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Students' Perceptions Of Educational Disparities Among Students In Urban And Rural Areas Of Muara Enim Regency

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Abstract

The study was conducted to explore students' perceptions about the gulf of education between urban and rural areas in the Muara Enim district. Qualitative descriptive method is used in the study by involving six high school students as participants. Data collection is conducted through semi-structured interviews to obtain information about the students' experiences and views of the education conditions in both areas. Research results suggest that availability of facilities, accessibility, technological support and Internet connectivity in urban areas are more adequate than rural areas, such as limitations in facilities, inadequate infrastructure lack education, and unstable Internet access, they are perceived to affect experiences in learning and students' opportunities for quality education.. Thus, increased education infrastructure and the equalizing of educational resources should be made in an effort to reduce educational inequality and realize more equitable learning opportunities for all students

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundational pillar in students for regional development and empowerment of individuals. According to Hallinger and Heck (2010), unequal access to quality education is crucial to reducing social inequality and increasing economic growth. In this context, students' perceptions about education in their learning environment place high emphasis on academic success. However, the differences in educational resources toward the disparity between different geographic locations, may hamper the variety of student motivation and attainment (OECD. 2018). As these differences are significant, they can impede progress and limit the potential of the rising generation in the entire district that is left behind.

Recent studies of education in some developing countries such as Indonesia have shown some of the major factors running the distance between schools in urban and rural areas. New research shows that schools in urban areas are high in rural areas because facilities in urban areas are better than those in rural areas (James H. Williams. 2005), greater numbers of teachers and higher pupils (Thomas F. Luschei, & Amita Chudgar. 2015), urban schools have more extracurricular opportunities (Pranab Bardhan. 2002.). Education in the country presents many challenges such as lack of digital facilities (Xuehui Du. 2021.), limited access to new books and materials (UNESCO. 2020.), and difficulty in finding a highly qualified teacher (David H. Monk. 2007). While this physical and systemic comparison has been well documented, it is often overlooked in the experience of city and country students that remain the most important components in cities, it is often overlooked in the educational

landscape. Furthermore, economic social status is often associated with geographic location, creating "a double cost" to students in remote areas (Aidan Mulkeen. 2005.). Furthermore, socioeconomic status is often associated with geographic location, creating a “double burden” for students in remote areas (Sean F. Reardon. 2011.). The condition is exacerbated by the phenomenon "drying of the brain," where highly skilled educators tend to move to the center of the city to maintain the stability of a better career (Amy Price Azano, & Trevor T. Stewart. 2015.). In addition, lack of facilities and overcast systems in rural schools often results in lower performance and higher dropout rates than the local population (Peter Barrett, et al. 2019.) While this physical and systemic comparison has been well documented, it is often overlooked in the experience of city and state students who remain the most important components of the education landscape. In Indonesia, especially at the Muara Enim, according to common statistics that there are various tools of education or lack of learning facilities, the study specifically covers the perspective of students living in cities and rural areas still has many differences and limitations. Digital segregation remains a significant barrier, as students in less developed areas often struggle with the erratic connectedness of Internet networks that limits their access to global learning platforms (Keith N. Hampton, et al. 2020.). To bridge this gap, local government initiatives must prioritize poor school funding distribution to make sure that village students were not given priority in the industrial revolution 4.0 (Daniel Suryadarma, et al. 2006.). Therefore, we should increase our focus on students who want to become the golden generation to give a more complete picture. Understanding the psychological impact of inequality is also important, since there is injustice with students in allocating resources can challenge students' abilities and aspirations (Andreas Wiedemann, et al. 2023.).

In Indonesia, especially in Muara Enim, according to general statistics that there are different educational media tools or lack of learning facilities, studies specifically explore the perspectives of students living in cities and rural areas still have many differences and limitations, so we should increase our focus on students who want to become a golden generation to be a more comprehensive picture

The study aims to find out the gap by analyzing students' perceptions about urban and rural interactions in the Muara Enim. By understanding the student's point of view, we can get more accurate information about the difference between access and the quality of education between the two areas Thus, the study was guided by one key question: what is the student's perception of educational inequality between urban and rural areas in the Muara Enim district?.

