

## **13-Year Compulsory Education: A Strategic Step Towards Equitable Access to Children's Education in Indonesia**

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Article history: Received: Januari 17, 2025 | Revised: Maret 01, 2025| Available

Online: Maret 30, 2025

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### **Abstract**

*The 13-Year Compulsory Learning Program is a strategic step taken by the Indonesian government to improve the quality of human resources by expanding access to education to the upper secondary level. This program is a continuation of the 9-Year Compulsory Learning program which only covers basic education, and aims to provide wider opportunities for every child in Indonesia to get an adequate education in the global and digital era. Despite facing major challenges, such as limited educational facilities and infrastructure, social and cultural barriers, and administrative problems in education management, the implementation of this program is expected to have a significant positive impact. The expected impacts include an increase in the participation rate of education at the upper secondary level, a decrease in the youth unemployment rate, and the creation of a smarter, empowered, and more productive society. The success of this program depends on strong cooperation between the government, the private sector, and the community, as well as the active role of all parties in supporting this policy through adequate budget allocation, equitable distribution of educational infrastructure, and empowerment of educators. The 13-Year Compulsory Learning Program has the potential to be a major driver in creating equality of educational opportunities and realizing the ideals of a fairer and more prosperous Indonesian independence.*

**Keywords:** 13 years of compulsory education, access to education, secondary education, unemployment, education policy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education has a very crucial role in determining the future direction and quality of a nation. In the midst of the dynamics of globalization and rapid technological development, the need for educated, skilled, and competent human resources is becoming more and more urgent. Indonesia, as a developing country with a large population, faces a major challenge in ensuring that every child has access to proper and equitable education. Therefore, education policies that favor equal access and quality improvement are a must.<sup>1</sup>

Since the enactment of the 9-Year Compulsory Learning program, the Indonesian government has shown a commitment to providing basic education services for all citizens. This program covers basic education from elementary school (SD) to junior high school (SMP), and has had a positive impact on increasing school participation rates and reducing dropout rates at the elementary level.<sup>2</sup> However, this program has not been fully able to answer the challenges of educational inequality that still occur, especially at the upper secondary education level. Many high school/vocational school age children are still unable to continue their education due to economic limitations, limited infrastructure, and lack of awareness of the importance of further education.<sup>3</sup>

In response to these conditions, the idea of expanding the program to 13-Year Compulsory Learning began to emerge as one of the strategic solutions. This policy carries the spirit that upper secondary education must be part of the state's basic services to its people, no longer an option, but a necessity that must be met. By increasing the duration of compulsory education from 9 years to 13 years, it is hoped that every Indonesian child will not only acquire basic knowledge, but also vocational and academic skills that are relevant to face the challenges of the world of work and social life in the future.<sup>4</sup>

The implementation of the 13-Year Compulsory Learning is not just an increase in learning time, but also reflects a comprehensive effort to build a more inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable education system. This policy contains the meaning of equitable access to education, strengthening the quality of learning, increasing the

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<sup>1</sup> Anwar, M. S. (2022). Inequality of educational accessibility in the perspective of multicultural education. *Foundasia*, 13(1), 1-15.

<sup>2</sup> Assa, R., Kawung, E. J., & Tumiwa, J. (2022). Factors Causing Children Dropping Out of School in Sonuo Village, West Bolangitang District, North Bolaang Mongondow Regency. *Journal of the Scientific Society*, 2(1).

<sup>3</sup> Amalia, R. N., & Puspytasari, H. H. (2018). Analysis of Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System on the Access of the Poor to Education. *Legal Perspectives*, 315-327.

<sup>4</sup> Syafii, A. (2018). Expansion and equitable access to education in 3T regions (frontier, outermost, disadvantaged). *Dirasat: Journal of Islamic Management and Education*, 4(2), 153-171.

capacity of educators and education personnel, and supporting educational infrastructure throughout Indonesia, including disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost (3T) regions.<sup>5</sup>

Through this policy, Indonesia seeks to narrow the educational gap between urban and rural areas, between upper and lower economic groups, and between men and women. Thus, the 13-Year Compulsory Learning can be the main instrument in creating social justice in the education sector and supporting the *Sustainable Development Goals*, especially the fourth goal of quality education for all.

