

THE TRANSFORMATION OF INDONESIAN EDUCATION POLICY: CURRICULUM INNOVATION, EQUAL ACCESS, DIGITALISATION, AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES (LITERATURE REVIEW)

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Abstract

This study examines the transformation of education policy in Indonesia, focusing on curriculum innovation, equal access, digitisation of education, and policy implementation challenges. Through a systematic literature review approach, this study analyses various literature, policy documents, and scientific sources related to the development of education policy from time to time to the current digital era. The results of the study show that curriculum innovations such as the Merdeka Curriculum play an important role in increasing the flexibility and quality of 21st-century learning, while efforts to equalise access to education still face geographical and socio-economic constraints. The digitisation of education has become a catalyst for transformation, but faces challenges in terms of infrastructure and digital literacy that need to be addressed comprehensively. The findings of the study emphasise the importance of comprehensive synergy between stakeholders and data-based policies to realise an inclusive, adaptive, and equitable national education system. This study contributes to the development of education policies that are responsive to social and technological changes in Indonesia.

Keywords: political transformation of education, curriculum innovation, equal access to education, digitisation of education, policy implementation challenges, Indonesia.

Introduction

The transformation of Indonesian education policy is an integral part of the nation's journey in building an education system that is not only high-quality but also inclusive and equitable (Judijanto & Aslan, 2025) ; (Purike & Aslan, 2025) . From the colonial era to the period of independence and reform, education has always been an important arena in the dynamics of national politics to strengthen national identity while preparing future generations. Dynamic education policy has led to policy changes oriented towards innovative curriculum development, equal access, digitalisation, and implementation challenges in the field (Komari & Aslan, 2025) ; (Fiteriadi et al., 2025) ; (Firmansyah & Aslan, 2025a) ; (Firmansyah & Aslan, 2025b) .

The history of education in Indonesia cannot be separated from the influence of political policies in each era. During the Dutch colonial period, formal education was only enjoyed by the elite, while the majority of the indigenous population experienced limited access. Discriminatory education policies oriented towards the interests of the colonisers resulted in social disparities that were embedded in the national education system (Binus Student Activity, 2024) . Figures such as Ki Hajar Dewantara emerged as pioneers of inclusive education oriented towards community empowerment through the

establishment of Taman Siswa, which became the starting point for the struggle for a democratic and cultural national education system. After the proclamation of independence in 1945, the struggle to build a national education system intensified (Faozi, 2024). The Indonesian government faced enormous challenges in designing a curriculum and educational structure that could meet national needs and equalise educational opportunities for all citizens. Education was then positioned as a strategic instrument for shaping a strong national character and identity amid the country's social and cultural diversity. However, limitations in infrastructure and human resources pose fundamental obstacles to realising this objective agenda (Sumiati, 2024).

The New Order era (1966–1998) was characterised by education policies focused on political stability and national economic development. The government used education as a tool for political integration by promoting a curriculum that instilled values of nationalism and character building (Fitriana, 2025). A nine-year compulsory education programme was launched in an effort to expand access to primary and secondary education throughout the country. Although there was significant progress in terms of illiteracy rates and educational equity, the centralised and authoritarian approach resulted in a lack of responsiveness to local needs (Hapinas et al., 2025); (Fitriani et al., 2024); (Caroline & Aslan, 2025); (Aslan & Sidabutar, 2025).

The reform era since 1998 has brought a breath of fresh air to Indonesia's education system with decentralisation and greater regional autonomy in managing education policy. A more democratic management model is expected to improve the quality and equity of education in accordance with the local context (Fitriana, 2025). Curricula and education policies have begun to undergo innovation in order to respond to global challenges and technological advances. However, the quality gap between regions and areas remains a structural problem that is difficult to overcome (Rokhmawati et al., 2025); (Cahyono & Aslan, 2025).

Curriculum innovation is one of the main focuses of Indonesia's current educational policy transformation. The Merdeka Curriculum, for example, is designed to give schools and teachers more freedom in determining contextual and adaptive learning models that meet the needs of students. This approach aims to create a generation that is creative, critical, and independent in line with the demands of the 21st century (Lie, 2023). However, the success of curriculum innovation implementation is highly dependent on infrastructure readiness, teacher quality, and consistent policy support from the central and regional governments (Saputra et al., 2024); (Aslan & Rasmita, 2025).

Equitable access to education is also a crucial agenda in the transformation of education policy. Efforts to reduce disparities between urban and rural areas, as well as between low-income and middle-to-high-income groups, continue to be made. Affirmative action policies and scholarship programmes are being strengthened to open up educational opportunities for all segments of society (Lie, 2023). However, obstacles such as inequality in facilities, teacher quality, and differences in welfare levels still cause a

significant gap in access to and quality of education in Indonesia (Pongpalilu & Aslan, 2025) ; (Suryadi & Aslan, 2025) .