The education gap indicates unequal access to educational opportunities and resources among students caused by local geographic location, social status, and institutional support. According to nature research Nature Research (2020.), educational gaps result in many differences when students in various areas experience unrestricted access to the quality of education, leading to a variety of academic achievement. Similarly, Sean F. Reardon (2011), explains that as the inequality of education is closely linked with social and geographical differences, many students have less healthy backgrounds tend to have lower academic performance than those from more developed regions. In addition, increased programs Paul Glewwe, & Karthik Muralidharan (2015) emphasize that gaps in the quality of schools, teacher attendance, and learning resources significantly contribute to different educational outcomes. These differences affect students' information about justice in education and can affect their academic motivations and aspirations.

The inequality of education must not occur because it has a crucial role in promoting social mobility and economic development. According to pranab bardhan (2002), in the enim estuary county it has not the same access to education, thus blocking regional development and widening the economic gap between communities. Similarly, the United Nations children's fund (2019) reports that gaps in educational access, especially in rural areas, can reduce and limit learning opportunities for future career opportunities. Students who lack adequate facilities, inadequate infrastructure and

difficulty in finding teachers in standardized rural areas often lead to less or even lower motivations. With many inequalities of education, the uniformity of education is necessary to provide the same opportunities to students in both villages and urban areas. To promote good education in rural areas, and to support equalizing infrastructure between urban and rural areas.

Village and city differences are very far away for the most specialized resources of education and infrastructure, and opportunities to expand. According to the world bank (2018), the urban students have more adequate facilities than the children in the villages. Like more developed and more teaching power, more and more children in cities have access to technologies and facilities that are far better than schools in rural areas. Similarly, UNESCO (2020), reports that rural schools often face challenges such as distances between homes to distant schools, limited learning facilities, and teacher shortages, which can negatively affect students' academic achievements. Furthermore, Daniel Suryadarma and his colleagues (2006), say that differences in resource quality significantly affect student performance, as well as teacher limitations significantly, especially in developing countries like Indonesia. The gap greatly affects the perception of education, the motivation for learning, the motivation for school, the aspirations of a shrinking future. Therefore, we must look at and understand the students' conception of the gap between the urban area and the village area. This is important because it is possible to identify what is happening in the educational environment and to improve the quality of education in Indonesia especially in the Muara Enim region.

2. METHOD

The study USES a descriptive qualitative method to explore the education perceptions between the two regions, urban and rural that are in the Muara Enim district. A qualitative method is chosen to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences and viewpoints on ward and education differences in learning. According to John W. Creswell, qualitative research is done in natural settings where research aims to understand participants' thoughts and the meaning of social phenomena. Thus, these studies are made to focus on exploring student/student thoughts and experiences related to the gaps in their respective wards of education.

In turn, the study was conducted in two separate schools located in the urban and rural areas of the Muara Enim district, in Indonesia. The participants consisted of six students selected in the course of the study (three men and three women). Participants are selected based on their willingness to present relevant information about the educational experience. To protect the privacy of the participants, assumed names were changed to their real names. Participants between the ages of 15 and 17 are now enrolled in the high school

The study was used using the concept of semi structured interviews as a primary tool for collecting data. Semi-structured interviews enable studies to prepare guiding questions while still providing flexibility for participants to describe their experiences in depth. These interviews are used in qualitative research because they enable more open responses and exploration of thought and participant experiences. This interview was conducted in the language of the region situated at the Muara Enim mouth to allow participants to express their ideas comfortably. Each interview takes approximately 5-10minutes and is videotaped with participants.

For data analysis, all interviews are recorded and copied by hand. After transcription, researchers jointly reread the data they have given to identify patterns and themes. The data is then encoded and categorized in several themes related to education inequality, such as the lack of manpower as teachers, learning facilities, and access to technology. To ensure trust, examiners may return the interview's transcript for confirmation and confirmation as well as an opportunity to revise or clarify their responses after reviewing the transcript.

Tabel 1. Background of the participants

No	Pseudonym	Age	Study period
1	Anm1	19	3 years
2	Anm2	19	3 years
3	Anm3	19	3 years
4	Anm4	19	3 years
5	Anm5	18	3 years
6	Anm6	18	3 years

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 research results

Based on an interview conducted with six respondents on perceptions of the inequality between urban and rural areas of Muara Enim district, there have been several major factors affecting the quality of education in the region, namely educational accessibility, educational facilities, resource, technology and the Internet, and the equality of education. Studies show that most respondents believe that urban areas have better access to and more adequate education facilities than those in rural areas. At table 2, table 3, and table 4 both show internal and external factors

Table 1. Factors of education gaps in both urban and rural areas of the Muara Enim district.

