Social Equality and Online Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

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Abstract. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought significant transformations in various social processes aspects of Indonesia. Prior to the pandemic, face-to-face interactions in physical spaces were the norm in most social processes. With the onset of Covid-19, a shift towards virtual platforms has become prevalent. This research focuses on the transformation of the learning process in Indonesia from classrooms to online learning environments. The virtual learning process from home requires access to essential facilities and supportive guidance from teachers or mentors. The concern addressed in this paper is the emergence of social polarization in terms of equality, justice, and inclusion. While some community groups have access to the necessary resources and can participate in online learning, others face barriers and are unable to do so. To analyze, researchers adopt a conceptual framework emphasizing social equality, justice, and inclusion, all of which underscore the importance of providing equal opportunities for all citizens to exercise their educational rights. The research approach is qualitative, involving a review of scholarly literature on equality, justice, and inclusion. This study concludes that not all students have access to the internet, electricity, and devices. This has an impact on the occurrence of inequality in the educational process.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a major shift in the way people learn in Indonesia. Prior to the pandemic, students typically learned in a face-to-face setting, but the pandemic forced schools to close and move to online learning. This shift has created several challenges for students, families, and educators.

One of the biggest challenges of online learning is access to technology. Not all students have access to computers, internet, or other devices that are necessary for online learning. This can create a significant gap between students who have access to technology and those who do not.

Another challenge of online learning is motivation. Students who are used to learning in a face-to-face setting may find it difficult to stay motivated when learning from home. This can be especially challenging for students who are already struggling academically.

Finally, online learning can be difficult for students who need extra help. In a face-to-face setting, students can easily get help from their teachers or classmates. However, this is not always possible in an online setting.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a few challenges for education in Indonesia. However, there are also a few opportunities. Online learning can provide students with more flexibility and choice. It can also help students to develop new skills, such as time management and independent learning.

As Indonesia continues to recover from the pandemic, it is important to find ways to make online learning more accessible and effective for all students. This will require a concerted effort from the government, schools, families, and educators.

In addition to the challenges mentioned above, the COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated social inequalities in Indonesia. Students from low-income families are more likely to lack access to technology and other resources that are necessary for online learning. This can lead to a widening gap in educational attainment between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

The government of Indonesia has taken some steps to address these challenges. For example, the Ministry of Education and Culture has provided subsidies for internet data and laptops for students from low-income families. However, more needs to be done to ensure that all students have equal access to quality education, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on education in Indonesia. However, it has also created an opportunity to rethink and improve the way we teach and learn. By addressing the challenges of online learning and ensuring that all students have equal access to quality education, we can build a more equitable and inclusive education system for all Indonesians.

2 Conceptual Framework

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This study focuses on the concept of social opportunity of student in learning during the covid-19 pandemic. As we all know, during a pandemic, the government made social policies such as social distancing and avoiding crowds[1]. The impact of this social policy on education is that the government decided to implement a policy of closing schools and starting to implement learning methods with an online system (from home) [2]. This policy brings changes to the learning process from face-to-face learning in physical spaces to virtual learning. On the one hand, this policy reduces the rate of spread of Covid-19, but on the other hand it creates social inequality to gain access to learning. There are groups of students who have access to learning, but some others do not get the same access. The learning process is very dependent on the internet and gadget facilities. However, not all student groups have internet access and gadget facilities [3]. Graphically, the conceptual framework of this article can be illustrated in the following figure:

![Conceptual Framework](Fig.1.png)

**Fig.1. Conceptual Framework**

### 2.1. Social Policies

WHO recommends physical distancing to break the chain of transmission of Covid-19 [4]. In Indonesia, this advice is outlined in Government Regulation Number 21/2020 concerning Large-Scale Social Restrictions. These policies include; (1) school and workplace closures, (2) restrictions on religious activities, and (3) restrictions on activities in public places (5). Obviously, the purpose of this policy is to break the chain of transmission of Covid-19 in Indonesia.

Specifically in the field of education, the Ministry of Education together with the Minister of Home Affairs, the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Health issued a joint policy regarding Guidelines for Organizing Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The principles of education policy during the Covid-19 pandemic are prioritizing the health and safety of students, educators, education staff, families, and society in general, and considering the growth and development of students and psychosocial conditions to fulfill educational services during the Covid-19 pandemic (6). The implementation of this policy is virtual learning or online learning. Since this policy was issued, internet facilities and gadgets have become a basic need for every student and teacher throughout Indonesia.

### 2.2. Social Equality

Social equality is a classic topic in sociology (7). This concept developed together with the emergence of a class society driven by industrialization. The concept related to social equality is social justice. However, this last concept is more widely discussed in philosophical studies.

