

# Transformative Leadership in Equitable Public Management: Advancing Educational Access and Quality in South Papua

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## Abstract

*This study explores the barriers and opportunities for enhancing educational access and quality in South Papua through equitable public management strategies. The region faces challenges due to geographical, social, and economic factors that impact the implementation of education policies. The study aims to identify these challenges and propose solutions to improve education equity. A qualitative case study approach was used to examine public management dynamics in South Papua. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with stakeholders, including government officials, school leaders, teachers, students, and parents. Quantitative surveys were also conducted to complement qualitative data. The data was analyzed using thematic coding and triangulation for reliability and validity. Key barriers include limited infrastructure, insufficient teaching staff, and socio-economic issues such as poverty and gender inequality. However, opportunities exist, such as government initiatives for infrastructure improvement, inclusive education, and teacher development. Collaboration between government and civil society organizations is essential for addressing these challenges. This study offers valuable insights into educational management challenges in South Papua, emphasizing the need for a participatory, collaborative approach to create equitable and sustainable education solutions..*

**Keywords:** *Public Management, Educational Access, Educational Quality, Equity in Education, Policy Implementation.*

## Introduction

Access to quality education serves as a fundamental pillar for achieving sustainable development, as outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4) (Costa et al., 2024). Education fosters economic growth, reduces inequality, and equips individuals with the skills necessary to address societal challenges (Tyagi et al., 2021). Despite its recognized importance, disparities in educational access and quality persist globally, especially in remote and underdeveloped regions (Cullinan et al., 2021). These disparities are often driven by factors such as geographic isolation, inadequate infrastructure, socioeconomic inequalities, and limited government investment in educational resources (Qureshi, 2021). Consequently, marginalized populations in such regions are frequently excluded from the opportunities provided by quality education, further entrenching cycles of poverty and limiting their potential to contribute to broader development goals (Fan, 2023).

In remote areas, including regions such as Papua Selatan, Indonesia, these challenges are further exacerbated by unique contextual barriers. Geographic remoteness often translates into high transportation costs, limited availability of qualified teachers, and insufficient school facilities, all of which hinder equitable access to education (Macharia et al., 2023). Additionally, socio-cultural factors, such as differing perceptions of education's value and gendered disparities in school attendance, compound these issues (Adomako Gyasi et al., 2023). Addressing these complex challenges requires a nuanced understanding of the local context, supported by evidence-based public management strategies that prioritize equity (Newcomer et al., 2023). This highlights the urgent need for targeted policy interventions and resource allocations that bridge the gap between urban and rural education systems, ensuring that no population is left behind in the pursuit of sustainable development.

In South Papua, Indonesia, educational disparities are profoundly shaped by the region's geographic remoteness, limited infrastructure, and persistent socio-cultural barriers (Gibson et al., 2022). The rugged terrain and vast distances between communities make it challenging for students to access schools,

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particularly in rural and isolated areas (Rodriguez-Segura & Kim, 2021). Many schools are sparsely distributed, often requiring children to travel long distances by foot or rely on inadequate transport systems, leading to reduced school attendance and higher dropout rates. Moreover, inadequate infrastructure such as poorly maintained school buildings, limited teaching resources, and a lack of access to modern technology further exacerbates the educational inequities faced by students in these regions (Olanrewaju et al., 2021). These challenges are compounded by the insufficient allocation of educational funds, which tends to prioritize urban over rural areas, leaving remote communities significantly underserved.

In addition to geographic and infrastructural constraints, socio-cultural factors play a critical role in limiting access to education in South Papua. Traditional norms and economic challenges within Indigenous communities often result in lower prioritization of formal education, especially for girls (Thamminaina et al., 2020). Many families rely on subsistence farming or informal labor, leading to children being engaged in work to support household livelihoods rather than attending school. Language barriers also contribute to these disparities, as many students speak indigenous languages at home and face difficulties adapting to curricula delivered in the national language (Xiao, 2024). Together, these factors create a cycle of marginalization that hinders educational attainment and limits opportunities for socioeconomic advancement, underscoring the urgent need for targeted, equitable public management strategies to address these systemic challenges.