In the global context, many countries have placed secondary education as part of the basic education that must be followed by all their citizens. Countries such as South Korea, Japan, and Finland have successfully demonstrated that the extension of the learning period has an impact not only on improving the quality of individuals, but also on economic progress and social welfare at large. Indonesia needs to take a similar path by adjusting education policies that are more progressive and in favor of the future of the younger generation.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the 13-Year Compulsory Study also has great potential in encouraging the development of the nation's character. Sustainable education is not only oriented to the mastery of knowledge and skills, but also to the formation of national values, ethics, tolerance, and entrepreneurial spirit. This is in line with the great goal of national education as stated in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which is to develop the potential of students to become human beings who have faith, piety, noble character, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, and independent.

However, the expansion of the compulsory education program to 13 years is certainly not without various challenges. Budget limitations, uneven educational infrastructure, shortage of educators, and socio-cultural barriers in several regions are real challenges that must be anticipated and overcome with strategic planning and a comprehensive approach. Collaboration between the central and regional governments, educational institutions, the community, and the private sector is needed so that these great ideals do not stop at the level of discourse, but can be realized in a real and sustainable manner.

Thus, the 13-Year Compulsory Learning is not just an education policy, but a long-term investment of the Indonesian nation in producing a generation that is intelligent, superior, and ready to face the challenges of the times. Through this paper, it will be studied in more depth about the urgency, implementation strategy, and challenges and impacts of this program as a strategic effort in realizing equal access to education for all Indonesian children.

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<sup>5</sup> Sherly, S., Dharma, E., & Sihombing, H. B. (2021, August). Freedom of learning: a literature review. In *UrbanGreen Conference Proceeding Library* (pp. 183-190).

<sup>6</sup> Sudagung, A. D., Putri, V., Evan, J., Sasiva, I., & Olifiani, L. P. (2019). Indonesia's Efforts to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals Target in Education in Sekayam District, Sanggau Regency, West Kalimantan (2014-2019). *Polinter Journal: Political Studies and International Relations*, 5(1), 1-27.

## METHOD

This paper uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the library research method. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for studying and analyzing in depth education policies, especially regarding the implementation of the 13-Year Compulsory Learning program from the perspective of equal access to education in Indonesia.<sup>7</sup>

The data used in this writing is sourced from various relevant literature such as scientific books, academic journals, policy articles, ministry reports, previous research results, and laws and regulations related to the national education system. Several important documents such as Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System and the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) document are also used as the main reference.

The data analysis process is carried out through content analysis techniques, namely by examining the content of various references to find patterns, themes, and relevance between the 13-Year Compulsory Learning policy and the goal of equitable education. The author also compares similar policies that have been implemented in several countries as a lesson for the Indonesian context.<sup>8</sup>

With this method, it is hoped that the writing can produce a comprehensive and argumentative description of the importance of the 13-Year Compulsory Learning program as a strategy to expand and equalize access to education for all children of the nation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Urgency of Implementing the 13-Year Compulsory Learning Program

The implementation of the 13-Year Compulsory Learning program is a strategic step to improve the quality of Indonesia's human resources as a whole. This program is a continuation of the 9-Year Compulsory Learning which so far only covers the basic education level.<sup>9</sup> In today's global and digital era, high school education is a minimum requirement for individuals to be able to compete in the world of work and in social life.<sup>10</sup>

Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that children from underprivileged families have a much lower high school participation rate than the upper economic group. Based on the 2021 National Socio-Economic Survey (SUSENAS), only about 74.5% of children from low-income families continue their education to the upper secondary level, while among high-income families, this participation rate reaches more than 90%. This reinforces the urgency of a more

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<sup>7</sup> Mahanum, M. (2021). Literature Review. *ALACRITY: Journal of Education*, 1-12.

<sup>8</sup> Adlini, M. N., Dinda, A. H., Yulinda, S., Chotimah, O., & Merliyana, S. J. (2022). Qualitative research methods of literature study. *Journal of Edumaspul*, 6(1), 974-980.

<sup>9</sup> Mubin, F. (2020). Planning for the completion of compulsory learning and improving the quality of education.