Miller [8] presents two distinct categories of equality: distributive equality and social equality. Distributive equality refers to the fair and equitable distribution of social goods as a prerequisite for justice. Social equality, on the other hand, relates to social ideals that do not involve hierarchies based on social statuses.

Furthermore, social equality can be understood within the context of social justice. Reisch [9] explains social justice in relation to distributive justice and proposes six conceptual frameworks for distributive justice, including equal rights and opportunities, distribution based on achievements and productivity, and unequal distribution based on status or contractual agreements.

Ayala, Wilcox, and Hage [10] elaborate on social justice by emphasizing values such as inclusion, collaboration, cooperation, equal access, and opportunity. They describe social justice as the fair distribution of power, resources, and obligations in society to all individuals, regardless of their personal characteristics. They illustrate that social equality can also be explored through the lens of social inclusion or exclusion.

Social exclusion refers to the deprivation experienced by certain groups due to factors such as lack of employment, discrimination, isolation, and poverty [11]. It can be based on various social identities like religion, ethnicity, race, social class, caste, gender, and citizenship [12]. Apart from that social equality is also related to the concept of justice. It is usually a concern in philosophical studies such as that carried out by Rawls [13]. Rawls outlines two basic principles of justice: equal basic liberties for all and social and economic administration in a way that benefits and provides equal opportunities for all. Meanwhile, Magnis-Suzeno [14] defines justice in terms of state obligations and the creation of conditions for the welfare of citizens through various policies.

### 2.3. Social Inequality

In general, inequality refers to the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities among certain members of society. In addition, inequality includes economic, social, and spatial dimensions. Economic inequality refers to disparities in income and wealth. Whereas social inequality refers to differences in rights and access to opportunities and social welfare or public goods based on race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, disability, citizenship status and place of residence. status. Finally, spatial inequality refers to the spatial manifestations and implications of inequality, such as regional and rural-urban inequality [15].

Inequality—the state of being unequal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities—is a core concept of
social justice theory. Inequality can be interpreted in two categories. First, economic inequality and second, inequality in opportunity. Economic inequality means “income inequality”, “monetary inequality” or, more broadly, inequality in “living conditions”. Then, inequality of opportunity is related to inequality of rights and obligations. The second approach deals with opportunity, that is, a circumstance beyond one’s acquaintance, that affects one’s potential outcome [16]. The focus of this article is inequality in education.

Education is an important dimension for human well-being. Education is related to empowerment, ability, and one’s participation in society. People who lack education or skills are more likely to live in poverty. Education is one of the main determinants of future economic attainment and upward social and economic mobility [17]. During the Covid-19 pandemic, different access to internet, electricity, gadgets contributed to educational inequality. During online learning, these facilities are a basic need in education.

3 Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative approach, which involves analysing empirical data encompassing event documents, recorded conversations, verbal expressions, gestures, and various events relevant to the research topic. W. Lawrence Neuman [18] outlines four fundamental orientations regarding the treatment of data. Firstly, data is regarded as inherently meaningful. Secondly, an interpretive and critical lens is applied to the data. Thirdly, the researcher employs both reconstructive and praxis logic in analysing the data. Lastly, the qualitative approach involves a non-linear, cyclical analysis process.

The research in this paper relies on secondary data obtained from databoks.katadata.co.id, focusing on the availability of online learning facilities such as electricity, internet access, smartphones, and computers owned by students. However, the data has been modified to enhance presentation and analysis while maintaining the integrity of the original information.

The availability of these facilities, as depicted in the data, is examined through the lens of social equality. The concept of social equality will be explored using the frameworks of justice and social inclusion.

The analysis of the data follows the process outlined in the diagram presented below.

Fig. 2. Analysis process.

This research relies on pre-existing secondary data concerning the challenges encountered by students in online learning during the pandemic. Utilizing these secondary data, the researcher approached the analysis from a subjective perspective, employing a social justice approach.

Consequently, the analysis conducted in this paper follows a cyclical process. It begins with the availability of data, which is then subjectively interpreted. Subsequently, a relevant conceptual framework is identified. The data is re-analysed based on this conceptual framework. The conclusions drawn reflect both the analysis and the subjective interpretation of the conceptual framework.

4 Findings

The World Bank Indonesia Flagship Report (2021) reports that over the last decade, Indonesia has made rapid progress in internet connectivity, but not all populations have equal access. Half of the adult population still does not have access [19]. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Indonesia implemented a distance learning process. In this regard, the World Bank said that around 60 percent of students were found unable to participate in online classes due to a lack of reliable internet and limited ownership of internet-enabled devices. The SMERU Research Institute also submitted the same report on inequality [3]. SMERU reports that 30% of teachers in villages outside Java Island still do not use any digital applications in their teaching and learning process.