Existing studies on educational disparities have predominantly emphasized structural deficits, such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher availability, and limited access to learning resources. While these analyses provide valuable insights into systemic challenges, they often overlook the nuanced interplay of policy implementation and local governance dynamics that directly impact education delivery in remote regions (Barikzai et al., 2024). Moreover, such studies tend to adopt a generalized approach, offering solutions that may not adequately address the unique socio-cultural, economic, and geographic conditions of specific localities. This creates a gap in understanding how public management strategies can be tailored to bridge these disparities effectively. Addressing this gap necessitates a shift in focus toward equitable public management strategies that are both inclusive and context-sensitive. These strategies must consider local stakeholder engagement, adaptive policy frameworks, and resource allocation models that prioritize equity without compromising efficiency (Chu & Cannon, 2021). In the context of South Papua, Indonesia, where geographic isolation and socio-economic constraints exacerbate educational inequities, the need for such an approach becomes even more critical. Exploring these dimensions can provide actionable insights to policymakers and practitioners, ultimately fostering sustainable improvements in educational access and quality in marginalized communities.

The persistent educational disparities in South Papua highlight the need for a focused analysis of public management strategies that prioritize equity while maintaining operational efficiency. Despite ongoing policy efforts to bridge the gaps, geographical remoteness, infrastructural inadequacies, and socio-economic constraints continue to undermine equitable access to quality education. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced approach that integrates localized insights with systematic public management frameworks, ensuring that interventions are both context-sensitive and resource-efficient. In this context, equitable public management emerges as a pivotal mechanism to reconcile disparities in education delivery (Young et al., 2020). By balancing equity through targeted support for underserved communities and efficiency via the optimal allocation of limited resources such strategies have the potential to mitigate systemic inequities. A comprehensive analysis is therefore essential to identify scalable solutions that align with the unique demographic, cultural, and economic characteristics of South Papua, ultimately contributing to the broader goals of inclusive and sustainable educational development. This study aims to identify key barriers and opportunities for enhancing educational access and quality in South Papua through the lens of equitable public management.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Public management strategies that prioritize equity are essential for fostering educational access and quality, particularly in regions with significant disparities (Young et al., 2024). The concept of equitable public management highlights the necessity for policies and practices that ensure resources, services, and

opportunities are distributed in a way that addresses the needs of disadvantaged groups (Stokan et al., 2023). In the context of South Papua, the concept of equity involves overcoming geographical, socio-economic, and cultural barriers to provide fair educational opportunities (Alam & Mohanty, 2023). By integrating equity in public administration, public policies are more likely to address the structural inequalities that have historically marginalized these communities. Furthermore, this approach stresses the importance of local adaptation, ensuring that policies are not only broad but also tailored to the unique needs of the region's diverse population. The implementation of such strategies requires a shift from a one-size-fits-all model to one that is sensitive to the local context, making public management more inclusive and just (Johnston & Fenwick, 2024).

The application of equitable public management in South Papua can directly influence the educational landscape, ensuring that every individual, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to access quality education. The integration of social justice theory into public management underscores the removal of systemic barriers such as geographic isolation, lack of infrastructure, and social exclusion that prevent marginalized groups from participating in the education system (Islam, 2024). When educational policies are informed by social justice principles, they create a more inclusive environment where all students, regardless of their location or socio-economic status, have the same opportunities to succeed (Sabela, 2023). Moreover, these strategies help to challenge the inequitable distribution of resources, addressing disparities in school facilities, teaching materials, and qualified educators, thereby improving the overall quality of education in underfunded and remote areas like South Papua.

Educational access in South Papua faces significant challenges due to both geographical and socio-economic barriers. Remote regions often suffer from insufficient infrastructure, including a lack of schools, transportation, and electricity, all of which contribute to the limited reach of educational services (Rasul & Karki Nepal, 2024). Theories of educational equity emphasize that access to education should not be determined by these factors but should be a fundamental right for all children (Cruz et al., 2024). In order to ensure that every child has the chance to attend school, public management strategies must focus on expanding infrastructure and improving access to schools, especially in rural areas (Gallez et al., 2024). Moreover, public policies need to address the financial and logistical barriers faced by families, such as transportation costs, which prevent many students from attending school regularly (Schuler et al., 2024). By applying the principles of equity in education, policymakers can ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to receive an education, regardless of where they live.

In addition to improving physical access, the quality of education in South Papua must also be addressed. Human Capital Theory suggests that investments in education contribute to the development of a skilled and capable workforce, which benefits both individuals and society (Leoni, 2023). However, the quality of education in remote areas often suffers from a lack of trained teachers, inadequate learning resources, and poor school facilities (Zamir & Wang, 2023). To enhance educational quality, public management strategies must prioritize teacher training and professional development (Muharom et al., 2023), ensuring that educators are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to deliver high-quality instruction. Additionally, curriculum development should be context-sensitive, integrating local culture and values to make learning more relevant and engaging for students. This approach aligns with the Cultural Relevance Theory, which argues that education should reflect the cultural identity of the community it serves, fostering a deeper connection between students and their learning environment. By improving teacher quality and making education more culturally relevant, public management can enhance the overall educational experience and outcomes for students in South Papua.

