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## QUALITY EDUCATION IN ACHIEVING THE SDGS IN INDONESIA

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### Abstrak

Pendidikan merupakan hak dasar yang sangat penting bagi keberlangsungan hidup manusia dan pembangunan suatu bangsa. Di Indonesia, pendidikan berkualitas memainkan peran krusial dalam mencapai Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan (SDGs), khususnya tujuan ke-4 yang menekankan pendidikan inklusif dan setara. Meskipun pemerintah telah mengeluarkan berbagai kebijakan untuk meningkatkan mutu pendidikan, tantangan yang dihadapi, seperti ketimpangan akses antara daerah perkotaan dan pedesaan, rendahnya kualitas guru, serta keterbatasan infrastruktur, terus menghambat progres tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara mendalam peran pendidikan berkualitas dalam mendukung pencapaian SDGs di Indonesia, serta mengidentifikasi tantangan utama dan kebijakan yang dibutuhkan untuk mencapai pendidikan yang merata dan berkelanjutan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan tinjauan pustaka, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan berkualitas memiliki peran strategis tidak hanya dalam peningkatan kapasitas akademik, tetapi juga dalam pembentukan karakter, pengentasan kemiskinan, dan penguatan ketahanan sosial. Oleh karena itu, perlu adanya kolaborasi lintas sektor dan kebijakan yang berpihak pada inklusivitas dan pemerataan akses pendidikan di seluruh wilayah Indonesia. Dengan komitmen yang kuat dan pendekatan yang terintegrasi, Indonesia memiliki potensi untuk menciptakan sistem pendidikan yang lebih baik, menghasilkan generasi yang terampil, kreatif, dan inovatif, serta siap menghadapi tantangan global serta berkontribusi pada pembangunan sosial dan ekonomi yang berkelanjutan.

**Kata Kunci:** Pendidikan berkualitas; SDGs; kesenjangan pendidikan; pembangunan berkelanjutan; sistem pendidikan Indonesia.

### Abstract

*Education is a fundamental right that plays a vital role in the sustainability of human life and the development of a nation. In Indonesia, quality education holds a crucial role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable education for all. Despite the government's various policies aimed at improving the quality of education, significant challenges remain such as disparities in access between urban and rural areas, low teacher quality, and inadequate infrastructure which continue to hinder*

*progress. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the role of quality education in supporting the achievement of the SDGs in Indonesia, while also identifying the major challenges and policy strategies required to realize equitable and sustainable education. Employing a literature review approach, the findings of this study highlight that quality education serves not only to enhance academic capacity but also to foster character development, reduce poverty, and strengthen social resilience. Therefore, cross-sectoral collaboration and inclusive, equity-oriented educational policies are essential across all regions in Indonesia. With strong commitment and an integrated approach, Indonesia has the potential to build a more effective educational system capable of producing skilled, creative, and innovative generations who are prepared to meet global challenges and contribute to sustainable social and economic development.*

**Keywords:** *quality education; SDGs; educational disparity; sustainable development; Indonesian education system.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is a basic right that is very important for human survival, everyone can have the ability to learn something new and not known before. Education is a process of self-development that includes ways of thinking, attitudes, morals, and language, which contribute to the life of individuals in society (Hera Ramadani & Nugraheni, 2024). In a broad sense, education is a lifelong learning process in a variety of places and situations, which has a positive impact on individuals (Gordon & Mwavita, 2018; Lederman et al., 2023; Somani, 2023). Therefore, education is an effort that is made consciously and planned to create a learning atmosphere and learning process (Erviana & Nugraheni, 2024). The implementation and development of education in the community is adjusted to social conditions and ongoing situations. This is because education is part of the culture of the community, so that when delivered in a way that is in harmony with the characteristics of the community, education can give birth to creative and innovative individuals in accordance with the culture of the local community (Safitri et al., 2022).