Gaps	Internal	External
1	Long distance from home to school	The road infrared's damaged
2	difficulty in accessing information and learning resources	Limited public transportation
3	dependence on public transport	Facilities that are less well equipped

Table 2. Educational facilities and rural areas accessibility points.

Difference	Urban Areas	Rural Areas
1	Have good road access	A dirt road that wasn't paved
2	A complete educational facility	Limited educational facilities
3	Better access to transportation	A shortage of educational workers

Table 3. Anonymous advice to improve the quality of education

Quality	Increased accessibility quality	Improved education
1	Improving road infrastructure	Developing potential students equally
2	Provide good transportation access	Maximize technology in learning
3	Equalizing education access between region	Provided a laboratory facility, mechanical tools and a complete library

3.1.1 educational accessibility

Based on the interviews, it is largely anonymous that access to education facilities in the rural areas is still difficult compared with urban areas. Based on the data of the chart above the main factors that pose a problem are poor or poor road conditions, mileage between residence to distant education, and limited public transportation.

One anonymous stated that students in the country area must travel long enough to reach the school.

"Many students who travel to school so far, roughly the distance between home and school can take an hour or two. "(w1)

Additionally, anonymous others claim that road conditions in some rural areas are less than ideal and may impede the educational process.

"Streets that are either unpaved or red dirt, so when the rain falls are potentially damaging the road so that access to education may be blocked. "(w6)

Some anonymous also revealed that public transportation in the countryside was still so limited that students had to use multiple vehicles.

"For one car it can carry students or students up to a dozen people on a single public vehicle. "(w5)

As the result of the interview is known that educational accessibility in the country of the Enim mouth is still a major problem.

3.1.2 educational facility

Interviews revealed that education facilities in urban areas are more complete than the country. And in urban schools it is judged to have considerable learning tools such as laboratories, libraries, Internet access, and learning practices.

One anonymous said:

"In my school I'm more inclined to practice, so to speak, there are sufficient practical tools as well as laboratories, libraries, Internet access. "(w5)

Meanwhile, some anonymously claimed that schools in the countryside still had limited facilities.

"Some schools still lack such tools as laboratories, libraries, and Internet access. "(w1)

Others anonymous also adds that limitations on the Internet and frequent blackouts can impede the learning of teaching.

"There are still a few drawbacks to Internet access and frequent power outages. "(w3)

Even so, some respondents claim that the government has begun unifying educational facilities in some rural schools. However, the facility is underrated.

3.1.3 educators

Accessibility and facilities are also important factors in the educational gap between urban and rural. On the basis of the interviews, respondents said that people in urban areas are more likely than rural areas. Because many in rural areas have what you might call urban education is lacking in size.

One anonymous stated that there were still many schools in rural areas with less educators that teachers from urban areas had to teach to rural areas.

"Many teachers in the city have been reassigned to teach in the countryside. "(w5)

Others anonymous also expressed that limited road access made some educators feel afraid or difficult to teach in rural areas.

"Workers from urban teaching to rural areas may be frightened with regard to road access in the minority. "(w3)

The rupiah's exchange rate was expected to continue to strengthen to rp9,100 per dollar, he said.

3.1.4 utilizing technology and the Internet

Based on interviews, the use of technology in learning processes is more developing in urban areas than in rural areas. Because many students in rural areas still lack information or miss methods of study that are lacking.

One anonymous claims that urban schools already use technologies such as computers, laptops and the Internet in study.

"Practically every school in the city of Muara Enim has been used by such methods as computers, computers, computers, or cell phones. "(w5)

In rural areas, however, Internet access is still limited, so students have difficulty locating learning information.

"The Internet is not evenly distributed throughout the country until it is very difficult for students to search the Internet. "(w6)

This suggests that development of educational technologies in rural areas still needs attention so that the quality of learning can be evenly increased.

3.1.5 of respondents' hopes and Suggestions

Based on the interviews, all anonymous hoped that the quality of education in the Muara Enim district could be more evenly distributed between urban and rural areas. And can be more sensitive to villages that are still far behind resources than those in cities.

For the most part, the goal is to improve education facilities, improve road access, improve quality of the Internet, and boost more educators in rural areas.

One anonymous person stated:

"The government needs to ensure that schools in the country have adequate facilities such as classrooms, libraries, technology, transportation, labor and so on. "(w1)

Also, anonymous others hope that governments pay more attention to the potential of students in rural areas.