<sup>10</sup> Widiyana, D., Siswoyo, M., & Nurfalah, F. (2020). The Effect of Socialization of the Nine-Year Compulsory Learning Program on Community Participation in the Field of Education in Argasunya Village, Harjamukti District, Cirebon City. *Public Scientific Journal*, 8(1).

inclusive education policy, which aims to close the gap and provide equal opportunities for all the nation's children.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, according to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), although the gross participation rate (APK) of secondary education in Indonesia has increased from year to year, inequality between regions remains significant. In urban areas, the APK of secondary education has reached more than 95%, but in rural areas and 3T areas (disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost), this figure is still below 70%. Therefore, the 13-Year Compulsory Education is expected to reduce this gap and ensure that all Indonesian children have equal access to quality education.<sup>12</sup>

Senior secondary education is also crucial because more than 70% of jobs in the formal sector today require applicants to have a minimum high school/vocational education qualification. Therefore, expanding the scope of compulsory education to 13 years is essential to increase the competitiveness of Indonesia's young generation in the global job market. Without such a policy, Indonesia risks losing the great potential of children who do not have access to upper secondary education, which will limit the development of quality human resources.

### **1. Implementation Strategy for the 13-Year Compulsory Learning Program**

In order for the 13-Year Compulsory Learning program to be implemented effectively, a strategy that touches on various aspects of education is needed. This implementation strategy includes various policies and concrete steps that must be taken by the government, the community, and other sectors.<sup>13</sup>

First, the government must provide an adequate and sustainable education budget. In accordance with the mandate of the 1945 Constitution Article 31 paragraph (4) which stipulates that the education budget is at least 20% of the state budget and regional budget, the government must consistently devote sufficient funds for the development and improvement of the quality of education. The budget must be allocated for various aspects, ranging from the development of school infrastructure, scholarship funding, to training for educators. In 2023, the Indonesian government has allocated around 20.3% of the state budget for the education sector, but the distribution of this budget is still uneven, especially for remote areas.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Andriyansyah, A. C. (2018). Implementation of the Nine-Year Compulsory Education Policy (Case Study at the Sumenep Regency Education Office). *JEMP (Journal of Education Management Dynamics)*, 2(2), 103-115.

<sup>12</sup> Lubis, R. C. (2018). *Implementation of Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2014 concerning Compulsory Study of Madrasah Diniyah Takmiliah Awaliyah (MDTA) in Medan City (Case Study in Medan Marelan District)* (Doctoral dissertation, State Islamic University of North Sumatra Medan).

<sup>13</sup> Aulia, S. (2012). Decentralization of education policy (study on the implementation of 12-year compulsory education in the city of Surabaya at the secondary and vocational education levels). *Journal of Young Politics*, 2(1), 204-216.

<sup>14</sup> Sidiq, U. (2019). Policy of the 9-Year Basic Education Compulsory Study Program at the Salafiyah Islamic Center BIN BAZ Yogyakarta Islamic Boarding School. *Codification: Journal of Islamic Research*, 13(1), 131-140.

Second, the development and equitable distribution of educational infrastructure needs to be a top priority. One of the biggest challenges in the implementation of the 13-Year Compulsory Learning is the gap in educational infrastructure between urban and rural areas, especially in the 3T (Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost) areas. According to the 2022 Ministry of Education and Culture report, around 25% of schools in the 3T area still lack basic facilities such as proper classrooms, access to electricity, and technological devices to support learning. Therefore, the construction and maintenance of educational facilities in these areas need special attention by involving funds from the state budget and assistance from the private sector.

Third, empowerment and improvement of the quality of teachers must be the main agenda. Educators are the spearhead of educational success, including in the 13-Year Compulsory Learning program. A sustainable and equitable Teacher Training Program must be held to improve teacher competence throughout Indonesia, especially in the 3T area. According to the 2021 Education Assessment Center (Puspendik) Report, around 30% of teachers in the 3T area do not have adequate educational qualifications. The Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG) and teacher certification can be used as an instrument to improve the quality of teaching. In addition, the use of technology in learning is also important to overcome the limitations of teachers in remote areas.<sup>15</sup>

Fourth, collaboration with the private sector and civil society organizations can support the provision of scholarships, vocational training, and learning mentoring programs. Many private sectors have corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs that can be directed to support education, such as scholarships for underprivileged students, the provision of learning tools, and the development of vocational skills. Programs such as Industrial Vocational Schools that work closely with industry can provide skills relevant to the needs of the job market. Likewise, civil society organizations, which can play an active role in socializing the importance of upper secondary education, as well as providing mentoring and tutoring for students in remote areas.<sup>16</sup>