Effective public policy and governance are critical components in achieving equitable educational access and quality (Polaskey & Chovatiya, 2024). Public policy analysis theory provides a framework for understanding how policies are formulated, implemented, and evaluated, emphasizing the need for inclusivity and responsiveness in addressing local educational challenges (Paulsrud, 2024). In South Papua, governance structures must be decentralized to allow for more localized decision-making and policy implementation (Oikonomou, 2023). Local leaders and educators have a more nuanced understanding of regional challenges and can create policies that better address specific needs (Fahmi et al., 2023). Moreover, transparent and accountable governance ensures that resources allocated for education are used effectively,

reducing the risk of mismanagement and ensuring that educational funds are directed toward improving infrastructure, training teachers, and providing learning materials. Additionally, governance theories stress the importance of participatory decision-making, involving all stakeholders such as local governments, parents, and civil society in the education process. This inclusive approach ensures that policies are not only well-informed but also widely supported and sustainable (Kaššaj & Peráček, 2024).

Community and stakeholder engagement are pivotal in the development of effective public management strategies for education (Dai & Azhar, 2024). According to Stakeholder Theory, involving all relevant actors in the decision-making process can lead to more informed and sustainable policies (Marcon Nora et al., 2023). In South Papua, local communities, educators, and families are key stakeholders who must be actively involved in shaping educational policies and programs. By engaging these groups, policymakers can ensure that educational strategies are relevant to the community's needs and that there is broad support for the implementation of such strategies (Wiedermann et al., 2023). Furthermore, collaboration between government agencies and non-governmental organizations can provide additional resources and expertise to tackle educational challenges. For instance, partnerships with NGOs can help build schools in remote areas or provide teacher training programs. By strengthening these partnerships and fostering collaboration, public management strategies can create a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable educational system in South Papua, where all students have the opportunity to thrive.

## Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method to explore the dynamics of public management in improving educational access and quality in South Papua. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth examination of the policies and practices in place, and helps understand the social, cultural, and geographical contexts that significantly impact education in the region. Through qualitative analysis, the study can explore the perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders, such as government officials, school leaders, teachers, students, and parents, who are directly involved in the educational process. The case study method was selected because it provides an opportunity to conduct a detailed analysis of specific situations in several districts with diverse geographical, social, and economic characteristics. This enables a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing policy implementation and the challenges faced in promoting educational equity.

Additionally, quantitative data obtained through surveys from students, teachers, and parents will complement and strengthen the qualitative findings. This data will offer an objective and measurable perspective on how education is perceived in the region. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods allows for a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the education situation in South Papua, offering empirical evidence to support the recommendations for policy improvements. By integrating both approaches, the study aims to provide a more robust and nuanced view of the challenges and opportunities for enhancing educational access and quality, considering the unique and dynamic local context.

This study was conducted in several districts of South Papua, including Merauke, Asmat, and Mappi. These locations were chosen to represent the diverse geographical, social, and economic challenges that influence the education system in the region. By selecting these areas, the research aims to provide a broad understanding of how these factors shape educational access and quality. The primary focus is on the rural and coastal areas, where accessibility issues and resource limitations are often major obstacles to educational equity. The selection of locations with varying geographical conditions is intended to offer a comprehensive picture of educational management in South Papua, capturing the unique challenges faced by different communities.

To obtain valid and reliable data, this study employs several data collection techniques. In-depth interviews were conducted with various stakeholders, including local government officials, school principals, teachers, students, and parents. The purpose of these interviews was to gain deep insights into the implementation of educational policies and the challenges faced in achieving equitable access and quality of education. The interviews focused on understanding the perspectives of key actors involved in the education system and

were conducted at various times throughout the research period to ensure a diverse range of responses. The interviews were semi-structured, with open-ended questions designed to explore the participants' views on policy implementation, resource allocation, and the barriers to equitable education.

In addition to the interviews, field observations were conducted where the researcher directly observed the conditions of schools, educational facilities, and the interactions between teachers and students during lessons. This observational data aimed to assess the quality of education being provided in the field. Secondary data, including educational policy documents, education budgets, and student assessment results, were also collected to support further analysis. Furthermore, quantitative surveys through questionnaires were distributed to students, teachers, and parents to measure their perceptions of the quality and accessibility of education in the area. These surveys provided additional data to complement the qualitative findings and help draw comprehensive conclusions about the educational landscape in South Papua.

