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Allocation of Education Funds and Educational Inequality in the Least Developed, Frontier, and Outermost Regions of East Nusa Tenggara

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effect of education funding allocation on educational inequality, with poverty rates and gender gap as control variables, in the least developed, frontier, and outermost regions of East Nusa Tenggara during the 2018-2024 period. The research data are secondary, sourced from the Central Statistics Agency and the Regional Education Balance Sheet, and are in panel form. This study uses panel-data regression analysis with a fixed-effects approach and quantile regression. The results show that although the allocation of education funding reduces educational inequality, it has no effect on the moderate inequality group. Meanwhile, poverty rates have a positive effect on educational inequality in both moderate and extreme groups. The gender gap has no effect on educational inequality, but in the moderate education inequality group, it has a positive effect on educational inequality in the least developed, frontier, and outermost regions of East Nusa Tenggara.

Keywords: Educational Inequality, Education Funding, Poverty, Gender Gap, Allocation.

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental aspect of human development because it enhances quality of life by improving skills and knowledge and expanding future opportunities. The quality of education and educational equality are important indicators of sustainable development [1]. Education plays a crucial role in increasing individual productivity and economic opportunities. However, educational equity remains a challenge in Indonesia. Educational inequality is a critical issue in human development because unequal access to education can widen the quality gap in human resources within a region. Educational inequality arises from the unequal distribution of educational attainment, resulting in unequal accumulation of human capital. In turn, it widens the gap between groups.

Educational inequality has broad implications for social welfare and human development. Research [2] found that educational inequality negatively impacts a society's well-being. This means that unequal distribution of education can reduce the overall quality of life. This finding confirms that education is not only important on average but also in its distribution. Furthermore, educational inequality is also closely related to the quality of human resources. Inequality in access to education is a serious obstacle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals [3].

Educational inequality contributes to low-quality human capital and reduces economic productivity [4]. Furthermore, [5] found, in their study of ASEAN countries, that expanding education without equitable distribution can increase inequality, ultimately leading to broader social inequality. Access to education enables individuals to acquire the knowledge and skills to participate in social and economic activity. Inequality in access to quality education leads to low productivity for some populations, making it difficult to escape the cycle of poverty. Educational inequality creates a skills gap in the labor market [6]. Individuals with access to higher education earn higher incomes, while those with less access to education receive lower wages. This widens the income gap. Furthermore, children from low-income families often have lower human capital due to limited access to facilities, which tends to keep them in lower socioeconomic strata [7].

Besides, educational inequality also contributes to skills and digital inequalities [8]. Differences in technological mastery widen the income gap between skilled and unskilled workers. If this problem is not resolved, it will erode trust, potentially resulting in social problems [9]. Educational inequality will result in an unequal distribution of human capital, ultimately hindering efforts to improve welfare. Next, educational inequality is closely linked to the allocation of funds in the education sector. Increasing education spending will expand access to education, improve the quality of educational services, and reduce disparities between community groups [5]. Education spending needs to be directed toward developing educational infrastructure and toward the equitable distribution of teaching staff in underdeveloped areas to reduce disparities between regions. Top-down policies, lacking flexibility in resource allocation and appropriate implementation strategies, have perpetuated inequality [10]. It means that the role of the education budget lies not only in the amount allocated, but also in how it is distributed.

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Research results [11] [12] indicate that allocating education funding helps reduce educational inequality. Conversely, a large education budget allocation (for example, 20% of the national budget) does not necessarily reduce educational inequality between regions, especially if the distribution is uneven or poorly targeted [13].

The distribution of education budgets has been unequal. The large populations in developed regions divert a significant share of the education budget to them, resulting in more advanced groups becoming even more advanced, while other groups are increasingly left behind. While the nominal allocation for education has increased, it has not been evenly distributed to disadvantaged areas [14]. Educational facilities tend to be used primarily by groups in urban areas or by those with middle- to upper-level socioeconomic status.

