Research Article

Education and Welfare: The Role of Public Policy in Equalizing Educational Opportunities for the South Papua Generation

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Abstract.
This research aims to identify public policies that increase access to education in South Papua, analyze their impact on educational equality, and evaluate the factors that influence the effectiveness of these policies, including the social, economic, and cultural challenges faced by local communities. This research uses qualitative methods and a case study approach to investigate the role of public policy in improving access and quality of education in Merauke Regency, especially Waan District. Through a purposive sampling approach, this research selected a representative sample to explore challenges and solutions in education in the region. The research instrument includes indicators such as access to education, quality of education, community involvement, and the impact of education policies, which will be analyzed comprehensively using a qualitative approach. The research results show that public policy has increased access to education in South Papua through infrastructure, scholarship programs, and improving the quality of teachers and curriculum. The development of educational infrastructure, including school buildings and learning facilities, has a positive impact on the accessibility and quality of education in the region. The scholarship program needs to be updated to reach the right targets and be effective for the people who need it. Improving teacher quality and adjusting the curriculum supports education standards in South Papua, but needs to be further encouraged through continuous training. Social factors such as economic inequality, gender inequality, and traditional culture influence access to education, requiring a holistic approach to education policy.

Keywords: education, well-being, public policy, educational opportunities, South Papuan Generation

1. INTRODUCTION

Papua is one of the regions that has a significant level of educational inequality in Indonesia. Various factors such as limited access to education, limited infrastructure, imbalances in resource allocation, as well as social and cultural factors, have caused a striking educational gap between South Papua and other regions in Indonesia. High

levels of poverty and lack of access to health services also play a role in hampering access to quality education for the people of South Papua [1]. Apart from that, ongoing conflict and social tension in the region also worsen educational conditions [2]. The implication is that the South Papuan generation often faces difficulties in achieving educational opportunities that are equal to other generations in Indonesia. This shows the need for government intervention through public policies aimed at overcoming educational inequality [3].

The role of public policy in equalizing educational opportunities for the South Papuan generation is becoming increasingly important considering that education is one of the key factors in reducing social and economic disparities [4]. Appropriate and targeted policies can help create an inclusive and equitable educational environment for the entire community [5], thus enabling them to access quality education without exception. Thus, this research will explore various public policies that have been and are being implemented, and analyze the extent of their effectiveness and relevance in increasing educational opportunities for the South Papuan generation. With a better understanding of the role of public policy in equalizing educational opportunities, it is hoped that we can provide a clearer view of the steps that need to be taken to improve the quality of education in Papua and reduce existing educational gaps [6].

In South Papua, the main challenge in equalizing educational opportunities for the younger generation is unequal access to educational infrastructure and social welfare. This region is often marginalized in the development of educational infrastructure, such as schools and supporting facilities, due to limited access to transportation and vulnerability to frequent natural disasters. Apart from that, high levels of poverty also worsen this situation with many children being forced to drop out of school because they are burdened by their family's economic needs [7]. Uneven public policies and lack of investment in education and welfare are important factors that hinder the achievement of educational equality in South Papua. Many inland areas are not yet covered by government programs, leaving a large gap between education in urban and rural areas. Lack of facilities such as books and learning technology is also a serious obstacle for children in remote areas. Problems such as social conflict and political tension in the area also affect access to education. Children often become victims of this situation, either directly through the diversion of education funds for conflict purposes, or indirectly through psychological and social impacts that disrupt the teaching and learning process.

In overcoming this problem, serious efforts are needed from the government to increase investment in educational infrastructure, provide equal access to education throughout the region, and reduce socio-economic disparities which are the main

obstacles to education in South Papua. In addition, an approach that involves local community participation in planning and implementing education policies is also key to ensuring that the solutions taken are in line with local needs and context [8]. Thus, through joint efforts between the government and society, it is hoped that educational opportunities for the South Papuan generation can be significantly improved, leading to increased prosperity and sustainable development. Statistical data, especially in Merauke, illustrates the big challenges in equalizing educational opportunities for the South Papuan generation. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the school participation rate in Merauke is still low, with the percentage of school-aged children not attending school reaching a significant figure. In addition, primary and secondary school graduation rates in Merauke are still below the national average, reflecting the difficulty in achieving quality education. This data shows the need for stronger interventions in terms of public policy to improve access and quality of education in Merauke, so that the South Papuan generation in the region has equal opportunities to access decent and quality education.