This study emphasizes a participatory and collaborative approach by involving various stakeholders, including local government, education-focused non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities. Through this collaboration, it is hoped that a shared understanding of the challenges and solutions for improving access and quality of education in South Papua can be developed. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) will be used as one of the methods to gather perspectives from these stakeholders. The purpose of the FGDs is to explore innovative ideas in education management that can be tailored to local needs, as well as to identify community-based solutions that are relevant to improving the quality of education in the region. In terms of sampling, the study will involve approximately 30 participants per FGD, with a total of 6 FGDs conducted across different districts. The sample will include government officials, school principals, teachers, community leaders, and representatives from local NGOs working in education. This ensures a diverse range of perspectives, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the local context and the identification of practical, context-specific solutions for enhancing educational access and quality.

Data analysis in this study will be conducted using a qualitative approach with a case study method. This method allows for an in-depth exploration of the complex dynamics of educational management in South Papua by analyzing data collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and FGDs. The data will be coded and categorized based on emerging themes related to educational access, quality, and local challenges. The analysis will focus on identifying patterns, discrepancies, and key insights within the data, particularly the interplay between local context and policy implementation. By examining each case individually and then comparing it across different districts, the study will provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing education in the region. Additionally, triangulation of data from multiple sources (interviews, observations, FGDs, and secondary data) will be used to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, ultimately providing a rich, contextualized understanding of educational management in South Papua.

## Results

Education in South Papua faces significant challenges due to its remote geography, socio-economic disparities, and limited access to resources. These barriers hinder the ability of many children to access quality education, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. To address these issues, equitable public management strategies are essential for ensuring that all communities, regardless of their location or socio-economic status, have equal access to educational opportunities. This research explores how public management when focused on equity, can enhance both access and the quality of education in South Papua. By examining the effectiveness of existing policies and identifying opportunities for improvement, this study aims to provide recommendations that can help bridge the educational gap in the region, ensuring a more inclusive and equitable system for all learners.



Table 1. Barriers and Opportunities to Improving Access and Quality of Education in South Papua

Aspect	Merauke Regency	Asmat Regency	Mappi Regency	Boven Digoel Regency
<b>Obstacle</b>				
Infrastructure	Lack of school facilities in remote areas.	Transportation is difficult to reach, especially in river areas.	School buildings are minimal, especially in remote areas.	Educational facilities are limited in border areas.
Instructor	Lack of qualified teachers in remote areas.	The distribution of teaching staff is uneven.	Teacher training and certification is lacking.	Teachers are reluctant to work in difficult areas.
Socio-Economic Inequality	High poverty affects educational participation.	Children are forced to help their families work, hindering school.	The cost of education is considered expensive by the community.	Low access to education due to geographical isolation.
Policy and Budget	Policy implementation is not optimal even though there is an allocation of funds.	Lack of coordination between local and central governments regarding education.	The education budget is not sufficient to cover all regions.	Education policies have not addressed local needs.
<b>Opportunity</b>				
Local Community Involvement	There is local community support for local wisdom-based education programs.	Potential collaboration with churches and traditional institutions to support education.	Local communities are enthusiastic about participating in educational programs.	The active role of indigenous communities in improving children's literacy.
Technology	The potential for digital learning through internet access in several areas.	Utilization of simple technology such as radio for distance learning.	Developing locally based digital literacy programs.	Technology-based programs can be developed in areas that already have access to electricity.
Strategic Partnership	There are partnerships with NGOs and the private sector to build educational infrastructure.	International assistance in the provision of educational facilities.	Support from donor agencies for teacher training.	Cooperation with higher education institutions for local teacher training.
Investment in human resources	Scholarship program for outstanding students from underprivileged families.	Intensive training for local teachers through government and NGO programs.	Special scholarships to continue teacher education to a higher level.	Developing the competence of local teaching staff through ongoing training.

Improving access and quality of education in South Papua faces various obstacles, such as limited infrastructure, uneven distribution of teaching staff, socio-economic inequality, and less than optimal policy

implementation. However, significant opportunities can be exploited through local community engagement, technology utilization, strategic partnerships with NGOs and the private sector, and investment in human resources, such as scholarships and teacher training. This integrated approach has the potential to overcome challenges and drive inclusive and sustainable educational transformation.

**Table 2. Main Obstacles in Improving Access and Quality of Education in South Papua**

Aspect	Inhibitory Factors	Explanation
Lack of Competent Teaching Personnel	Shortage of qualified teachers and gap in distribution of teaching staff	The distribution of teaching staff is uneven, especially in remote areas, so some areas have a shortage of teachers.
	Low training and professional development for educators	There is no ongoing training to improve teacher quality and competence.
Social and Economic Inequality	High poverty rates hinder people's access to education	Many families cannot afford basic educational needs such as uniforms, books, and stationery.
	Education costs are still considered a burden on families	Although basic education is free, additional costs such as transportation and school supplies are a burden.
Lack of Policy and Budget Support	The allocation of the education budget is not sufficient to meet the needs	Limited budgets result in limitations in infrastructure development and the provision of learning facilities.
	Ineffective implementation of education policies	Government programs are often not adapted to local conditions and lack monitoring and evaluation.