As a country of law, Indonesia emphasizes the importance of education as the basis of national development. However, education in Indonesia still faces various challenges and its quality continues to decline and is still inadequate (Ramadhan, 2023). This is evidenced by Patandung & Panggua (2022), which shows that the quality of education in Indonesia from 2018 to 2021 is in a relatively low position compared to several other countries. Indonesia ranks low in the secondary education system category. Data from

surveys PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) in 2019 shows that Indonesia is ranked 74th out of 79 countries listed, or relatively in the bottom sixth. According to a report from The World Economic Forum Sweden in 2018, Indonesia shows a low level of competitiveness, ranking 37th out of 57 countries surveyed globally (Schwab, 2019)

Today, the quality of education has become a serious topic of discussion. This happens because of the recognition that the quality of education greatly affects the quality of the graduates produced. Low education also has an impact on low prospects in creating quality individuals, which is the main goal of education. Therefore, quality education is considered an important foundation for all parties involved, including the community (Alifah, 2021). Because education is very important to advance the nation, quality education is needed. Quality education is a learning process that shapes students to become intelligent, capable, independent, honest, noble, and faithful individuals by freeing them from various limitations and shortcomings (Suteja, 2024). Sustainable development can be achieved through education because education is a means to change human perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Quality education not only focuses on mastering science, but also on the formation of character and moral values that can have a positive impact on the development of the nation (Fadil & Isna Alfaien, 2023). In Indonesia, the challenge of realizing quality education is still quite large. Although there have been various government policies and programs to improve the quality of education, there are still many regions that face gaps in access and quality of education (Amanulloh & Wasila, 2024). Factors such as limited infrastructure, varying teacher quality, and socio-economic inequality affect education in Indonesia. However, with a shared commitment, Indonesia has the potential to create a better education system, produce a generation that is skilled and ready to face global challenges with a strong character (Sasmiharti, 2023).

With the existing challenges, efforts to achieve quality education in Indonesia are also in line with the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially the 4th goal, namely "Quality Education". The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or sustainable development, are a continuation of the Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs) with 17 targets to improve economic and social welfare. One strategy in education is to provide inclusive and equitable quality education, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to learn (Triatmanto, 2021). Based on the results of the study Nurfatimah et al., (2022), The SDGs emphasize the importance of inclusive, equitable, and quality education to encourage lifelong learning opportunities for all. In this context, Indonesia is faced with the challenge of ensuring that every child, without exception, has equal access to education that can develop their potential. In addition, the SDGs also emphasize the importance of improving the quality of teachers, educational infrastructure, and reducing socio-economic gaps, all of which are key elements in creating an education system that can realize these goals (Nurhuda, 2024). The achievement of SDGs goals related to quality education also involves innovations in learning methods, educational technology, and improving the quality of teaching materials that are relevant to the times (Stevani & Nugraheni, 2024). Indonesia must ensure equal access to education, especially for remote areas, by leveraging technology and digitalization to address gaps and prepare students for global challenges (Ayuningtyas, 2021). With strong commitments from the government, the private sector, and the community, Indonesia can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and ensure a better future for future generations. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of quality education in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Indonesia, especially goal 4 on "Quality Education".

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach through the literature review method (library research) (Habsy, 2017). The literature review used includes a review of primary and secondary literature relevant to the topic of quality education and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The research approach is carried out in depth to study and understand a phenomenon through individual understanding and views (Ardiansyah et al., 2023). The literature studied includes: First, academic sources such as national and international scientific journals, educational reference books, and the results of previous research published in the last 5-10 years. Second, government policy

documents, reports from international institutions such as UNESCO, the World Economic Forum, and data from BPS and the Ministry of Education and Culture support contextual analysis in Indonesia. The analysis process is carried out through three main stages: Data reduction: selecting literature that is in accordance with the focus of the research; Data presentation: grouping information based on key themes such as the role of quality education, challenges, policies, and achievements; Conclusions: carried out through thematic synthesis to see the linkage between quality education and the achievement of the SDGs, especially in the context of inclusivity and sustainable development.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Importance of Quality Education in Achieving the SDGs**

Quality education plays an important role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly on goal 4 which focuses on providing inclusive and equitable education for all (Magfiroh & Nugraheni, 2024). This goal emphasizes the importance of providing lifelong learning opportunities, ranging from primary, secondary, to vocational education that is relevant to the needs of the world of work. Quality education not only aims to improve academic ability, but also to shape individuals to be ready to face global challenges. In the context of sustainable development, quality education has a strategic role as a catalyst for social and economic change (Anggraini & Nugraheni, 2024). Through good education, individuals are able to develop skills to find solutions to various global problems, such as economic inequality, climate change, and social conflicts. In addition, education provides insight into the importance of preserving the environment and natural resources, which are important elements in achieving sustainability.

