

Comparative Study of Inclusive Education Programs for Women in Indonesia and Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Education constitutes a fundamental right for all individuals, irrespective of gender. Despite this, gender-based educational disparities persist globally. This study conducts a comparative analysis of inclusive education programs for women in Indonesia and Malaysia, aiming to elucidate gender challenges in educational access and participation. Employing a qualitative methodology and comparative analysis, this research scrutinizes inclusive policies and initiatives within these nations, delineating their distinctions and commonalities. Data were collected through document reviews, observations, and interviews and subsequently subjected to comparative descriptive analysis. The findings reveal both countries' dedication to enhancing female educational participation. Nonetheless, obstacles such as restricted rural educational access, prevalent gender stereotypes in certain academic disciplines, discrepancies in STEM proficiency, and economic constraints continue to impede progress. To surmount these gender challenges in education, it is imperative to eradicate gender stereotypes, fortify gender-specific policies, broaden educational access, and provide tailored support for women with unique needs. Through collaborative efforts across multiple stakeholders, this study advocates for the establishment of an inclusive, equitable, and gender-fair educational milieu.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is an essential foundation for a country's development, and gender equality in access to and participation in education is crucial for achieving sustainable and inclusive growth. Indonesia and Malaysia, as two countries with cultural and social diversity, are committed to improving education for all citizens, including women (Jatmika, 2023). However, gender constraints and challenges are still a severe concern in efforts to achieve inclusive and equitable education for women in these two countries.

In Indonesia, access to education for women has experienced positive developments in recent years. The efforts of the government and various non-governmental organizations have been directed at increasing women's participation in formal education (Sari, 2019). Programs such as the National Movement for Women's Empowerment (GNPP) and the School Literacy Movement (GLS) have provided a significant impetus in increasing learning opportunities for women at various levels of education (Chanana, 2017; Fitri, 2022). However, challenges remain, especially in overcoming the gender gap in access to education in rural and urban areas (Isnawati & Sholeh, 2022). Gender inequality is also evident in opportunities for tertiary education and choosing fields of study, where women tend to be underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (Zhao, 2023).

Likewise, efforts to increase women's access to and participation in education have shown positive results in Malaysia. The Malaysian government has committed to empowering women through education (Idris & Bacotang, 2023). Several policies and programs have been introduced to increase women's participation in education, including the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, which aims to improve the quality of teaching and gender equality (Huang, 2022). However, there are still some challenges that need to be overcome. One of them is the gender gap in the mastery of STEM subjects, which is still considered a severe challenge to empowering women in work and future careers (Surianshah, 2022).

The two countries, Indonesia and Malaysia, are also working to create an inclusive educational environment for women with special needs. Although there have been several steps forward in recognizing the educational rights of children with special needs, there are still challenges in implementing inclusive education that fully supports women with special needs (Khalid, 2018). Effective implementation of inclusive education programs requires ongoing support from all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and the community (İlik & Hacieminoglu, 2019). In this context, this research aims to make in-depth comparisons between inclusive education programs for women in Indonesia and Malaysia, focusing on addressing gender challenges. The main objective of this research is to identify the successes and obstacles faced by each country in creating an inclusive educational environment that supports gender equality.

Several previous studies have reviewed critical issues related to women's education in these two countries. For example, Mustafa et al. (2020) highlight efforts to empower women through education in Malaysia. The research provides an in-depth look at the challenges and opportunities in empowering women through education in this country. Meanwhile, UNFPA (2015) reviewed the difficulties of women's access to education in Indonesia, especially in rural areas. On the other hand, Chisamya et al. (2012) have researched progress and challenges in achieving gender equality in education in Malaysia. This research provides insight into various policies and programs that the government has implemented to increase women's access to and participation in education. Other research relevant to this theme is by ACDP Indonesia (2013), which reviews the challenges of achieving gender equality in access to education in Indonesia. This study highlights the differences between access to education in urban and rural areas and women's challenges in remote areas. Furthermore, Siscawati et al. (2020) have investigated issues related to women's education in Indonesia, focusing on women's empowerment programs through education. This research provides an overview of various programs implemented to improve women's education access.

To achieve gender equality in education, the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia have also worked to create an inclusive educational environment for women with special needs. The study by Suhendri (2020) reviews challenges and strategies in implementing inclusive education for women with special needs in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Jelas & Mohd. Ali (2012) has examined implementing inclusive education in Malaysia and the challenges of creating an environment that supports gender equality.