Research has shown that education has a crucial role in improving the social and economic well-being of a society. However, in South Papua, disparities in access and quality of education remain a problem that hinders progress. Public policies focused on equalizing educational opportunities for generations of South Papuans could be the key to overcoming this inequality. The study highlights that inequality in education in Papua is not only related to physical access to schools, but also involves aspects such as the quality of teaching, curriculum relevant to local needs, as well as psychosocial support for students [9]. Thus, policies that encourage increased accessibility and quality of education, such as scholarship programs for Papuan students, teacher training that is sensitive to local cultural contexts, and the development of inclusive curricula, can help equalize educational opportunities for the Papuan generation. This will not only improve their individual welfare, but can also bring positive changes in the social and economic structure of Papua as a whole.

Although there has been some research conducted to identify challenges in education in South Papua, there are still research gaps that need to be addressed. One of the main problems in focus is the inequality in access and quality of education between South Papua and other parts of Indonesia. Research has highlighted that this inequality is not only geographical, but also involves aspects such as a lack of educational infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, an insufficiently relevant curriculum, as well as cultural and social obstacles that influence the learning process. However, more in-depth studies are still needed to fully understand the complex dynamics behind

educational disparities in Papua. Apart from that, research that looks at the impact of public policy specifically in equalizing educational opportunities for the Papuan generation is also still limited. There is a need for a more comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of policies that have been implemented as well as identification of potential new policies that can overcome these challenges. By filling this research gap, we can better understand the roots of educational problems in Papua and design more effective policy interventions to improve the educational well-being of the South Papuan generation.

The hypothesis of this research is that the implementation of public policies oriented towards equalizing educational opportunities can significantly increase access and quality of education for the South Papuan generation. This research aims to identify public policies that have been implemented to increase access to education in the South Papua region and analyze their impact on educational equality among the local population. Apart from that, this research also aims to evaluate factors that might influence the effectiveness of this policy, including the social, economic and cultural challenges faced by the people of South Papua. Thus, this research will provide in-depth insight into the role of public policy in creating educational equality in the region and offer policy recommendations that can improve educational prosperity for future generations of South Papua.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method and a case study approach. This research was conducted between September and December 2023 in Merauke Regency, with a focus on Waan District. Through a qualitative approach and case studies, the research aims to investigate the role of public policy in balancing educational opportunities for the South Papuan generation in the region. By focusing on these districts, it is hoped that the research results can provide deeper insight into the challenges and potential solutions in improving access and quality of education in these areas. Sampling was carried out using the purposive sampling method. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to selectively choose informants or cases that are considered most relevant and representative for research purposes. This process involves selecting subjects or cases that have certain characteristics or experiences that are considered important to study in the research context. First, researchers will identify specific inclusion criteria, for example, native South Papuans aged between 18-30 years, teachers at local schools, or local government officials involved in education policy. Then, based on these criteria,

the researcher will select a sample that represents the desired variation in relevant characteristics and experiences, such as educational background, type of work, or geographic location.

The research instrument will include several relevant indicators. First, access to education will be analyzed, including the number of schools, distance traveled and availability of transportation to reach school, as well as the level of participation of school-age children in education. Furthermore, the quality of education will be assessed through indicators such as the student teacher ratio and the availability of educational facilities. In addition, the instrument will also evaluate community involvement in education, including the participation of parents and community leaders. Other indicators will include the availability of resources, such as education budgets and teacher qualifications. Aspects of equality and justice will also be taken into account, taking into account educational disparities between social groups and access to education for girls. The instrument will measure the impact of the policy by looking at student academic achievement and graduation rates. Research instruments will be designed to collect data related to these indicators through various methods, such as surveys, interviews, or direct observation, to provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of education policies in achieving educational equality in the region.

Data analysis in this research will be carried out comprehensively and in depth. First, the data collected from the research instrument will be compiled and presented descriptively to understand the characteristics and patterns that emerge in access, quality, community involvement, resource availability, equality, and the impact of educational policies in Waan. Furthermore, statistical regression analysis techniques or t-tests can be used to evaluate the relationship between variables that are relevant to the relationship between education budgets and education quality. Qualitative analysis will also be used to understand the context and dynamics underlying the data findings, including the subjects' perceptions and experiences related to education policy. With a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, data analysis will provide comprehensive insight into the effectiveness of education policies in achieving the goal of educational equality for the South Papuan generation in the region.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, the condition of educational facilities and the number of teachers in the South Papua region will be analyzed to understand the available educational infrastructure and human resources. The role of facilities and number of teachers is

considered crucial in determining the accessibility and quality of education in the region. A deeper understanding of these conditions will provide a more complete picture of the challenges and potential solutions in improving education in South Papua.