"Many students have better potential that they don't get the same sort of education gap. "(w2)

In this way, studies show that education is still the main hope of the people of the Muara Enim district.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a significant educational gap between urban and rural areas in Muara Enim Regency, as perceived by high school students. Four major dimensions emerged from the data: educational accessibility, educational facilities, availability of educators, and access to technology and the Internet. The discussion below interprets these results in relation to existing

theoretical frameworks and prior research, examines the implications of the findings, acknowledges the limitations of the study, and suggests directions for future research.

- **Educational Accessibility**

  The study found that students in rural areas of Muara Enim face serious barriers to accessing school, including long travel distances, poor road conditions, and limited public transportation. Some participants reported that the journey to school could take one to two hours each way, and unpaved roads frequently become impassable during the rainy season. These findings are consistent with UNESCO (2020), which identifies physical distance between homes and schools, limited transportation infrastructure, and inadequate road conditions as primary factors that negatively affect student attendance and academic achievement in rural settings. Similarly, Barrett et al. (2019) note that poor school infrastructure, including accessibility routes, directly impacts learning outcomes and increases dropout risk among rural populations.

  This disparity in accessibility reflects a broader structural inequality described by Reardon (2011), who argues that geographic location frequently compounds socioeconomic disadvantage, creating a "double burden" for students in remote areas. In the context of Muara Enim, rural students not only face poverty-related constraints but also must overcome physical and infrastructural barriers that their urban counterparts do not encounter. The implication is that educational inequity in this region is not merely a matter of resource allocation inside schools, but is deeply rooted in broader infrastructural deficiencies that must be addressed by local and national government through targeted investment in rural road networks and public transportation systems.

- **Educational Facilities**

  Participants in this study clearly perceived a significant difference in the availability and quality of educational facilities between urban and rural schools. Urban students reported having access to well-equipped laboratories, libraries, and stable internet connections, whereas rural students described shortages of basic learning tools, frequent power outages, and inadequate school buildings. This result is in line with the World Bank (2018), which confirms that urban students generally have greater access to modern educational infrastructure compared to their rural peers. Surya Darma et al. (2006) further documented that disparities in resource quality significantly affect student performance, particularly in developing countries such as Indonesia, where funding allocation between regions remains highly uneven.

  Glewwe and Muralidharan (2015) emphasize that gaps in school quality, including physical learning resources and infrastructure, substantially contribute to divergent educational outcomes. The perception of rural students in Muara Enim that their schools are inadequately equipped aligns with this theoretical argument. When students lack access to essential facilities, their motivation and ability to engage with the curriculum are compromised. Moreover, the sense of injustice that arises from visible inequality in resources can negatively affect students' self-efficacy and educational aspirations, as highlighted by Wiedemann et al. (2023). This indicates that the problem of inadequate facilities extends beyond the physical into the psychological domain, affecting how rural students perceive their own potential and future opportunities.

- **Availability of Educators**

  The study found that rural schools in Muara Enim face a shortage of qualified educators, with some teachers being reassigned from urban areas to fill vacancies. Participants noted that difficult road conditions and concerns about safety discouraged educators from choosing to work in rural

postings. This finding strongly supports the "brain drain" phenomenon described by Azano and Stewart (2015), wherein highly skilled educators tend to migrate toward urban centers where career stability, amenities, and professional development opportunities are more readily available. Monk (2007) similarly identifies the difficulty of attracting and retaining qualified teachers in rural areas as one of the most persistent challenges facing rural education systems.

From a broader policy perspective, Luschei and Chudgar (2015) highlight that the uneven distribution of teachers between urban and rural schools is a systemic problem that persists across many developing nations, including Indonesia. Mulkeen (2005) further argues that without targeted incentive programs—such as housing allowances, salary supplements, or career advancement pathways for rural postings—the teacher shortage in remote areas will remain unresolved. The implication for Muara Enim is clear: improving teacher recruitment and retention in rural districts requires structural policy reform rather than temporary reassignments, which often result in unmotivated educators who lack long-term commitment to rural communities.

- **Technology and Internet Access**

  Participants in this study indicated that technology use in the learning process is far more advanced in urban schools, where computers, laptops, and stable internet access are widely available. In contrast, rural students in Muara Enim reported unstable internet connections and frequent power failures that hinder their ability to access digital learning resources. This finding resonates with Du (2021), who identifies the digital divide as a critical obstacle to educational equity in rural areas. Hampton et al. (2020) further demonstrate that inadequate broadband access is directly associated with performance gaps among students, particularly in regions where digital tools have become central to the curriculum delivery.