Considering these studies, the current research will dig deeper into inclusive education programs for women in Indonesia and Malaysia. This research will analyze the successes and obstacles faced by each country in creating an inclusive and equitable educational environment for women. Thus, this research has the potential to provide valuable insights for policymakers, education practitioners, and

other related parties to better address gender challenges in education. By better understanding what has worked and what still needs to be improved, it is hoped that efforts towards inclusive and equitable education for women can be strengthened. Gender equality in education can be realized more in the future.

2. METHODS

This study employs a comparative methodology to examine inclusive education programs for women in Indonesia and Malaysia. The selection of the comparative method is informed by its utility in elucidating the disparities and parallels in educational policy implementation between the two nations, as posited by Gerring (2017). This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of the respective strategies and obstacles encountered in promoting gender-inclusive education in each country. The research predominantly relies on secondary data, sourced from official governmental reports, prior scholarly studies, and statistical data on education in Indonesia and Malaysia. This data compilation spans multiple years, enabling an analysis that accurately represents the contemporary educational policy landscape in both countries.

Furthermore, document analysis serves as a critical methodological tool in this study, unveiling the core policies enacted by the Indonesian and Malaysian governments for inclusive education. This method provides insights into the historical trajectory, objectives, and strategic frameworks of gender-inclusive education in these settings. An in-depth analysis of the gathered data aims to uncover patterns, themes, and variances in the execution of inclusive education programs for women. The research process incorporates triangulation analysis to bolster the validity and reliability of the findings. This multifaceted analytical approach, integrating multiple data sources and methods, ensures a robust verification of the research outcomes. Consequently, this study aspires to present a comprehensive and reliable portrayal of the state of inclusive education for women in both countries.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Comparison of Inclusive Education Programs for Women*

Inclusive education is an approach that focuses on providing learning opportunities for all individuals, including those with special needs, without discrimination and segregation. In the context of women, inclusive education is important because there are still gender challenges that need to be overcome so that women can access and participate equally in education. To achieve inclusive education oriented towards gender equality, Indonesia and Malaysia face differences and similarities in the inclusive education programs they implement.

In Indonesia, inclusive education programs for women have experienced rapid development in recent years. The Indonesian government has committed to ensuring equal access to education for all children, including girls with special needs. Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System underlines the importance of creating an inclusive learning environment (World Bank, 2020). In addition, several policies and programs, such as the National Women's Empowerment Movement (GNPP) and the School Literacy Movement (GLS), have been launched to increase learning opportunities for women at various levels of education (Trisnani, 2019). GNPP focuses on empowering women to increase their participation in multiple fields, including education, and GLS aims to improve literacy levels among women.

Despite many efforts, challenges remain in achieving inclusive education for women in Indonesia. One of the main challenges is the gender gap in access to education in rural and urban areas. Despite improvements in access to education, women in rural areas still face limited learning opportunities and a lack of adequate educational facilities (UNFPA, 2015). In addition, there are still significant differences in the mastery of STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) between women

and men, where women tend to be less representative in these fields (Hango, 2013). This indicates the need for further efforts to overcome gender stereotypes in selected areas of study.

Meanwhile, in Malaysia, the government has also committed to increasing women's participation in education through inclusive education programs. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 sets goals to improve education quality and gender equality in education access and participation (Ministry of Education, 2013). Several programs, such as the Special Education Program (PEKAS) and the Special Program for Youth (PKR), have been introduced to provide additional support for women with special needs and prevent them from being trapped outside the education system.

However, like Indonesia, Malaysia faces challenges in achieving inclusive education for girls. One of the main challenges is the gender gap in the mastery of STEM subjects, where women are still considered underrepresented in these fields (UNESCO, 2020). In addition, there is also a gap in access to education between urban and rural areas, where women in rural areas still face difficulties in accessing quality education.

Comparisons between inclusive education programs for women in Indonesia and Malaysia show significant similarities and differences. One similarity is the commitment of the governments of both countries to increase women's participation in education. The two countries face similar challenges in overcoming the gender gap in mastery of STEM subjects and access to education in rural areas.

However, there are also significant differences in the approaches taken by individual countries toward achieving inclusive education for girls. Indonesia has focused more on increasing learning opportunities for women at different levels of education through programs such as GNPP and GLS. Meanwhile, Malaysia emphasizes special programs such as PEKAS and PKR to support women with special needs.