The role of education in improving the quality of life is not limited to mastering technical skills, but also touches on the aspect of strengthening character and moral values (Susianita & Riani, 2024). Individuals who receive a quality education tend to have better access to economic opportunities, are able to actively participate in social life, and become productive members of society. Education also paves the way to break the chain of

poverty, as educated individuals have the potential to improve their family's economic condition and give priority to education for the next generation (Zulyanto, 2022). Furthermore, quality education is an important foundation in creating a just and prosperous society. Through education, the community can understand the importance of active participation in development, both in the social, economic, and political fields. Thus, quality education is not only about educating individuals, but also building communities that are able to face the challenges of the future with strong character and broad insights.

### **The Main Challenges in Realizing Quality Education in Indonesia**

Equitable education will certainly affect inclusive and sustainable economic growth, a productive workforce, and decent work for all, so as to reduce income inequality. Fourth goal SDGs targeting around the world can ensure that no citizen is left behind, forgotten or marginalized to achieve a prosperous life. All boys and girls must complete primary and secondary education and ensure equal access to education for all children. However, of course, there are still challenges that can cause educational gaps in some regions. One of the main challenges is the inequality of access to education between urban and rural areas. Data from National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) shows that in 2020, only about 73% of children in rural areas had access to secondary education, while in urban areas, this figure reached 82%. This creates a significant gap in learning opportunities for children based on geographical location. The gap between primary and secondary education is the factor of where the child lives.

**Table 1 Number of Out-of-School Children**

Region of Residence	Number of out-of-school children by education level and region of residence					
	Elementary School/Equivalent		Junior High School/Equivalent		Senior High School/Equivalent	
	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023
Urban	0.45	0.32	5.6	5.82	18.75	18.5
Rural	1.06	1.12	8.68	8.45	27.6	26.06
Urban + Rural	0.71	0.67	6.94	6.93	22.52	21.61

*Source: BPS, 2024*

BPS Indonesia has the Number of Out-of-School Children by Education Level and Region of Residence in 2022-2023 recorded the number of elementary / junior high school / high school equivalent as 72.97 children in villages/districts, and 49.44 children did not continue their education. Elementary/junior high schools are easier for children to reach because they are spread almost throughout the region than high school equivalents, most of which are found in urban areas. Based on this data, in rural/district areas it shows a higher value than in urban areas. This shows that access to secondary education in rural areas cannot be enjoyed equally. This must be a concern for the government so that all children aged 16-18 years get the same opportunity to be able to access secondary education wherever they live.

Several other factors are also the cause of the educational gap in Indonesia, namely the low quality of school facilities in some regions is still low, the quality of educational facilities and infrastructure in Indonesia is still a serious problem, especially in remote areas. Many schools in some areas do not have basic facilities, such as adequate classrooms, clean sanitation, and access to other educational resources. These shortcomings hinder the teaching and learning process and affect overall educational outcomes, the low quality of teachers becomes a critical challenge and many teachers, especially in remote areas, lack adequate training and professional education necessary to teach effectively. The level of education and competence of teachers in certain areas is still low, which has an impact on the quality of teaching and student learning outcomes, infrastructure factors, the number and quality of books (references), the high cost of education caused by economic factors have a significant influence on children's participation in education. Children from low-income families are more prone to dropping out of school, especially when the cost of education, such as books, uniforms, and transportation, is a heavy burden. Data from Susenas shows that children from low-income families have significantly lower levels of educational participation compared to those from high-income families, as well as school groupings (Sekolah Berstandar Nasional/SBN dan Rintisan Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional/RSBI) (Hidayat, 2017). This needs to be a concern by the government that it turns out that the policy for secondary education still does not provide maximum results like in basic education.



### **Efforts and Policies to Improve Quality Education**

SDGs are an effort by an oriented government that aims to achieve and realize sustainable development on a global and national scale. This effort aims to meet the needs of a country's condition without sacrificing current and future generations to meet its needs. Good quality education is expected to be a source of development in realizing a developed nation. To achieve the SDGs goals in the field of education, a series of effective strategies are needed to overcome the problems that cause the low quality of education in Indonesia, especially in remote areas that do not have adequate educational equity. The Government of Indonesia has taken a series of steps and efforts in organizing education in accordance with the opinion of the Council of Ministers of the Presidency Regulation Number 59 of 2017 concerning the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals stating that Indonesia is required to realize the high quality of education and improve the prospects of quality education.