Table 2 outlines three major barriers to improving access to and quality of education: lack of competent teachers, social and economic inequality, and minimal policy and budget support. The shortage of qualified teachers and the uneven distribution of teachers are exacerbated by the lack of professional training. Economic inequality makes it difficult for many families to meet their educational needs, while additional costs such as transportation remain a burden. On the other hand, limited budget allocations and ineffective policy implementation hamper the development of educational infrastructure and facilities, exacerbating the inequality in access to and quality of education services.

**Table 3. Opportunities to Improve Access and Quality of Education**

Aspect	Opportunity	Scientific Explanation
Local Community Involvement	Potential synergy with local communities to support education programs	Local community involvement can increase the relevance and effectiveness of education programs, creating social support and active participation in education implementation.
	The use of local wisdom in the curriculum to increase the relevance of learning	Integration of local wisdom into the curriculum can increase students' connectedness to learning, support cultural sustainability, and strengthen local identity in the educational context.
Technology as an Innovative Solution	Utilization of digital technology for distance learning	Digital technologies can expand access to education by overcoming geographical limitations, providing flexibility in learning methods, and increasing student engagement.
	Digital literacy program to improve the quality of education	Digital literacy programs can improve the technological skills of students and educators, which is important to prepare them to face the challenges of globalization in education.

Table 3 illustrates opportunities to improve access and quality of education through two main approaches: local community engagement and technology utilization. Local community engagement can strengthen the effectiveness of education programs by creating social support and active participation and integrating local wisdom into the curriculum to increase cultural relevance and sustainability. In addition, the use of digital technologies, such as distance learning, can overcome geographical barriers and provide flexibility in learning, while digital literacy programs can improve the technological skills of students and educators, which are crucial in facing the challenges of globalization of education.

**Table 4. Strategic Partnerships in Improving Access and Quality of Education in South Papua**

Strategic Partnership Aspects	Description	Potential Impact
Collaboration with the Private Sector	Cooperation with private companies to provide educational facilities (for example, building schools or providing technological equipment).	Provision of funds and resources for the development of educational infrastructure.
	Provision of scholarships or training programs to improve the competence of teaching staff.	Improve the quality of teaching and reduce educational disparities in remote areas.
Partnership with NGOs	Local community training and empowerment programs to support education.	Increase public awareness of the importance of education and reduce school dropout rates.
	Management of resources to improve the quality of education for disadvantaged groups in society.	Improve access to education for children from underprivileged families.
International Institutions	Cooperation with international institutions to obtain grants, research, and the best education policies.	Development of an international-based curriculum and improving the quality of teaching in South Papua.
Support from the Church or Traditional Institutions	Use of church networks or traditional institutions to introduce local culture-based education.	Increase the relevance of education and strengthen social ties in society.
	Mentoring and moral support programs from traditional or church institutions to increase student motivation.	Increase community participation in supporting education and reducing the culture of laziness in going to school.

This study highlights the role of strategic partnerships in improving access and quality of education in South Papua. Collaboration with the private sector, such as providing educational facilities and training for teachers, can accelerate infrastructure development and improve the quality of teaching in remote areas. Partnerships with NGOs focus on empowering local communities to reduce dropout rates and expand access to education for low-income families. Collaboration with international institutions allows for the development of internationally-based curricula and improved teaching quality. Support from churches or traditional institutions helps introduce local culture-based education and increases community participation in education. All of these have the potential to create a more inclusive and locally relevant education system.

**Table 5. Strategies for Increasing Investment in Human Resources in Education in South Papua**

Aspect	Strategies Implemented	Objective	Expected Impact
Intensive Training for Teachers	- Continuous training programs to improve teacher competency.	Improving the quality of teaching and teacher skills in managing classes.	Increasing teacher professionalism, decreasing teacher resignation rates.



	- Training based on educational technology and innovative teaching methods.	Improving the effectiveness of using technology in the learning process.	Wider and more adaptive use of technology in teaching.
Scholarships for Underprivileged Students	- Full scholarship program for students from underprivileged families.	Ensuring access to education for children from underprivileged families.	Decreasing dropout rates and increasing the number of graduates.
	- Scholarships for specific skills training, such as English and STEM.	Expanding students' skills in areas required by the job market.	Increasing the quality of graduates who are ready to enter the world of work.