Fifth, strict monitoring and evaluation of program implementation is also very necessary to ensure that this policy runs well. An accurate data system and information on educational conditions, number of students, graduation rates, and

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<sup>15</sup> Islamadeti, I. (2019). STRATEGI KEGIATAN PROGRAM WAJIB BELAJAR BACA TULIS AL-QUR'AN BAGI SISWA DI SMKN 2 SEBERANG MUSI. *An-Nizom: Jurnal Penelitian Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 4(2).

<sup>16</sup> Subijanto, S., Suprastowo, P., Jakaria, Y., Hendarman, H., Waluyo, P., & Winigsih, L. H. (2017). Program Pendidikan Menengah Universal Sebagai Persiapan Wajib Belajar Duabelas Tahun. *Cakrawala Pendidikan*, (1), 1-12.



school participation throughout Indonesia must be accessible to all relevant parties to monitor the progress and effectiveness of this program.<sup>17</sup>

With the implementation of these strategies, it is hoped that the 13-Year Compulsory Learning program can run effectively and have a positive impact on the equitable distribution of education in Indonesia. The government, society, and various related sectors must work together to realize this great goal for a better future for Indonesia's children.

## **1. Challenges in Realizing Equitable Access to Education**

Although the 13-Year Compulsory Learning program promises a better future for the young generation of Indonesia, its implementation cannot be separated from various significant challenges. These challenges affect the effectiveness of equitable access to education and require joint efforts to overcome them.

First, the limitation of educational facilities and infrastructure is a major problem, especially in rural and archipelagic areas. Based on the 2022 Report of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), around 30% of schools in 3T areas (Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost) still lack basic facilities such as proper classrooms, sanitation, and internet access to support technology-based learning. Schools in the region are often forced to rely on makeshift facilities, which has an impact on the quality of education. Even in some areas, there are schools with a very large number of students in one class, which of course affects the effectiveness of learning.

Second, cultural and social barriers are also a major challenge in increasing educational participation, especially for girls in some regions. Although there has been an increase in awareness of the importance of education, there is still a perception in some areas that upper secondary education, especially for girls, is not so important. According to BPS 2021 data, the participation rate of high schools in rural areas was recorded lower than in large cities, with the greatest inequality seen in girls' education. For example, in some areas in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and Papua, girls are more often stopped at the basic education level or do not continue to high school/vocational school due to cultural and economic factors. Some parents also feel that housework or marriage is more important than high school education for girls.

Third, administrative challenges also complicate the implementation of this program. Accurate student data collection processes are often a problem, especially in hard-to-reach areas. Inaccuracies in data can lead to inaccuracies in the allocation of education budgets and the distribution of scholarships. In addition, the sometimes non-transparent management of School Operational Assistance (BOS) can hinder the targeted distribution of funds, which has an impact on the quality of education in certain schools. In 2022, around 10% of schools in Indonesia experienced difficulties

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<sup>17</sup> Rupinus, R., Arifin, A., & Akadira, T. (2023). Implementasi Kebijakan Wajib Belajar Sembilan Tahun Di Kecamatan Dedai Kabupaten Sintang. *VOX EDUKASI: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 14(2), 301-310.

in managing BOS funds due to a mismatch between the allocated budget and the operational needs of the school. Weak supervision of the quality of education delivery can also lead to unequal quality of education in various regions.

Fourth, although these challenges are quite severe, a holistic approach involving various sectors and levels of society is needed so that the 13-Year Compulsory Learning program can run effectively. Solid cooperation between central and local governments, the private sector, and civil society organizations is needed. For example, the private sector can play a role in the provision of educational facilities and technology, while civil society can provide education awareness of the importance of education for children, especially for girls. In addition, technology-based education must also be widely introduced to overcome infrastructure limitations in remote areas, such as by using e-learning platforms that can be accessed through mobile devices.<sup>18</sup>

Seeing these challenges, there is no shortcut in realizing equal access to education. Sustainable, coordinated, and inclusive efforts are needed so that the 13-Year Compulsory Learning program can provide equitable benefits to all Indonesian children, without exception.