The digitisation of education has become the main catalyst for accelerating the transformation of Indonesia's education policy. The use of information and communication technology in the teaching and learning process has opened up new opportunities for more inclusive and efficient education. Government digital platforms and e-learning programmes have emerged as solutions to address geographical issues and physical limitations (Supriani, 2022) . However, digitalisation also presents significant challenges, ranging from uneven technological infrastructure to the inability of human resources to adopt technology optimally (Fitriyanti & Aslan, 2025) ; (Renyaan et al., 2025).

The challenges of implementing educational transformation policies are not merely technical issues of execution but also relate to cultural and political resistance. A change in the educational paradigm requires the commitment of all stakeholders, from the government, teachers and parents to the wider community. Conflicts of interest and bureaucratic tendencies often hinder the ideal transformation process. Therefore, policy communication strategies and participatory engagement are important to ensure that education policies are properly adopted (Supriani, 2022) .

In the context of policy strengthening, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of political transformation in education must be a priority agenda. Data-based and empirically-based assessments will produce valid information for future policy redesign or refinement. Educational equity and quality are not only related to the policies issued but also to the extent to which these policies are effectively implemented in the field (Primahendra, 2024) .

Finally, the political transformation of education in Indonesia is an ongoing process that evolves in line with the changing times and global demands. With the right innovations, serious equity measures, and wise digitalisation, national education can become the main foundation for the development of a sovereign, independent, and just nation.

Research Methods

The research method used in this study is a literature review with a qualitative approach. This method involves searching for, collecting, and analysing relevant literature in the form of books, scientific journals, articles, official documents, and electronic sources related to political transformation in education in Indonesia, particularly curriculum innovation, equal access, digitisation of education, and policy implementation challenges. The literature review aims to build a strong theoretical foundation and understand the development and dynamics of education policy from a historical to a contemporary perspective (Elijah & Aslan, 2025) . The data collected was then synthesised systematically to produce a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study. This method was chosen because the focus of the research was on documented theory and policy studies, so it did not require direct field data collection, but rather an in-depth analysis of reliable

literature sources as a basis for argumentation and recommendations. This approach supports a comprehensive understanding of the transformation of educational policy as a complex phenomenon that draws on various scientific references and government policies. Thus, this research can produce valid and systematic intellectual contributions in the field of Education (Randolph, 2009) .

Results and Discussion

Curriculum Innovation and Access Equity in Educational Transformation

Curriculum innovation is an important pillar in the transformation of Indonesia's education policy, which aims to accommodate the learning needs of the 21st century. Since the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022 and the subsequent development of the 2025 Curriculum, the national education system has been directed towards more flexible, contextual, and student-centred learning (Aslan & Naba, 2025) ; (Aslan & Nur, 2025) . This curriculum emphasises deep learning, which is a deep understanding of the material and its application in real life, rather than simply memorising content. This approach is designed to shape a generation that is creative, critical, and able to adapt to rapid global changes (Primahendra, 2024) .

The Merdeka Curriculum provides schools and teachers with greater autonomy to design teaching and learning processes in accordance with local contexts and needs. This flexibility allows for the development of innovative learning methods that are relevant to the characteristics of individual students. Through this policy, teachers are encouraged to become facilitators who are able to guide students in discovering knowledge and developing the analytical and creative thinking skills needed in the digital era (Ridwan et al., 2025) ; (Aslan & Azizan, 2025) .

The implementation of curriculum innovation has also introduced a number of new subjects that are relevant to technological developments and the demands of 21st-century industry. For example, subjects such as coding and artificial intelligence (AI) have been introduced in upper primary and secondary schools. This is a strategic step by the Indonesian government in preparing students for the era of the 4.0 industrial revolution and increasing digital literacy from an early age as an integral part of the transformation of Education (Nasution & Aslan, 2025) ; (Sampe & Aslan, 2025) ; (Mudzakir & Aslan, 2025) ; (Rahayu et al., 2025) .

One of the advantages of the Merdeka and 2025 Curriculum is the reduction in the amount of subject material, which allows teachers to use student-centred learning methods, such as projects and experiments. Assessment has also undergone changes towards portfolio-based and project-based evaluation that emphasises critical thinking and problem-solving (Primahendra, 2024) . This step is expected to improve the quality of student learning while providing space for the development of essential character and soft skills. The success of curriculum innovation is highly dependent on the readiness of infrastructure and human resources. Therefore, the government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), is actively conducting

teacher training to improve their competence in adopting innovative learning. This training covers the use of digital technology as a learning medium and the development of innovative strategies that can motivate students and increase their interest in learning (Indrasari, 2024) .