To reduce educational inequality, disadvantaged regions need adequate, well-allocated funding to improve learning quality, encourage participation among vulnerable groups, and reduce dropout rates. Research [15] shows that programs such as school operational assistance, scholarships, and education subsidies help lower education costs for poor households, thereby increasing school participation and reducing dropout rates. Other factors contributing to the education gap are poverty and the gender gap. Poverty reflects not only limited income but also limited access to basic services, including education. Poor households face challenges with education and transportation costs, as well as limited facilities, making their children vulnerable to dropping out of school or having difficulty accessing higher levels of education. Limited incomes in low-income families force children to work to support their families' economies, making education a secondary priority. The high opportunity cost of education for low-income families leads to higher dropout and lower participation rates [5]. As a result, children from low-income families tend to have lower school participation rates and shorter school years than children from wealthy families [7] [16]. This condition leads to an unequal distribution of educational attainment [17].

Poverty also results in educational polarization through differences in the quality of accessible education. High-income groups have access to higher-quality educational institutions, while poor groups tend to have limited access to educational facilities. This difference not only affects educational outcomes but also widens the long-term gap between groups. Meanwhile, the gender gap is a determinant of educational inequality. Social structures tend to be biased against boys and relegate women to the role of housewife, thus limiting access to education [18]. The assumption that women's primary role is as housewives makes further education less crucial than for men. Limited family incomes lead to men being prioritized for schooling, as they are considered the future breadwinners. Social expectations that prioritize women's domestic roles are a barrier [19], making it difficult for women to access education and making them vulnerable to dropping out of school [20]. This results in low school enrollment, literacy, and economic opportunities for women. Educational inequality limits women's ability to participate in the labor market and narrows their role in decision-making. Reducing the gender gap is crucial to addressing educational inequality.

Several studies have shown that the gender gap contributes to educational inequality. Research [21] shows that the gender gap has a significant and positive effect on educational inequality. Similarly, studies [22] [23] also show that the gender gap has a positive effect on educational inequality. Furthermore, East Nusa Tenggara is one of the provinces experiencing educational inequality. The distribution of educational access and attainment in this province is unequal, particularly in the least developed, frontier, and outermost regions. Of the 21 regions and one city in East Nusa Tenggara, 13 fall into the least developed, frontier, and outermost categories. It hinders the achievement of the East Nusa Tenggara Provincial Government's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) program, particularly in the education sector. This study examines the effect of education funding allocation on educational inequality in the least developed, frontier, and outermost regions in East Nusa Tenggara, with poverty and gender gap as control variables. These areas are generally remote, with limited infrastructure, economic challenges, and limited accessibility.

2. Research Method

This study uses a quantitative, panel-data approach covering the period 2018–2024 and 13 regions categorized as the least developed, frontier, and outermost regions in East Nusa Tenggara. Research variables include educational inequality, gender gap, poverty rates, and education funding allocation. Data for this study were obtained from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) and the Regional Education Balance Sheet (NPD). Educational inequality refers to unequal access to, quality of, and educational facilities between social groups. Educational inequality is measured using the Education Gini Coefficient (GNI), calculated manually in Microsoft Excel from data on the percentage of the population aged 15 years and over by highest level of educational attainment and average years of schooling. The calculation formula is as follows:

$$G = \left(\frac{1}{\mu}\right) \sum_{i=2}^{n} \sum_{j=1}^{i-1} p\,|y_i - y_j| p_j$$

Description G = Education Gini Index, μ = average years of schooling of the population, n = number of observations, pi and pj = proportions of the population, yi and yj = years of schooling with educational attainment levels i and j (j = i - 1). The education fund allocation is the total government budget allocation for education programs (in trillions of rupiah). The poverty rate is the proportion of the population whose average monthly per capita expenditure is below the poverty line (in percent). The gender gap is the gap in access, opportunity, and fair treatment between men and

women in education. The gender gap is measured by the ratio of female illiteracy to male illiteracy