  The significance of this gap is amplified in the context of Indonesia's industrial revolution 4.0 agenda, which increasingly demands digital literacy from its workforce. As Surya Darma et al. (2006) warn, failing to provide rural students with adequate digital infrastructure means effectively excluding them from the economic opportunities that technological advancement brings. Hallinger and Heck (2010) further argue that access to technology is not merely a matter of convenience but a determinant of academic leadership and school quality. For students in rural Muara Enim, the absence of reliable technology access not only limits their current learning but also diminishes their competitive prospects in higher education and the labor market.

- **Implications of the Findings**

  Collectively, the findings of this study carry important implications for educational policy in Muara Enim Regency. The persistent educational gap between urban and rural areas undermines the principles of justice and equal opportunity that are foundational to Indonesia's national education agenda. Bardhan (2002) warns that unequal access to education within a region obstructs local development and widens the economic divide between communities. The United Nations Children's Fund (2019) similarly reports that educational gaps in rural areas reduce long-term career opportunities for children, thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty across generations. These theoretical positions support the urgency of the students' own aspirations expressed in this study: that the government must equalize access to quality education across all geographic areas without exception.

  The OECD (2018) emphasizes that reducing educational inequality requires not only increasing resources in disadvantaged areas but also addressing systemic barriers such as social stratification and geographic isolation. In the context of Muara Enim, this means that policy responses must be

multi-dimensional: investing in road and transportation infrastructure, redistributing educational funds more equitably between urban and rural schools, strengthening teacher incentive programs for rural postings, and expanding broadband connectivity to underserved villages. Nature Research (2020) underscores that mapping and monitoring these disparities is the first step toward designing effective interventions that can meaningfully improve outcomes for marginalized students.

- **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

  Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size was small, consisting of only six participants from two schools. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other areas of Muara Enim Regency or other regions in Indonesia. Second, the study relied exclusively on self-reported perceptions gathered through interviews, which may be subject to social desirability bias or the participants' limited ability to articulate systemic issues. Third, the study did not include perspectives from teachers, school principals, or local government officials, whose views would have provided a more complete picture of the educational landscape. Fourth, the use of a qualitative descriptive approach, while appropriate for exploring subjective experiences, does not allow for causal conclusions about the relationship between resource disparities and academic outcomes.

  Future research should address these limitations by employing larger and more diverse samples that include multiple schools from various urban and rural sub-districts within Muara Enim Regency. Mixed-method approaches that combine qualitative interviews with quantitative measures of academic achievement, attendance rates, and resource allocation would produce a richer and more rigorous understanding of educational inequality in the region. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the same cohort of students over time would be valuable for examining how persistent resource gaps influence educational trajectories and future career outcomes. Research that incorporates the perspectives of educators and policymakers alongside those of students would also contribute to more holistic and actionable policy recommendations. Finally, comparative studies between Muara Enim and other similarly situated regencies in South Sumatra or across Indonesia could help identify best practices and transferable solutions for reducing the urban-rural educational divide.

4. CONCLUSION

According to research, there is still a significant gap in both urban and rural Muara Enim areas. The differences are seen from several aspects, such as educational accessibility, educational facilities, while the availability of more educators, and the use of technology and the Internet during the improving learning process. Regional schools have better grades than in rural areas where they are said to be poor.

Meanwhile, students and students in the rural areas at the Muara Enim still face a wide range of obstacles, such as poor road conditions such as hole or hole, untarred public transportation to schools, inadequate school facilities such as wi-fi, a shortage of educators, and a shortage of stable networks. Those conditions greatly influence students in learning experiences, motivations, and opportunities to gain an equal or equal education in cities. While governments have attempted to increase or include educational facilities both in rural and urban areas, implementing reform still needs to be more conducive to more equitable and effective.

Studies also show that students hope for the equality of quality education between urban and rural areas. Infrastructure improvements, transportation access, Internet networks, educational facilities,

and integrating of educators are important steps toward reducing the education gap. Therefore, it is necessary for greater attention and cooperation from the government and related parties so that all students in the Muara Enim district can obtain a fair and quality education without being influenced by the geographic location of their region.

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