The results of this study indicate that although there has been significant progress in achieving inclusive education for women in Indonesia and Malaysia, gender challenges still need to be addressed further. Improving access to education in rural areas and tackling gender stereotypes in career choices and fields of study will be vital to achieving gender parity in teaching in both countries.

3.2 Identification of Differences and Similarities Between Inclusive Education Programs

Inclusive education for women in Indonesia and Malaysia faces different challenges and opportunities in efforts to achieve gender equality in access and participation in education. Identifying the differences and similarities between inclusive education programs in the two countries is essential for understanding the approaches taken and evaluating their effectiveness in achieving gender inclusion and equality goals.

One significant difference is in the policy approach taken by each country. In Indonesia, there are efforts to increase learning opportunities for women with special needs through programs such as the School Literacy Movement (GLS) and the National Movement for Women Empowerment (GNPP) (Siscawati et al., 2020). GLS aims to increase literacy levels among women, while GNPP focuses on empowering women in various fields, including education.

On the other hand, Malaysia emphasizes special programs such as the Special Education Program (PEKAS) and the Special Program for Youth (PKR) to provide additional support for women with special needs and prevent them from being trapped outside the education system (Chin, Thien, & Chiew, 2019). This approach focuses on supporting women with special needs in achieving inclusive education.

In addition, differences can be seen in efforts to overcome the gender gap in the mastery of STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). In Indonesia, women are still underrepresented in STEM fields (Tamba & Chiang, 2021). However, this gap is also a challenge in Malaysia, as women are seen as underrepresented in the STEM field. While these challenges are the same, the strategies for addressing the gap may differ between the two countries.

Apart from the differences, some similarities exist between inclusive education programs in Indonesia and Malaysia. One of them is the commitment from the two countries' governments to increase women's participation in education through an inclusive approach. Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System in Indonesia emphasizes the importance of creating an inclusive learning environment (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20, 2003). Meanwhile, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 sets goals to improve the quality of education and gender equality in education access and participation (Ministry of Education, 2013).

The two countries also face similar challenges in overcoming disparities in access to education between urban and rural areas. Women in rural areas still struggle to access quality education in both countries. In identifying the differences and similarities between inclusive education programs in Indonesia and Malaysia, it should be understood that social, cultural and political factors from each country can influence these differences. Different cultural and social contexts can influence the implementation of programs and strategies to address gender challenges in education. The results of identifying the differences and similarities between inclusive education programs in Indonesia and Malaysia can provide valuable insights for education stakeholders in both countries. This information can be used to increase the effectiveness of existing programs and address challenges in achieving inclusive and equitable education for women in the future.

3.3 Gender Challenges in Education for Women in Both Countries

Education for women in Indonesia and Malaysia still faces several gender challenges that must be overcome to achieve an inclusive, equitable, and just education. Although both countries have made efforts to increase women's access and participation in education, there are still problems affecting gender equality in both countries' access to and success in education.

Limited Access: One of the main challenges is restricted access for women to education, especially in rural and remote areas. Geographical factors and limited infrastructure can make it difficult for women to reach quality schools, resulting in low levels of enrollment in education (Suryadarma & Jones, 2013).

Gender Stereotypes: Strong gender stereotypes in society can affect women's educational aspirations and career choices. In many cases, women tend to be more interested in fields of study considered "traditional" or following traditional gender roles, such as education, health, and work related to social services (Hentschel et al., 2019). This causes the low participation of women in fields of study that are more technical and science-oriented.

The gap in Mastery of STEM Subjects: The gap in the mastery of STEM subjects between women and men is still a problem in both countries (Asia Research Centre of Universitas Indonesia, 2022). Women tend to be underrepresented in STEM fields, such as science, technology, engineering, and math. This challenge can be overcome by eliminating gender stereotypes, encouraging women to enter STEM fields early, and providing support and incentives for women to learn and develop.

Poverty and Social Inequality: Social factors, such as poverty and social inequality, also affect women's participation in education (Setyadi, 2022). Women from low-income families or marginalized social groups often face difficulties meeting education costs and obtaining adequate educational support. Therefore, it is necessary to support policies and social programs to overcome poverty and inequality and encourage women's participation in education.