TABLE 1: Facilities and access for elementary, middle and high school equivalents in Waan District.

Village	Elementary School			Junior High School			Senior High School	
	Amount	Access	Function	Amount	Access	Function	Amount	Access
Kladar	1	Very easy	No	0	Difficult	-	0	Very difficult
Sabon	1	Very easy	Yes	0	Difficult	-	0	Difficult
Tor	1	Very easy	Yes	0	Difficult	-	0	Very difficult
Waan	1	Very easy	Yes	1	Very easy	Yes	0	Very difficult
Konorau	1	Very easy	Yes	0	Very difficult	-	0	Very difficult
Sibenda	1	Difficult	No	0	Difficult	-	0	Very difficult
Wetau	1	Very easy	Yes	0	Very difficult	-	0	Very difficult
Kawe	1	Very easy	No	0	Very difficult	-	0	Very difficult
Dafnawanga	0	Very difficult	-	0	Difficult	-	0	Very difficult
Wantarma	0	Difficult	-	0	Very Difficult	-	0	Very Difficult
Pembri	1.	Very easy	No	0	Very difficult	-	0	Very difficult

There are nine [9] primary schools in Waan District. Six of them belong to government schools and 3 belong to private schools managed by YPPK. The nine schools are SD Inpres Kawe, SD Inpres Kladar, SD Inpres Konorau, SD Inpres Sibenda, SD Negeri Pembri, SD Negeri Wetau, SD YPPK Sabon, SD YPPK Tor Kladar and SD YPPK Waan. In general, educational activities in several villages are very worrying, this is because almost all villages do not have teaching and learning activities. Educational problems include the absence of teachers who live in the village (high absenteeism rate and low teacher quality). There are no teacher support facilities such as clean water, toilets, teachers' houses, adequate lighting. Transport costs are very high to access the place of assignment. Students are more likely to follow their parents looking for food in the forest because if they go to school in the village there is no one to care for them and feed them. Apart from that, in Kampung Kawe there was an expulsion of teaching staff because the community was disappointed with the teachers who only came to give grade promotion exams but never taught students in Kampung Kawe. Meanwhile, in Wetau Village, the

community expelled teachers because of disputes between parents and teachers, for example, parents of students did not accept the treatment of a teacher who beat students at school. Meanwhile, for junior high schools, there is only 1 school in the Waan District, namely Waan State Middle School. This junior high school accommodates elementary school graduates from villages in the Waan District. Meanwhile, there are no senior high schools in Waan District. This is one of the obstacles in improving the quality of education of the population in this area. As a result of the absence of senior secondary schools, some students who graduated from junior high school gave up their intention to continue their education to senior secondary schools because there were none in the Waan District. Except there are still some who continue their high school education in the Kimaam District.

TABLE 2: Facilities and Number of Teachers in Waan District Villages.

Village	Total number of teachers		Supporting facilities			Building Condition
	Total	Active	Teacher's House	Clean water	Bath wash toilet	
Wantarma	8	2	There is	There isn't any	There isn't any	Heavy Damaged
Sibenda	-	-	-	-	-	There isn't any
Wetau	6	2	There is	There isn't any	There is	Light Damage
Pembri	7	0	There is	There isn't any	There is	Light Damage
Kawe	8	0	There is	There isn't any	There is	Light Damage

Table 2 presents data related to educational conditions in five villages in the Waan District area. Wantarma Village has a total of 8 teachers, but only 2 teachers are active. Supporting facilities in this village are limited, with the absence of clean water, toilet facilities, and the worrying condition of the school buildings, especially those that are badly damaged. Sibenda village does not have data available on the number of teachers, supporting facilities, or building conditions, indicating a lack of information or perhaps a neglected existence of education in the village. Wetau Village has 6 teachers with 2 active teachers, although it has supporting facilities such as a teacher's house, it does not have access to clean water and the condition of the building is slightly damaged. Meanwhile, Pembri village has 7 teachers but none are active, with supporting facilities and building conditions similar to Wetau village. The final village, Kawe, has 8 teachers but none are active, with supporting facilities and building conditions similar to Wetau and Pembri villages. Analysis of this data highlights variations in educational

conditions in each village, including challenges faced such as a shortage of active teachers, a lack of supporting facilities, and building conditions that need improvement.