The results of other studies can also be seen in the data presented in the following databox. The data presented demonstrates that not all individuals have equal access to online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The graphic data reveals that certain community groups encounter difficulties in fully exercising their right to education.

These groups face various challenges in their pursuit of learning. Some of these challenges include the lack of preparedness among teachers or parents to provide guidance for online learning at home. Additionally, inadequate internet access, the absence of electricity facilities, and the lack of smartphones or computers as essential tools for online learning pose further obstacles.

These challenges are depicted in Fig 3 below.

Fig. 3. The Challenge of Learning from Home [20]
Source: https://databoks.katadata.co.id/4/7/2020
The chart displays the following findings: 38% of students reported feeling inadequately guided by their teachers, while 35% faced challenges with unreliable internet access. Additionally, 7% of students did not possess smartphones, 4% encountered difficulties accessing online learning applications, and 3% lacked parental support. Other challenges were reported by 13% of students.

This survey titled "Back to School Plans in the Covid-19 Period" was conducted by U-Report Indonesia. It encompassed diverse regions of Indonesia, with a significant number of responses originating from West Java.

At the institutional level, it is evident that not all educational units in Indonesia have access to internet and electricity facilities. The subsequent chart presents data regarding the availability of internet and electricity facilities in Elementary, Junior High, and Senior High Schools across Indonesia.

![Fig. 4. Availability of electricity & Internet Access in Education Units in Indonesia](https://databoks.katadata.co.id)

There are a total of 116,783 elementary schools in Indonesia that possess both electricity and internet facilities. Among elementary schools, 25,494 have electricity but lack internet access, while 6,604 schools do not have either internet or electricity facilities.

In the case of Junior High Schools, 12,956 schools have both internet and electricity facilities. Additionally, 6,143 schools have electricity but no internet access, and 817 schools lack both internet and electricity facilities.

Regarding High Schools, all 12,956 schools have both electricity and internet facilities. However, 884 schools have electricity but no internet access, while there are no schools at the High School level that lack both internet and electricity facilities.

5 Discussion

The statistical data presented provides concrete evidence of social division in education during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. A specific group of people is unable to participate in online learning due to a lack of essential resources like electricity, internet access, smartphones, or computers. Furthermore, they lack the guidance and support of teachers during the online learning process.

This situation highlights the presence of inequality, injustice, and exclusion in education throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, making it difficult for all Indonesian citizens to access equal educational opportunities. Some individuals are unable to fully exercise their right to education and face challenges in learning compared to other community groups.

These challenges can be classified as both structural and situational. They are structural because they reveal the uneven distribution of social justice within the community, hindering equal access to education for all citizens. They are also situational as these challenges have emerged unexpectedly, catching the state, which holds the primary responsibility for ensuring the educational rights of every citizen, unprepared to facilitate equal realization of these rights.

The equitable and inclusive distribution of internet, electricity, and teachers has not been adequately achieved for all citizens. As a result, not all individuals can fully exercise their right to education during the online learning phase of the Covid-19 pandemic.

6 Conclusion

The Covid-19 outbreak has brought about significant societal transformations across various levels: institutions, civil society, and individuals. One notable change occurred in the field of education, where the learning process shifted from traditional face-to-face methods to online platforms.

In contrast to face-to-face learning, online education places a greater emphasis on individual resources. Students are now required to have personal access to smartphones, computers, and internet connections. Unlike traditional classrooms, where schools typically provide these resources, online learning relies more on self-reliance, with information flow being less dependent on teachers.

Building upon the earlier discussed concepts of equality, justice, and inclusion, the challenges associated with online education during the Covid-19 pandemic have resulted in disparities, injustices, and exclusions among specific community groups. Not all individuals have equal and inclusive opportunities to exercise their right to receive a quality and equitable education.

Inequalities in access to education that occur during the distance learning process have an impact on the quality of education for students. Some students have access to quality education, but others receive less quality education. This will affect the inequality of citizens' opportunities to get better social welfare in the future. Therefore, a special policy is needed that can accelerate the quality of education for groups who during the pandemic did not have access to the necessary educational facilities.

To address these disparities, injustices, and exclusions during the online learning process, it is imperative for the state to intervene. The state plays a vital role in ensuring the fair distribution of essential resources among all segments of the population,
enabling everyone to realize their right to a quality education.

References