Unique Challenges for Women with Special Needs: Women with special needs face extra challenges in accessing inclusive education. Although there are specific programs such as PEKAS in Malaysia to provide additional support, challenges remain in providing an inclusive learning environment and adequate support for women with special needs in both countries (Sarkar, 2023).

In addressing gender challenges in education for women, collaborative efforts need to be made by various parties, including the government, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and the wider community. Policies and programs that support equal access to education, eliminate gender

stereotypes, and provide support for women with special needs need to be improved and properly implemented to achieve the goals of inclusive education and gender equality in Indonesia and Malaysia.

3.4 Consideration of Cultural and Social Context

Addressing gender challenges in education in Indonesia and Malaysia requires a deep understanding of each country's cultural and social context. Every country is unique and different in terms of culture, customs, social norms, and value systems that affect how women and education are viewed. Therefore, it is essential to consider this cultural and social context in designing education policies and programs that are gender inclusive and equitable. The following are some essential considerations that need to be considered in addressing gender challenges in education in Indonesia and Malaysia:

3.4.1 Traditional Values

Indonesia and Malaysia have strong traditional values, which can influence people's views on gender roles in education. Women may face certain social expectations that limit their opportunities to achieve education on par with men. Therefore, in designing inclusive education programs, it is necessary to consider ways to change traditional perceptions and promote gender equality (UNFPA, 2015).

3.4.2 Religion and Beliefs

Religion and beliefs also play an essential role in influencing views of women and education. Some religious values and norms may hinder women's participation in education, while others may support gender equality. Therefore, in addressing gender challenges in education, it is necessary to find the right balance between respecting religious values and beliefs by ensuring equality and inclusion in education (Iqbal et al., 2022).

3.4.3 The Role of Family and Society

Families and communities have a substantial role in shaping women's gender identities and educational aspirations. In many cases, support from family and community is essential to encourage women's participation and success in education. Therefore, involving families and communities to address gender challenges in education is critical (Bayeh, 2016).

3.4.5 Language and Communication Culture

Language and culture of communication can also influence women's participation in education. The choice of language used in the learning process must ensure equality and inclusion for all students, including girls. In addition, providing a gender-friendly environment for social interaction at school and in the community will facilitate women's participation in education (Llorens et al., 2021).

3.4.6 Economic Factors

Economic factors also play an essential role in women's participation in education. Poverty and economic limitations can seriously hinder women's access to quality education. Therefore, programs that support access and financial support for women in education will help overcome this challenge (Adema et al., 2014).

In designing inclusive and gender-equitable education policies and programs in Indonesia and Malaysia, consideration of the cultural and social context cannot be ignored. Respecting cultural and religious values, involving families and communities, using an inclusive language and culture of

communication, and providing economic support for women are critical steps toward creating an equitable and equitable educational environment for all, regardless of gender.

3.5 Efforts to Address Gender Challenges in Education

Addressing gender challenges in education for women in Indonesia and Malaysia is complex. It requires a comprehensive approach from various parties, including government, educational institutions, communities, and civil society organizations. Multiple efforts have been made to create an inclusive and equitable academic environment for women and address gender stereotypes and disparities in access to education.

3.5.1 Raising Awareness and Education about Gender

Awareness of gender issues and their role in education is essential to addressing gender challenges. Through educational programs, seminars, and training, communities and educational institutions can increase their understanding of the importance of gender equality in women's access, participation, and academic success (Siscawati et al., 2020).

3.5.2 Elimination of Gender Stereotypes

Addressing gender stereotypes in education is critical for empowering women and promoting gender equality in the workforce, particularly in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. Programs that actively encourage women to engage in technology and innovation are not only pivotal in broadening their educational opportunities but also essential for closing the persistent gender gap in these crucial sectors. According to Tamba & Chiang (2021), such initiatives can lead to more expansive career pathways and enhance women's roles in driving technological and scientific advancement. Furthermore, integrating gender-sensitive training and curricula that challenge traditional stereotypes from an early age can foster a more inclusive and diverse educational environment. This approach not only supports women in pursuing and excelling in STEM careers but also contributes to a more innovative and robust professional landscape.

