areas. Schools in these areas face many limitations: lack of teachers, minimal learning facilities, no laboratories, and difficult access to the internet and teaching materials. In several study locations, school participation rates for junior high and high school levels are still below the national average. Assistance programs such as BOS Funds and DAK Education have not been fully able to overcome these structural problems because the nominal amount received is too small and is not adjusted to the geographical conditions and level of difficulty of the area. (Sormin et al., 2022)

4. Mismatch between Budget Planning and Implementation

The results of interviews with education office officials show that although budget planning has included priorities for 3T (disadvantaged, outermost, and frontier) areas, the realization in the field is not always appropriate. There is often budget refocusing, delays in disbursement, and no assistance in implementation in the field. In addition, the spatial data-based planning system has not been running optimally. This has resulted in many underdeveloped areas not being properly mapped in national and regional planning documents, so they are not a priority for allocation.

In general, the results of the study show that:

1. Education budget politics are still elitist and do not fully support areas with the most urgent needs.
2. The gap in access to education in underdeveloped areas is a consequence of ineffective and unfair budget policies in terms of distribution.
3. Reform of budget planning and execution based on real needs and spatial data is needed to reduce educational inequality between regions in Indonesia. (Najib & Maunah, 2022)

DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that although the Indonesian government has allocated an education budget according to the constitutional mandate of at least 20% of the total APBN, its realization and distribution have not fully reflected the principles of justice and equality. The disparity in budget allocation between developed and underdeveloped regions is still very striking. Regions with strong political access and proximity to the center of power tend to receive a larger allocation of education budgets, while underdeveloped regions that actually need more attention are often marginalized. This condition strengthens the findings in previous studies that budget politics are often more influenced by electoral considerations and the negotiating power of local elites than by the urgency of educational needs in the field. (Napitupulu, 2021) This phenomenon shows that the education budget has not been fully managed with a needs-based budgeting approach.

Instead of responding to structural problems faced by underdeveloped regions such as limited infrastructure, teacher shortages, and low school participation rates, budget policies are more oriented towards political stability and short-term interests. This is in line with the views of public policy experts that the budgeting process in developing countries is often “top-down” and non-participatory, thus ignoring local dynamics and the needs of vulnerable groups. (Piqriani et al., 2023)

In addition, the effectiveness of the education budget in supporting equal access to education is still low due to the absence of a planning and evaluation mechanism that is integrated with spatial data and regional development indicators. Programs such as the BOS Fund and DAK Education are indeed designed to reach schools in the regions, but because the nominal value is limited and the allocation is uniform, the program has not been able to address the complex geographical challenges and disparities in disadvantaged areas. The mismatch between budget planning and implementation also worsens the situation. Budget refocusing, delays in disbursement, and lack of technical assistance have caused many schools in disadvantaged areas not to feel the optimal benefits of the allocated budget. (Ulum, 2020)

This finding emphasizes the importance of reform in the education budget political system, both at the central and regional levels. This reform includes sharpening the analysis of regional-based needs, increasing transparency in the budget planning and distribution process, and strengthening the capacity of local governments to manage and utilize education budgets effectively. Moreover, there needs to be an affirmative policy that truly supports disadvantaged regions, not only as a political slogan, but in the form of a fiscal policy that is measurable, accountable, and has a real impact. Thus, the principle of distributive justice in education can be realized, and the gap in access to education between regions can be significantly reduced.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that education budget politics plays a very significant role in determining the direction, scale, and effectiveness of education budget distribution, especially for underdeveloped regions. Although normatively the government has fulfilled the constitutional mandate by allocating a minimum of 20% of the state budget for the education sector, the reality on the ground shows that the distribution of the budget is not fair and has not really sided with the regions that need it most. The gap between developed and underdeveloped regions in terms of access to education, infrastructure, and human resources for education is still very striking.

The political process in determining budget allocation tends to be more influenced by practical political interests, the lobbying power of regional elites, and electoral orientation, rather than based on the objective needs and urgency of education development in underdeveloped regions. This causes bias in fiscal distribution, where regions with strong political access actually get a larger portion of the budget, even though their level of need is lower. This inequality is the main factor hampering the equalization of access and quality of national education.

In terms of effectiveness, the education budget has not had a significant impact on improving the condition of education in underdeveloped regions. Schools in the region still face serious problems such as limited facilities, lack of educators, low school participation rates, and weak support for technology and learning facilities. Assistance programs such as the BOS Fund and DAK Education which should be the solution have not fully addressed the complexity of the problem because they are not based on data on specific regional needs and are still distributed uniformly.

Furthermore, this study found a mismatch between budget planning and implementation, which is exacerbated by the minimal use of spatial data and regional development indicators in the planning process. This ineffectiveness is also

caused by weak coordination between agencies, limited budget management capacity in the regions, and lack of supervision of implementation in the field.

Thus, to encourage real equality in education, a comprehensive reform of the education budget policy is needed. This policy must be based on the principle of distributive justice, based on accurate data, and carried out through a transparent, participatory process, and oriented towards the real needs of disadvantaged regions. If serious structural changes and affirmative policies are not made, the gap in access to education in Indonesia will continue to be a latent problem that hinders the achievement of inclusive and equitable human resource development.

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