4. DISCUSSION

Improving educational infrastructure is one of the key aspects of public policy aimed at increasing access to education in the South Papua region [10]. This policy involves various government efforts to build and improve the physical facilities needed to support the learning process, such as school buildings, learning facilities and other supporting facilities. The construction of school buildings is the main focus in efforts to improve educational infrastructure [11]. This policy includes the construction of new buildings to accommodate the growing number of students, renovation of existing buildings to improve their condition and capacity, as well as routine maintenance so that these buildings remain fit for use. Tracking infrastructure development programs can be done by analyzing the budget allocated by the government, construction contracts awarded to third parties, as well as the physical progress of the construction of school buildings.

Improving learning facilities is also an important part of this policy. This includes providing educational equipment and supplies such as tables, chairs, whiteboards, projectors and other supporting technology devices. Evaluation of the impact of this policy on educational accessibility could involve surveys or interviews with teachers, students and parents to assess improvements in the quality of learning facilities and their impact on student motivation and participation in school. Education infrastructure policies also involve the provision of other supporting facilities, such as libraries, laboratories, computer rooms and sports fields [12]. These tools not only support learning in the classroom, but also expand students' educational experiences outside the classroom. Evaluation of the impact of this policy could involve direct observation of the use of these facilities by students and teachers, as well as analysis of student involvement in extracurricular activities held at school. Improving educational infrastructure is an important step in increasing educational accessibility in the South Papua region [13]. Through tracking infrastructure development programs that have been implemented and evaluating their impact on society, a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of this policy in improving the quality of education and achieving educational equality in the region can be obtained.

The scholarship program in South Papua is one of the policies aimed at increasing access to education for economically disadvantaged people [14]. This program includes various types of scholarships, such as full and partial scholarships, merit scholarships,

scholarships based on social criteria, and so on. Selection criteria for scholarship recipients generally include factors such as family income level, academic achievement, and general financial need. Analysis of this scholarship program involves evaluating the suitability of the selection criteria to the social and economic conditions of the people of South Papua, effectiveness in reaching the right targets, and its impact on increasing educational participation among those who benefit. By comprehensively understanding the types of scholarships, selection criteria, and program effectiveness, it can provide in-depth insight in evaluating the contribution of scholarship programs to achieving educational equality goals [15].

In the context of improving the quality of teachers and curriculum in South Papua, various training and professional development programs have been implemented to improve the competency of teaching staff in the area. These programs include training in innovative teaching methods, the use of educational technology, as well as the development of interpersonal skills necessary to interact with students from diverse cultural backgrounds [16]. In addition, implementing a curriculum that is more appropriate to the local context has become the main focus, by adapting learning materials to the social, cultural and natural environmental realities of South Papua. These efforts not only aim to increase the relevance of education to local needs, but also to promote local cultural identity and values in the curriculum. Furthermore, in order to improve education standards in the region, ongoing evaluations are carried out to monitor the development and success of the implementation of these policies, including assessments of student learning outcomes and teacher performance.

Economic inequality is a crucial factor influencing educational equality in the South Papua region [17]. In this context, income differences between social groups are one of the main obstacles in ensuring equal access to education for all individuals [18]. The South Papua region is known for significant economic disparities, with some communities living in deep poverty while others may have better access to economic resources. This creates inequities in families' ability to meet their children's educational needs. Economically marginalized families often face serious challenges in financing their children's education. School costs, including tuition, textbooks, uniforms, and other educational equipment, can be a heavy financial burden for them. Apart from that, the cost of transportation to go to school can also be an obstacle, especially if the transportation infrastructure in the area is underdeveloped. This inability to meet educational needs can have a major impact on educational equality. Children from poor families may be forced to drop out of school or be unable to attend school regularly due to financial difficulties. This causes them to miss out on opportunities

to get a decent education and contributes to wider educational disparities in society. It is important to understand that economic inequality is not just a matter of income distribution, but is also a key determining factor in understanding the challenges of access to education [19]. To overcome this, public policies are needed that not only pay attention to increasing physical access to education, but also provide financial support and assistance to economically vulnerable families so that they can ensure their children receive a decent education.