Next, the data were analyzed using quantile panel data regression to examine the effects of education fund allocation, poverty rate, and the gender gap on educational inequality in regions with moderate and extreme levels of inequality. Technically, quantile panel data regression analysis is performed at a tau (τ) value of 0.25, representing regions with moderate levels of educational inequality, and a tau (τ) value of 0.75, representing regions with extreme levels of educational inequality. Quantile panel data regression is a non-parametric regression model [24], so it does not require the tests that parametric regression models do. The regression model is expressed in the following equation.

$$EI_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AEF_{it} + \beta_2 POV_{it} + \beta_3 GG_{it} + e_{it}$$

Respectively, the EI represents educational inequality, the AEF represents the allocation of education funds. The POV represents the poverty rates, and the GG represents the gender gap.

3. Result and Discussion

This section describes the variables used in this study. A descriptive study was conducted using numerical methods to summarize the data. Based on the descriptive study, the possibility of correlation between variables can be identified. The following is a statistical description of the variables in this study on Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	EI	AEF	POV	GG
Mean	0,437	1,528	25,123	0,199
Max	0,570	5,630	34,850	0,539
Min	0,344	0,640	13,860	0,063
Std. Dev	0,049	0,811	5,262	0,098
Obs.	91	91	91	91

According to Table 1, an education gap of 0.570 was observed in Central Sumba in 2018. The high poverty rate in Central Sumba drives this condition. In poor families, low incomes push children into the labor market to support their families' economies. For them, education becomes a secondary priority. It causes a decline in educational participation rates, thus increasing educational inequality. The lowest education gap, at 0.344, occurred in East Manggarai in 2024. It is related to the decline in the poverty rate in that region. Rising family incomes drive down poverty, enabling more residents to access education. The increase in educational participation rates thereby reduces educational inequality.

Meanwhile, the highest education budget, at 0.539, was in South Central Timor in 2024. The region's largest population and relatively large area contribute to its large Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD). The APBD percentage requirement for allocating to the education sector encourages high funding for this sector. In contrast, the lowest education budget, at 0.063 percent, was in Sabu Raijua Regency in 2018. The small area and small population are suspected to contribute to the low allocation of education funds in Sabu Raijua Regency.

The highest poverty rate, at 34.85 percent, occurred in Central Sumba in 2018. Dependence on the agricultural sector, limited infrastructure, and high prices of necessities are suspected to be the causes of high poverty in this region. Underdeveloped agricultural cultivation, limited land, and limited infrastructure contribute to low productivity, ultimately contributing to the high poverty rate. Conversely, the lowest poverty rate was recorded in Belu in 2024 at 13.86 percent. Economic development, including improvements in infrastructure and agricultural cultivation, has increased productivity and reduced poverty.

The highest gender gap occurred in Lembata Regency in 2018, with a score of 5.63 points. This regency is located on Lembata Island and lacks land transportation infrastructure to other surrounding regencies. This situation complicates population mobility and limits access to various facilities, including education, especially for women. This situation is exacerbated by high poverty rates, leading some families to allocate their funds to sons, who will ultimately become the household breadwinners. It leaves women vulnerable to dropping out of school or having difficulty continuing their education to a higher level. Women's educational participation lags further behind men's. Conversely, the smallest gender gap, at 0.64 points, was recorded in East Manggarai Regency in 2024. It is related to the decline in poverty rates in the region. Reducing poverty enables people to access educational facilities, thereby increasing women's educational participation. Next, the first step in estimating panel data regression is the Chow test to determine whether the intercepts between individuals are the same (Common Effects Model) or different (Fixed Effects Model). The Chow test results indicate a cross-section F-statistic < 0.05, indicating that the Fixed Effects model is superior on Table 2.

Table 2. Result of Chow Test

Effects Test	Statistic	Prob	Selected Model
Cross-section F	76,270	0,000	Fixed Effects

Because intercepts differ across individuals, a Hausman test is necessary to determine whether the fixed-effects or random-effects model is superior. The Hausman test results show a Random Cross-Sectional Probability value of <0.05, indicating that the fixed-effects model is superior on Table 3.