Based on this, education policies in Indonesia will be more effective if the government adopts an approach by several other countries in achieving the SDGs, especially in improving the quality of education. Improving the quality of education in Indonesia is currently only achieved in several provinces, so efforts are needed to achieve qualitative equality nationally. Other countries can adopt SDGs strategies that have proven successful and implement similar policies. It is known that the quality of education in Indonesia still needs equity, and there are various problems that need to be overcome. To address these issues, the participation of other countries in supporting the SDGs program is urgently needed so that Indonesia can improve the quality of its education. From the perspective of education economics, educated individuals have the potential to change and build the country towards a better future, where a quality country is supported by high education and quality human resources. Therefore, collaboration with other countries in supporting the SDGs program is very important. This cooperation can include knowledge exchange, provision of funds, and technical support to implement better policies. Thus, to achieve the goal of better and sustainable education, a strong commitment from government, community support, and active participation from the private sector and international organizations. Only with an integrated and collaborative



approach can Indonesia ensure that every child gets a quality education, so that it is able to contribute optimally to the development of the nation.

### **Achievements and Prospects of Quality Education in Indonesia**

Increasing the education participation rate and reducing the dropout rate are the main focus in efforts to build quality human resources. Education is a basic right of every individual and an important foundation for social and economic development. However, challenges such as limited access, economic factors, and lack of public awareness are still significant obstacles in achieving equal distribution of education. And education is one of the important foundations in the development of a country. Without good and quality education, it is difficult for a country to achieve sustainable economic growth as well as significant social progress. In addition, education also has an important role in creating a nation that is capable, faithful, devoted to God, and has good knowledge and national insight.

Through an equitable distribution of education participation rates and a reduction in the dropout rate as much as possible, every individual regardless of socio-economic background, should have this opportunity to obtain free education divided equally in order to reduce the social gap in order to reach its full potential. Free education is a concept in which the government or other institutions provide access to education at no cost or at a very affordable cost to all individuals, regardless of economic background, race, religion, or gender. One of them is by providing transportation for students in remote areas. Programs such as the Smart Indonesia Card (KIP) have made a great contribution in reducing the burden of education costs for underprivileged families is one of the efforts to participate in education. In the Smart Indonesia Card program, it has managed to reach more than 20 million students throughout Indonesia in 2023.

In this context, free education in the community is very suitable which has significant social benefits. The concept of free education aims to provide accessibility and equal opportunities for everyone to get quality education, which in turn is expected to improve the level of literacy, skills, and quality of life of the community as a whole. The benefits of free education can increase educational participation, society will have more skilled and competitive workforce and equitable education can also help reduce social

disparities and improve the overall welfare of society. Meanwhile, reducing the dropout rate will encourage the creation of a younger generation that is more confident and able to contribute to nation building.

### **Success in the implementation of inclusive education programs.**

Success in the implementation of inclusive education programs is a concept that ensures that every individual, including those with special needs, has equal access and equal opportunities to obtain quality education. In an article written by Devi Milasari and Nursiwi Nugraheni, it was explained that the success of the implementation of this program is not only measured by how many students get access to education but also by the quality of learning they receive and the impact on the empowerment in society. Inclusive education programs also support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have a global agenda launched by the United Nations in 2015. This agenda includes 17 goals and 169 targets planned to be achieved by 2030. Which specifically focuses on ensuring access to inclusive and quality education and increasing lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals (Elfert, 2019)

There are aspects of the success of Inclusive Education as seen in the following aspects:

1. Conservation Approach in Education, where the conservation approach in education is integrated to instill the values of sustainability and environmental responsibility from an early age. Conservation education is an effective approach to achieving these goals that teaches students to understand the environment, care for nature, and act to protect the planet. This is important to encourage the awareness of the younger generation, including students with special needs, towards environmental conservation as part of sustainable development. This strategy also helps to create a welcoming learning environment for all students. The implementation of conservation education includes tree planting in schools, recycling actions, and livestock manure farming for biogas. Equitable Education Accessibility Inclusive education aims to eliminate barriers to access, both physical, social, and economic. A welcoming and inclusive educational environment allows all students to feel welcome and able to actively participate in the learning process.

1. Technology Interaction in Learning, in the use of technology also pays attention to the most important element to facilitate inclusive learning. With the development of information and communication technology, barriers that used to be barriers, such as geographical distance and limited access to educational resources, can now be overcome. UNESCO emphasized that technology has an important role to play in improving access to education globally, especially for those in remote locations. This development provides opportunities for educators and educational institutions to apply online-based learning methods and utilize various digital learning resources. Online-based learning, such as through e-learning platforms, webinars, and online courses, offers convenience, both in terms of time flexibility and a variety of learning materials that can be accessed by students from any location. In addition, digital learning resources, such as e-books, learning apps, and educational videos, provide rich alternatives and support the learning process with a more interactive and engaging approach. Educational technology, or EdTech, is paving the way for innovative learning methodologies, allowing wider access to education, and supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to education.