Table 5 above describes two main strategies for increasing investment in human resources in education in South Papua. Intensive teacher training involves a continuous program to improve teaching competency, including the use of educational technology and innovative methods. The goal is to improve the quality of teaching and teacher skills, which is expected to reduce teacher resignation rates and expand the use of technology in teaching. Meanwhile, scholarships for underprivileged students focus on providing full scholarships to ensure access to education for children from underprivileged families, as well as scholarships for specific skills training, such as English and STEM, to prepare students for the world of work. The impact is expected to reduce dropout rates, increase the number of graduates, and produce graduates who are ready to compete in the job market.

## Discussion

Adequate educational infrastructure is one of the crucial factors affecting access to and quality of education (Raygan & Moradkhani, 2022), especially in remote areas such as South Papua. In many areas, existing educational facilities do not meet the standards required to support effective learning processes (Turnbull et al., 2021). Schools in these areas often operate in less-than-ideal conditions, with old buildings and inadequate classrooms (Awada et al., 2021). Many schools do not have basic facilities such as enough classrooms to accommodate all students, library space, or laboratory space needed to support practical learning. This condition clearly hinders the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, because students cannot learn in a comfortable and conducive environment (Brink et al., 2021). In addition, many schools are not equipped with other supporting educational facilities and infrastructure, such as proper toilets, sports rooms, and extracurricular activity rooms that should be an integral part of the student's educational experience.

These infrastructure limitations also impact the integration of technology into learning (Joshi et al., 2021). Many schools in South Papua do not have access to modern technological devices such as computers, projectors, or adequate internet access, which are increasingly important in supporting learning in the digital age. Without technological support, classroom learning is limited, and students miss out on access to global educational information and resources that could improve the quality of their learning (Ahmed & Opoku, 2022). Teachers also face difficulties in using educational technology to improve teaching methods, which could make the learning process more interactive and engaging (Christopoulos & Sprangers, 2021). These limitations create a wider gap in the quality of education between remote areas and advanced education centers and require serious attention from the government to improve and enhance the overall education infrastructure in South Papua.

Limited human resources, especially in terms of teacher quality, are a major challenge in improving education in South Papua. Many areas in the region face a shortage of teaching staff who meet the expected qualification standards. Some schools in remote areas are even forced to rely on teachers who do not have a formal educational background in the field they are teaching or have limited qualifications. This situation causes significant gaps in the quality of teaching received by students, especially in important subjects that require special skills. In addition, the number of teachers available is often insufficient to handle the large

number of students, given the gap in the distribution of teaching staff between urban and rural areas (Hennessy et al., 2022). This shortage of qualified teaching staff contributes to the low quality of education in many schools, which ultimately affects students' academic achievement.

On the other hand, the problem of limited professional training also exacerbates the situation. Teachers in remote areas often do not have adequate access to professional development programs that can update their teaching knowledge and skills (Dille & Røkenes, 2021). Although there are policies aimed at improving the quality of education through teacher training, their implementation is often hampered by geographical factors, costs, and a lack of supporting facilities (Lim et al., 2020). For example, training conducted in education centers is often inaccessible to teachers in hard-to-access areas. As a result, these teachers are unable to obtain the latest knowledge on effective teaching methods, educational technology, or relevant curriculum developments. To address this problem, more responsive policies are needed, which not only bring highly qualified teachers to remote areas but also ensure that training programs are affordable and tailored to local needs. Capacity building of teachers in these areas is key to improving the overall quality of education (Mahmood, 2021).

Social and economic issues are major barriers to improving access to education in South Papua. Poverty that afflicts most communities in the region significantly limits the ability of families to send their children to school (Coulibaly & Li, 2020). Although the government has provided education subsidies to reduce costs, many families, especially those living in remote areas, still find it difficult to meet the costs of education. This factor causes many children, especially from low-income families, to drop out of school or be unable to access adequate education. In addition, poor economic conditions contribute to a worsening of the overall quality of life, creating a cycle of poverty that prevents them from accessing better educational opportunities (Liu et al., 2021). Therefore, despite government efforts to reduce the cost of education, these socioeconomic barriers require more integrated interventions, including increased financial support and more pro-poor policies.

In addition to poverty, gender inequality is also a significant factor hindering access to education in South Papua. In some communities, social and cultural norms that view girls' education as less important than boys' education have exacerbated inequalities in education participation. This is more so in areas that still hold on to traditions and cultures that limit women's roles in public spaces. Girls are often faced with the choice of helping with household chores or working outside the home rather than continuing their education (Çoban, 2022). This gender inequality exacerbates the inequity in access to education between men and women, creating a large gap in educational opportunities (Casad et al., 2021). Therefore, a more inclusive approach is needed, with policies that not only address poverty but also empower women to participate more actively in education, in order to reduce existing inequalities and ensure more equitable access to education in South Papua.