Inadequate infrastructure is one of the key factors that can hinder access to education in the South Papua region. This is especially evident in poor road conditions, lack of access to electricity, clean water and telecommunications services which can have a major impact on educational participation in local communities. Damaged or poorly serviced roads can make traveling to school difficult and dangerous for students, especially for those living in remote areas [20]. As a result, children may be frequently absent or even drop out of school due to difficulties in accessing educational institutions. Apart from that, lack of access to electricity and clean water can also have a negative impact on teaching and learning activities in schools, such as the availability of learning resources and the comfort of the learning environment [21]. Then, the unavailability of adequate telecommunications services can also hinder access to online educational resources or important information related to education [22]. Therefore, to increase access to education in this region, repairing and upgrading infrastructure which includes improving roads, providing electricity and clean water, as well as increasing telecommunications access needs to be a priority. In doing so, it will not only make it easier for students to attend school regularly, but also improve the overall quality of education by providing a more conducive learning environment and providing wider access to educational resources.

Gender inequality has become a significant obstacle in achieving educational equality in the South Papua region. Women are often faced with a series of barriers that hinder their participation and access to education [23]. One of the main obstacles is the practice of early marriage, where girls are forced to marry at a very young age, resulting in a premature end to their education. This early marriage not only disrupts women's continued formal education, but can also lead to physical and mental health risks and a lack of opportunities for personal development. Household responsibilities are also a factor that influences women's educational participation [24]. The traditional roles assigned to women in society often place them as the primary caretakers of the household, which can reduce the time and energy they have to pursue formal education. This challenge is exacerbated by the lack of adequate child care support and services,

which could free women from the burden of household duties to participate fully in education. Discrimination in access to education is also a serious problem faced by women in South Papua [25]. Factors such as gender stereotypes, cultural norms, and inequalities in access to educational resources often prevent women from having the same opportunities as men in obtaining a quality education. Limited physical access and security can also be obstacles for women in accessing schools, especially in remote or conflict areas [26].

Cultural and traditional factors have a significant impact on attitudes and behavior towards education [27]. Cultural and traditional values often shape people's framework for thinking about formal education, and in some cases, can be a barrier to participation in the education system [5]. For example, in many communities, values such as adherence to traditional traditions, respect for agricultural or other manual work, and gender roles that are embedded in the culture can influence how people value the importance of formal education. In some cases, formal education may be considered less relevant or less valued than traditional activities or occupations that are considered more prominent in the local culture. In societies with strong agricultural or hunting traditions, formal education may be considered less important than the skills and knowledge gained through direct experience in traditional activities [28]. Cultural values that emphasize certain gender roles can also influence educational access and participation, especially for women [29]. In some societies, women may be expected to devote themselves to household and family roles, thereby limiting their opportunities to pursue formal education. Apart from external factors, culture also plays an important role in shaping an individual's attitudes and motivation towards education. Values such as respect for knowledge, the desire to improve one's standard of living, or the aspiration to contribute to society can be important drivers in motivating individuals to pursue formal education [30]. It is important to remember that cultural and traditional values are not always an obstacle to education [31]. In some cases, these values can be a source of motivation and support for educational participation, especially if education is seen as a means of strengthening and preserving local culture. By understanding the role of cultural and traditional values in shaping attitudes and behavior towards education, public policies and educational programs can be designed more sensitively to local cultural contexts. An inclusive approach based on community participation can help overcome barriers arising from cultural values that may conflict with formal education [32], while still respecting and strengthening the cultural and traditional riches of the South Papua people.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This research describes various public policies that have been implemented in an effort to increase access to education in the South Papua region. The main focus is on improving educational infrastructure, scholarship programs, improving teacher quality and curriculum, as well as analysis of social factors such as economic inequality, gender inequality, and cultural and traditional factors that influence educational participation. In the context of improving educational infrastructure, this research highlights the importance of constructing new school buildings, renovating existing facilities, and providing adequate learning facilities. Evaluation of these programs shows that the development of educational infrastructure has had a positive impact on the accessibility and quality of education in the region. Scholarship programs have become an important instrument in expanding access to education for economically disadvantaged communities. However, evaluation of the scholarship program shows the need to adjust selection criteria and increase effectiveness in reaching the right targets. Improving the quality of teachers and curriculum is also an important step in raising educational standards in the region. Research shows that training and professional development for teachers as well as adapting the curriculum to the local context have made a positive contribution to the quality of education in South Papua. Social factors such as economic inequality, gender inequality, and cultural and traditional factors also have a significant impact on access to education in the region. Evaluation of these factors shows that building educational equality requires a holistic approach that takes into account the social, cultural and economic dynamics of local communities.

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