3.5.3 Increasing Access to Education

Efforts to improve access to education for women in rural and remote areas are crucial for overcoming gender challenges in education. Prioritizing the development of gender-friendly educational infrastructure is key. This includes constructing schools within safer, more accessible locations, and providing reliable transportation options that respect cultural norms and ensure safety for female students. According to Echazarra (2019), such initiatives can significantly reduce disparities in access to education. Additionally, implementing programs that offer flexible schooling hours to accommodate the unique socioeconomic challenges faced by rural women can further enhance access. By addressing these specific needs, we not only promote gender equality in education but also empower women to contribute more effectively to the economic and social growth of their communities, paving the way for a more inclusive society.

3.5.4 Support for Women with Special Needs

Women with special needs often face significant barriers to accessing inclusive education. To address this issue, it is essential to implement specialized programs that not only promote physical accessibility but also provide tailored support that meets their unique learning needs. Such initiatives could include adaptive technologies, individualized learning plans, and trained support personnel, which are crucial for facilitating an equitable learning environment. For example, programs could implement ramps and elevators in educational institutions to enhance physical access, as well as provide resources like sign language interpreters or reading assistants to support learning. According

to INOVASi (2019), these measures are not just beneficial but necessary to ensure that women with special needs have equal opportunities to achieve their educational goals. By fostering an inclusive educational framework, we not only support their academic achievements but also enhance their potential for future employment and social integration.

3.5.5 Gender Policy Strengthening in Education

Strengthening policies focusing on gender equality in education is essential to achieve inclusion and equality goals. Policies that prioritize gender-inclusive and equitable principles in curriculum plans, teacher development, and educational assessments will help create an inclusive learning environment for women (Gibson & Purba, 2020).

3.5.6 Positive Role Model Development

Building positive role models for women in academic, professional, and social fields is an effective strategy for overcoming gender stereotypes and fostering gender equality. Involving successful and accomplished women from diverse backgrounds as role models and mentors can be transformative. These role models can offer tangible evidence of success, breaking down perceived barriers and challenging societal norms about gender roles. According to Young et al. (2013), such mentorship can inspire women to pursue their educational and career ambitions without constraints. Furthermore, active mentorship programs can provide the necessary support and guidance, helping young women navigate challenges and seize opportunities in their chosen fields. This not only empowers the individual women but also cultivates a culture of inclusivity and diversity within these sectors, promoting wider societal changes.

3.5.7 Collaboration with Related Parties

Addressing gender educational challenges necessitates a robust collaboration and partnership among government agencies, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and the broader community. As Bexley et al. (2022) suggest, the involvement of these diverse stakeholders in the design, implementation, and monitoring of inclusive and gender-just education programs is critical to the success of these initiatives. Such collaborative efforts ensure that policies are not only comprehensive but also responsive to the specific needs of women in different contexts. In Indonesia and Malaysia, this approach aims to gradually overcome gender challenges in education through a series of strategic actions. These include raising awareness of gender biases, actively working to eliminate gender stereotypes, enhancing access to education, providing tailored support for women with special needs, strengthening gender-responsive policies, developing positive female role models, and fostering cooperation among all parties involved. By implementing these measures, it is envisioned that the educational environment in both countries will become more inclusive, equitable, and supportive of women's rights and opportunities, leading to broader societal benefits.

4. CONCLUSION

Inclusive education programs for women in Indonesia and Malaysia reflect the commitment of these countries to achieving gender equality in educational access and participation. While notable strides have been made to enhance women's educational access and engagement, significant challenges remain. These include constrained access in rural locales, entrenched gender stereotypes influencing career and academic choices, inequities in STEM subject proficiency, and economic barriers like poverty and social disparity. Additionally, women with special needs require augmented support to partake in inclusive education fully. To effectively tackle these gender-related educational hurdles, a multi-faceted approach involving government bodies, educational institutions, community groups, and civil society organizations is imperative. Essential measures encompass promoting gender awareness, dismantling gender stereotypes, reinforcing gender-focused policies, broadening educational access, and delivering

specialized support for women with unique needs. Cultivating positive female role models in traditionally male-dominated study areas could also boost women's participation in such fields. Both nations must tailor their inclusive education strategies to their unique cultural and social fabrics, considering elements like traditional values, religious beliefs, familial roles, language, and economic conditions. By doing so, Indonesia and Malaysia can forge an education system that is truly inclusive, equitable, and conducive to gender justice, thereby advancing the broader objectives of gender equality and inclusive education. Persistent and concerted efforts are essential to surmount these gender challenges, aiming for a future where learning opportunities are equitable for all, thereby contributing to a just and fair society.

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