The success of inclusive education is inseparable from strong policy support. The Government sector, educational institutions, and communities need to work together to ensure that inclusive education programs can run effectively. According to a UNESCO report (2022), more than 40% of students with special needs in developing countries still face challenges in accessing education. However, countries that have integrated inclusive technologies show an increase in participation of up to 30%. And judging from data from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture in 2023, it is noted that inclusive education programs in several pilot schools have succeeded in increasing the attendance rate of students with special needs by 85%, compared to the national average of 60%. The success in the implementation of inclusive education programs conducted a study, conducted by the OECD stating that students in inclusive learning environments

tend to have higher levels of empathy and social skills compared to students in segregated environments.

**The prospect of quality education in creating a young generation that is ready to face global challenges.**

Education is not only a process of developing systematically and consciously, but it is also an effort that stimulates the potential of individuals, preparing them to play an optimal role in society. Education plays a central role in human life, along with being the foundation for a person's development in various aspects such as way of thinking, behavior, then character, linguistics, and his participation in living in society. Therefore, the importance of education does not only lie in individual aspects, but also in the contribution that individuals can make in the community environment. Education is a basic need for humans, allowing them to acquire knowledge that they did not know before. The quality of education remains a serious topic in recent discussions, because the quality of education has a significant impact on the quality of graduates. The lack of quality of education also has the potential to reduce expectations to create quality Human Resources (HR). Therefore, quality education is the center of attention for all people or entities involved, including community members, as it is considered an important starting point to achieve optimal educational outcomes. Nowadays, efforts to improve the quality of education have become the main focus of government programs.

Quality education is the main pillar in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Sustainable development can be achieved through education because education is a means to change human perceptions, attitudes and behaviors. Education is necessary in human life because education is the process of forming ways of thinking, attitudes, characters, languages, and how they contribute to the nation and state. In the article, Asyharul Muala and Nursiwi Nugraheni emphasized that quality education is not only a tool to educate individuals but also builds the capacity of the younger generation to be able to face global challenges that continue to develop. The importance of this quality education includes equitable access, kurikulum yang relevan, dan pendekatan pembelajaran yang mampu mengembangkan kompetensi abad ke-21, seperti kemampuan critical thinking, collaboration, and technological literacy. And good education has been

shown to increase workforce productivity, stimulate innovation, and play a leading role in inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Of course, quality education has a crucial role in encouraging the progress of a nation. Education not only functions as a forum to shape the young generation to become agents of change for the future, but must also be able to produce real impacts in various aspects of life. The concept of ideal education should not be limited to formal education only, but can also change the mindset and perspective of the next generation who will lead this nation. Innovative and quality education is expected to encourage the creativity of individuals, especially the younger generation, so that they can develop their potential as agents of reform. With this ability, the younger generation will play a significant role in supporting the concept of sustainable development which is a global goal (Safitri et al., 2022).

Based on supporting data that can be seen from the 2023 UNESCO report, around 244 million children in the world still have access to basic education, which shows the importance of quality education, and based on BPS Indonesia data (2023), the human development index (HDI) in Indonesia has increased to 72.91, but disparities between regions are still the main obstacle that must be overcome through inclusive education policies. To realize a quality education project, several strategies are needed such as: Preparing the next generation of the nation who are equipped with technology and extensive knowledge, Equitable distribution of facilities and infrastructure, Learning innovation, Paying attention to teacher welfare, Improving teacher ability. With this, the commitment to quality education in Indonesia can create a young generation that is creative, and innovative, so that they are able to compete globally.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Quality education has a strategic role in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in goal 4. Through quality education, individuals not only acquire academic abilities, but are also formed into citizens who have strong character, ethics, and the ability to participate in social and economic development. In the Indonesian context, quality education plays a role as a lever for social change that

is able to overcome poverty, increase environmental awareness, and strengthen social cohesion. However, the realization of quality education is still faced with significant challenges, such as inequality of access between regions, limited infrastructure, low quality of educators, and economic disparities. Therefore, a more integrated strategy is needed through cross-sector collaboration, education digitalization, teacher capacity building, and equitable distribution of educational facilities. In closing, this study emphasizes that the role of quality education is vital in building a generation that is adaptive, innovative, and ready to compete at the global level. The success of achieving the SDGs cannot be separated from strong investment in the equitable and inclusive education sector.

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