In addition to curriculum innovation, equal access to education is a major concern in educational policy reform. The government is striving to reach remote areas and underprivileged communities through various affirmative action programmes, scholarships, and the development of educational facilities (Zainudin & Aslan, 2025) ; (Hamid & Aslan, 2025) ; (Komari et al., 2025) . This effort aims to eliminate geographical, economic, and social barriers that have been the cause of inequality in learning quality and opportunities in Indonesia (Aslan & Abbas, 2025) .

Equal access to education is also closely related to the development of school infrastructure and the provision of adequate facilities. In many areas, especially in rural and remote areas, there is still a high demand for representative schools, competent teaching staff, and communication technology. Therefore, the government has allocated a special budget for the construction and rehabilitation of schools, as well as the provision of internet access, which is the backbone of the digitisation of learning (Indrasari, 2024) .

Affirmative action programmes and inclusive policies such as scholarships for poor students and those with disabilities are also an integral part of efforts to equalise access. This approach ensures that the right to quality education can be enjoyed by all levels of society without exception. Synergy between the central and regional governments is necessary to ensure that these programmes can run effectively in accordance with local characteristics (Aslan & Hajiri, 2025) ; (Indrasari, 2024) .

The digitisation of education further strengthens efforts to equalise access to learning. With digital platforms and online learning, students in hard-to-reach areas can gain equal access to quality learning materials. However, infrastructure challenges such as the uneven availability of electricity and internet networks are serious obstacles that must be overcome in order for digitisation to truly bring equitable benefits to all regions of Indonesia (Romadhon & Aslan, 2025) ; (Rozikin et al., 2024) .

The role of teachers in striving for equal access and curriculum innovation is central. Teachers are not only educators, but also agents of change who connect policy with learning practices in the field. Continuous training and professional development support is essential for teachers to be able to overcome challenges in diverse classrooms, especially in the context of implementing a new, more dynamic and digital curriculum (Indrasari, 2024) .

The implementation of curriculum innovation and equal access cannot be separated from the dynamics of Indonesian education policy, which must harmonise various interests and bureaucratic challenges. Systemic transformation requires synergy between the central government, local governments, and other stakeholders, including the community and the private sector. Policy consistency and continuity must be

maintained so that the results of innovation and equity are not hampered by regime changes or partial policies (Astuti et al., 2023) .

Continuous evaluation and monitoring are important elements in ensuring the effectiveness of curriculum innovation and equitable access. Data and feedback from implementation in the field are used as evaluation material for policy and practice refinement. Information technology is also a tool for monitoring progress and detecting obstacles that arise so that they can be quickly and appropriately addressed (Sarnoto, 2020) .

Equal access to education and curriculum innovation must be seen as two sides of the same coin that support each other to produce quality and inclusive education. Without equal access, curriculum innovation will only be enjoyed by a small portion of society. Conversely, equality without innovation will result in a stagnant education system that is unable to respond to global challenges (Fathurrahman, 2025) .

Overall, curriculum innovation and equal access in Indonesia's educational transformation reflect the country's commitment to providing an education system that is responsive to changing times and inclusive of all levels of society. Adaptive learning models and information technology are at the forefront of creating this synergy. Despite many challenges, the success of these efforts will determine the future of education and human resource development in Indonesia.

Digitalisation of Education and Policy Implementation Challenges

The digitisation of education in Indonesia is a vital part of the political transformation of education to improve the quality, access and efficiency of the national learning system. The government is actively promoting the integration of information technology in administration, teaching and evaluation processes through various policies and digital platforms, such as the Merdeka Belajar, Dapodik and e-Rapor platforms. This transformation aims to create a modern, transparent education system that is accessible to all members of society regardless of geographical location (Naim, 2025) .

One of the main aspects of education digitisation is the use of technology to expand access to education, especially in remote and isolated areas. Online learning systems enable students who are far from educational centres to obtain quality learning materials via the internet. This is in line with the commitment to equal education, while also providing an adaptive and innovative learning model to prepare the younger generation for the digital era (Zhang, 2025) . However, despite the enormous potential of digitisation, there are still serious challenges that need to be overcome. The technological infrastructure gap, particularly unequal access to the internet and digital devices, is a major obstacle in many areas, especially in 3T (Frontier, Outermost, and Disadvantaged) regions. Many schools in these areas do not yet have basic facilities such as computers, stable internet networks, or reliable electricity to support consistent online learning (OECD, 2017) .

Another crucial obstacle is the readiness of human resources, especially teachers and educators, in facing the digital era. Many teachers still have limited digital literacy, making it difficult for them to operate online learning devices and platforms. The lack of adequate digital training and mentoring widens the capability gap, especially for senior teachers who are accustomed to conventional methods (Anwarudin, 2025). In addition, education management at the school level also faces challenges in designing and implementing effective digitisation strategies. Many schools do not yet have a mature strategic plan to fully integrate technology into the learning and administrative processes. This causes the implementation of digital policies to often be fragmented and less than optimal (Sholichah, 2023).