Geographical accessibility in South Papua is one of the main obstacles that hinders students' participation in education. Many students living in remote areas have to travel long distances and pass through difficult terrain, such as mountains and forests, just to reach school. In addition, extreme geographical conditions often worsen access, especially during the rainy season when roads become impassable. This leads to high absenteeism rates among students, given the long distances and unfavourable weather conditions, reducing their opportunities to participate in the education process regularly. As a result, the inequality in educational opportunities between urban and remote areas is widening, with a negative impact on the quality of education received by students in these areas (Daniele, 2021). In addition to the challenges of distance and difficult terrain, inadequate transportation infrastructure also exacerbates these accessibility issues (Boakye et al., 2022). Many areas in South Papua lack adequate transportation networks and existing roads are often damaged, slowing down the mobility of students and teachers. These transportation limitations lead to difficulties in reaching school on time, which impacts the consistency and effectiveness of the learning process (Schönbach et al., 2020). Therefore, policies that focus on improving accessibility, such as providing educational transportation or building better road infrastructure, are essential to ensure that all students, regardless of their geographic location, have equal access to quality education.

Improving educational infrastructure in remote areas through government policies is an important step to address the gap in access to education in South Papua (Hambly & Rajabium, 2021). In this study, it was found that infrastructure development policies directed at hard-to-reach areas can reduce physical barriers faced by students and local communities. The government can prioritize the construction of schools, dormitories, and other adequate educational facilities by considering the geographical and socio-economic conditions in the area (Sakti et al., 2021). This effort is expected to expand the reach of education to previously isolated communities so that educational accessibility becomes more equitable. In addition, the provision of supporting transportation facilities, such as better and more affordable transportation routes, can also accelerate the process of increasing access to education (Kaiser & Barstow, 2022). Improving the quality and equity of education infrastructure will contribute to achieving the goal of developing more inclusive and quality education. This policy also reflects the government's commitment to reducing inequality in access to education between regions, which is important for realizing social justice for all levels of society.

The inclusive education approach is a great opportunity to improve the quality of education in South Papua, by emphasizing gender equality and cultural diversity. In this context, an inclusive approach requires that the education curriculum be adapted to local needs, which includes recognizing the cultural values and beliefs of local indigenous communities (Mpuangnan & Ntombela, 2024). In addition, inclusive education focuses on providing equal access for all children, without discrimination, either gender or socio-economic background. In South Papua, where there is a wide cultural diversity, inclusive education can strengthen the sense of local identity and enrich the learning process by introducing diverse cultural values. In addition, this approach also pays special attention to groups that have been marginalized, such as women and children with special needs. Providing space for them in the education system will open up opportunities for equal rights and opportunities to obtain a decent education (Grimm, 2024). The implementation of an inclusive education model will enrich students' learning experiences while reducing social inequality and increasing mutual respect among various groups in society (Sorkos & Hajisoteriou, 2021). Thus, inclusive education policies not only improve the quality of education but also create a more harmonious and just society.

Teacher empowerment through strengthening human resources (HR) is one of the effective strategies to improve the quality of education in South Papua (Tran, 2022). This study revealed that the development of training programs and continuing education for teachers can improve the quality of teaching, both in terms of teaching methods and mastery of materials. In many remote areas in South Papua, there is still a shortage of skilled and trained teachers. Therefore, training programs that focus on improving pedagogical skills, classroom management, and the use of technology in learning are needed. In addition, providing incentives and improving teacher welfare can also motivate them to be more dedicated to their teaching duties (Barghani, 2021). In addition to technical training, teacher empowerment programs also need to include capacity building in dealing with the unique social and cultural challenges in South Papua. Teachers who understand the local social and cultural context are better able to provide relevant and effective education for students (Ladson-Billings, 2023). Therefore, human resource development strategies in education must involve a more holistic approach, taking into account both aspects of teacher professionalism and socio-economic conditions that affect the teaching and learning process. This effort can accelerate the achievement of the goal of improving the quality of education in the region.