### **1. Expected Positive Impact**

If the 13-Year Compulsory Learning program is successfully implemented widely and consistently, various positive impacts will emerge that are not only felt by individuals, but also by society and the country as a whole. These impacts are very important in realizing a more advanced and prosperous Indonesia.<sup>19</sup>

First, the increase in school participation rates at the high school level nationally. The 13-Year Compulsory Learning Program aims to ensure that all Indonesian children, without exception, have the same opportunity to continue their education up to the upper secondary level. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the school participation rate at the high school/vocational level in 2022 only reached 75.5%, much lower than neighboring countries in Southeast Asia. With this program, the participation rate is expected to increase significantly, especially in remote and underdeveloped areas. Equitable upper secondary education will provide a strong foundation for the younger generation to develop their potential.<sup>20</sup>

Second, a decrease in the unemployment rate at a young age. High school/vocational school graduates have a greater chance of accessing the world of work or continuing higher education. Based on BPS 2022 data, youth unemployment in Indonesia is still quite high, with an unemployment rate of 15.35% at the age of 16-24 years. Quality high school education can equip graduates with skills that are more in line with the demands of the job market. With this program, it is hoped that

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<sup>18</sup> Sari Nusantara Putri, "Inspiring Early Childhood Education: Fostering Creativity and Innovation," n.d.

<sup>19</sup> Sos, J. P. S. (2020). *Implementation and evaluation of public policies*. Unisri Press.

<sup>20</sup> Ali, M. (2017). *Secondary education policy in the perspective of governance in Indonesia*. Brawijaya University Press.



more and more Indonesian youth will have adequate skills and education to enter the world of work or continue to college. It can also reduce economic inequality between generations, because the educated young generation will have higher competitiveness.<sup>21</sup>

Third, the creation of a more empowered, intelligent, and productive society, which in turn will accelerate the rate of national economic growth. Education is the key to creating a skilled and globally competitive workforce. With the improvement of the quality of education, especially at the upper secondary level, the Indonesian people will become smarter and ready to face the challenges of the times. A World Bank report (2021) states that investment in education can increase labor productivity and drive economic growth. An educated and productive society will accelerate Indonesia's economic transformation towards a developed country.

Fourth, this program can be a driver for the achievement of social justice and equality of opportunity in the field of education, which is in line with the values of Pancasila and the ideals of Indonesian independence. One of the basic principles of Pancasila is social justice for all Indonesian people, and education is the main means to achieve this. With equal access to upper secondary education, children from various economic and social backgrounds can have equal opportunities to learn and develop. This will reduce social inequality and create a more inclusive society. In addition, equitable education can open up opportunities for individuals to change their destiny and contribute to the development of the country.

Overall, the 13-Year Compulsory Learning program is expected to be the foundation for the creation of a more advanced, fair, and prosperous Indonesia. The proper implementation of this program can result in a younger generation that is more educated, productive, and ready to face the challenges of the increasingly complex world of work.

## **CONCLUSION**

The 13-Year Compulsory Learning Program is a very important strategic step in an effort to improve the quality of Indonesia's human resources. By expanding the scope of education to the upper secondary level, this program is expected to create equal access to education, reduce socio-economic inequality, and increase the nation's competitiveness in the global arena. Despite major challenges in its implementation, such as limited infrastructure, social barriers, and administrative challenges, the success of this program will have a significant positive impact, both in increasing the education participation rate, reducing youth unemployment, and accelerating the national economic growth rate. In addition, this program also plays an important role in realizing social justice and equal educational opportunities in accordance with the ideals of Indonesian independence.

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<sup>21</sup> Umar Yampap and Universitas Musamus, "Exploration of the Relationship between Classroom Display Management and Elementary School Students' Learning Achievement in Various Learning Conditions," n.d.

To achieve this success, strong collaboration is needed between the government, the private sector, and the community. The provision of an adequate budget, equitable distribution of infrastructure, and the empowerment of teachers and the community will be the main keys in realizing the goals of the 13-Year Compulsory Learning program. With a shared commitment and the right strategy, Indonesia can create a more empowered, intelligent, and productive young generation, which in turn will accelerate the country's social and economic transformation.

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