Social and cultural conditions and resistance to change also pose significant obstacles to the digitisation of education. Some teachers, parents, and even students find it difficult to adapt to new technologies, which are sometimes considered complicated or unfamiliar. The paradigm shift in learning requires communication support and the involvement of all stakeholders to ensure that technology adoption runs smoothly and sustainably (Anggraini, 2022).

The government, in this case the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, has launched various digital literacy training programmes for teachers and educational personnel as part of the solution to these challenges. This training provides basic to advanced skills in the use of educational technology, digital-based learning management, and the development of interactive learning materials (Gurudikdas Dikdasmen, 2023). However, the frequency and scope of training need to be increased so that it is evenly distributed across all regions. The importance of cross-sector synergy is also highlighted in the implementation of education digitisation policies. Cooperation between the central government, local governments, the private sector, and civil society is needed to overcome limitations in resources and infrastructure. Joint investment can accelerate the development of technology facilities and the provision of a broad and reliable internet network (Wanti, 2022).

Continuous evaluation and monitoring of the implementation of education digitisation policies are essential elements in ensuring that any challenges can be identified and addressed in a timely manner. The use of data generated from digital systems, such as Dapodik and the e-Rapor platform, helps the government map regional needs and the effectiveness of the programmes being implemented. This provides an important basis for evidence-based policy-making and improving the quality of education (Widiastuti, 2025).

Digital transformation also brings new challenges in terms of data security and student privacy. The readiness to implement cyber security and personal data protection systems must be an integral part of the government's digitalisation policy. The education sector needs to build awareness and capacity to manage digital security risks so that sensitive information is not misused. Digital access inequality has the potential to deepen existing socio-economic disparities in Indonesia (Purnastuti, 2016). Digitalisation without efforts to equalise infrastructure and competencies can widen the gap between urban and

rural schools, as well as between socio-economic groups. Therefore, digitalisation policies must be accompanied by inclusive strategic measures so that all levels of society can enjoy the benefits of educational transformation (Sitopu et al., 2024) ; (Guna et al., 2024) .

Furthermore, the digitisation of education opens up opportunities for innovation in curriculum development and learning methods. Technology can be used to create more personalised, interactive, and project-based learning experiences that are tailored to the characteristics and interests of learners. This brings a new paradigm in education that is more adaptive and responsive to the needs of the times (Iksal et al., 2024) . However, this shift in the learning paradigm requires adjustments to the assessment and accountability systems in education. Technology-based assessments must be able to measure competencies holistically and objectively, not only cognitive aspects but also the social and emotional skills of learners. Developing effective digital assessment platforms presents both challenges and opportunities in this era of transformation (Fawait et al., 2024) .

Policies that encourage the digitisation of education need to be complemented by clear and comprehensive regulations. These regulations must govern both the technical and ethical aspects of technology use in education to prevent inequality and misuse. A robust policy framework will provide legal certainty and a more structured direction for implementation for all stakeholders (Syakhrani & Aslan, 2024) .

Overall, the digitisation of education in Indonesia represents a major leap forward in the transformation of the national education system, presenting both opportunities and challenges for the implementation of complex policies. The success of digitisation depends heavily on the readiness of infrastructure, human resources, cross-sectoral synergy, as well as political will and a shared commitment to advancing inclusive and quality education for all children of the nation. Addressing these challenges appropriately will shape a more adaptive, innovative, and socially equitable future for education.

Conclusion

The transformation of education policy in Indonesia shows significant dynamics by placing curriculum innovation at the centre of learning system development. Innovations such as the Merdeka Curriculum provide greater scope for flexibility and creativity for teachers in managing learning oriented towards the development of 21st century competencies. This reflects strategic efforts to deliver education that is relevant to global demands and local needs in a balanced manner, while strengthening the character and soft skills of students.

On the other hand, equal access to education is a key agenda that is constantly being pursued through various affirmative policies and infrastructure development, especially in remote and underserved areas. However, geographical constraints, human resources, and economic inequality remain major challenges that require strong cross-sectoral synergy. The digitisation of education has emerged as an important catalyst in bridging the gap in access and quality, but the implementation of digitisation policies also

faces obstacles in terms of infrastructure, digital literacy, and cultural resistance that must be systematically overcome.

Overall, the success of Indonesia's educational policy transformation depends heavily on the government's steadfast commitment, the readiness of human resources, and the implementation of sustainable, data-driven policies. Preventing policy fragmentation and ensuring consistent and inclusive implementation are key prerequisites for realising high-quality, equitable, and adaptive education in the digital age. This literature review provides an important foundation for the development of further policies that are responsive to the challenges and opportunities of the future of national education.

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