Collaboration with civil society organizations (CSOs) is an important opportunity to create more equitable and equitable education in South Papua. This study found that collaboration between government and non-governmental organizations has great potential to improve the quality of education more efficiently and on target. CSOs can play a role in providing technical support, training, and resources that are not always available through government channels (Levine et al., 2023). By leveraging the local networks and experiences of CSOs, education programs can be more tailored to the needs of local communities and can overcome the various barriers faced by isolated communities. This collaboration also allows for synergy in resource allocation, whether in the form of funding, teaching staff, or facilities. Educational programs run collaboratively between the government and CSOs can accelerate the implementation of equitable education policies, especially in hard-to-reach areas (Carter et al., 2023). In addition, CSOs can also function as supervisory institutions, ensuring transparency and accountability in the implementation of education

policies. Thus, this collaboration can strengthen local capacity in managing education and create a more inclusive and sustainable education system.

It is important for education policies in South Papua to be tailored to specific local conditions. Each region has different challenges and needs, both in terms of infrastructure, culture, and socio-economic conditions (Prus & Sikora, 2021). Therefore, education policies must be designed with local context in mind in order to more effectively address community needs. For example, policies that support community-based education, involving the active participation of parents and local community leaders, will be more effective in creating awareness and sustainability of education. These responsive policies must also take into account hard-to-reach geographical conditions and integrate innovative solutions such as distance learning or the use of digital technology to reach remote areas. In addition, responsive education policies must also pay attention to the cultural diversity aspect in South Papua. Local communities have various customs and cultural values that need to be respected in the implementation of education. An inclusive education approach, which respects local customs and culture, will increase community participation in education (Mpuangnan & Ntombela, 2024). With such policy adjustments, education will not only be more accessible but also more relevant and accepted by the local community, which in turn can improve the overall quality of education.

The role of local governments in managing educational resources is crucial, considering that they understand local dynamics better than the central government (Dutta & Fischer, 2021). Strong local leadership in designing and implementing education policies can ensure equal access and quality of education in remote areas. One concrete example is the management of education funds that are more transparent and responsive to regional needs. Local governments that have a deep understanding of local challenges can formulate more targeted policies and prioritize resource allocation for areas that need it most, such as areas with high dropout rates or inadequate education infrastructure. In addition, the role of local government in coordinating various local stakeholders, including communities, educational institutions, and the private sector, is very important to create a holistic and sustainable education system (Roxas et al., 2020). This collaboration will strengthen support for the education policies that have been implemented while increasing the effectiveness of the implementation of these policies. With proactive local leadership, the management of education resources can be more efficient and in accordance with the needs of the local community, which will ultimately have a positive impact on the quality of education in South Papua.

Strengthening the monitoring and accountability system is an important factor in ensuring that the education budget is used effectively and efficiently (Lugada et al., 2022). In the context of South Papua, where resources are limited, strict monitoring will ensure that funds allocated to the education sector are not misused and actually achieve the desired goals. Transparent monitoring will also prevent corrupt practices, which are often an obstacle in managing education in areas with limited resources. Therefore, a strong monitoring system must include various mechanisms, ranging from regular audits, and clear reporting, to community involvement in monitoring the use of the education budget at the local level. In addition, strengthening accountability also involves increasing the capacity of local governments and educational institutions in planning and implementing education programs. A good monitoring system must ensure that education policies are not only implemented with transparency but also with a clear goal of improving the quality of education. With an effective accountability system, the public can be more confident that the policies implemented truly address local education challenges and provide long-term benefits for future generations.

## Conclusions

This study shows that improving access and quality of education in South Papua faces several significant obstacles, including limited infrastructure, lack of qualified human resources, and social and economic issues that affect education participation. Remote areas with difficult geographical accessibility are the main challenges in the distribution of adequate education facilities. The limited number of trained teachers and low levels of professional training also worsen the quality of teaching, while gender inequality and poverty

are socio-economic barriers that reduce student participation. However, there are opportunities that can be utilized to overcome these obstacles, such as government policies in the development of education infrastructure, the development of inclusive education, and the empowerment of teaching staff through continuous training. Collaboration between the government and civil society organizations can also accelerate the provision of more equitable education services. A fair public management strategy, with policies that are responsive to local needs, good management of education resources, and strengthening the monitoring and accountability system, can be a solution to create fairer and quality access to education in South Papua.

The limitations of this study lie in the limited data obtained from a number of areas in South Papua, which may not cover all conditions in the wider region. In addition, this study focuses more on the analysis of education policies and structural factors, while cultural factors and local beliefs have not been fully explored. Therefore, further research is needed to cover broader data and deepen the study of the influence of cultural and social factors in education. Recommendations for improving access to and quality of education in South Papua include strengthening cooperation between the government, local communities, and non-governmental organizations in providing educational facilities, as well as developing policies that are more adaptive to local needs. In addition, improving training for teachers and adapting the curriculum to the local cultural context are also very necessary to ensure the success of inclusive and quality education.

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