Table 3. Hausman test's result

Summary	Chi-Sq Statistic	Prob.	Selected Model
Cross-section random	24,723	0,000	Fixed Effects

Furthermore, the Fixed Effects estimation results indicate that poverty rates and education funding allocation influence educational inequality, but the gender gap does not. The significant F-value indicates that the variables gender gap, poverty rates, and education funding allocation collectively influence educational inequality on Table 4. The coefficient of

determination of 0.718 indicates that variations in gender gap, poverty rates, and education funding allocation explain 71.8 percent of the variation in educational inequality, while the remaining 29.2 percent is explained by the residuals.

Table 4. Estimated Results

Variable	Coeffi.	t-Stat.	Conclusion
AEF	-0,061	-2,378	Significant
POV	0,014	7,387	Significant
GG	0,003	1,506	Insignificant
Constant	0,776	1,440	Insignificant

Furthermore, to determine the effect of gender gap on regional groups with moderate and extreme educational inequality, the data were divided into four equal parts (quartiles), and quantile regression was used. The estimation results show that in regions with moderate educational inequality (lower quartile), gender gap and poverty rates influence educational inequality, while education fund allocation does not. Meanwhile, in regions with extreme educational inequality (upper quartile), gender gap does not influence educational inequality, while poverty rates and education funding allocation do on Table 5.

Table 5. The Quantile Regression Result

Variable	Lower Quantile (p=0,25)	Upper Quantile (p=0,75)
	Coefficient	Coefficient
AEF	-0,053 (0,093)	-0,068* (0,032)
POV	0,014* (0,000)	0,015* (0,000)
GG	0,005* (0,015)	0,002 (0,437)

In parentheses is the prob value, significant at α= 5%. The Effect of Education Fund Allocation on Educational Inequality. Based on the t-test results from the Fixed Effects Model (FEM) estimation, education fund allocation had a negative effect on educational inequality. The regression coefficient of -0.061 indicates that a one-trillion-rupiah increase in education fund allocation is associated with a 0.061-point decrease in educational inequality, assuming all other variables remain constant. Increased education spending will expand access to education, ensuring that all community groups can use educational infrastructure. Furthermore, increased government spending on education also improves the quality of educational services, thus improving access to better services.

Increased education funding also enables improvements in educational infrastructure in underdeveloped areas, thereby reducing the gap between developed and least developed areas. Equitable distribution of teaching staff can reduce disparities in educational performance across regions. It means that the allocation of the education budget depends not only on the amount allocated but also on its geographic distribution. Increasing the education budget provides greater opportunities for the community to access education, thereby reducing educational inequality. The results of this study support those of [12] [25], which show that the allocation of education funding has a negative effect on educational inequality. It suggests that increasing education funding can help reduce educational inequality because local governments have greater capacity to expand access to education and improve the equity of educational services for all.

Furthermore, the quantile regression results indicate that the effect of education funding allocation on educational inequality differs between regions with moderate educational inequality (the lower quartile) and those with extreme educational inequality (the upper quartile). In the group of regions with moderate educational inequality (the lower quartile), education funding allocation does not affect educational inequality. It means that a decrease in educational inequality does not accompany the increase in education funding allocation. Regencies with moderate levels of educational inequality (the lower quartile) include Lembata, Central Sumba, Southwest Sumba, East Manggarai, Sabu Raijua, and Malaka. The allocation of education funds in these regions exceeds the average allocation in the least developed, frontier, and outermost regions of East Nusa Tenggara. The continuing educational inequality in these regions is suspected not to be due to a lack of educational funding, but rather to unequal distribution.

Conversely, in regions with extreme educational inequality (the upper quartile), increasing educational funding reduces it. The regencies included in the upper quartile are East Sumba, West Sumba, South Central Timor, Belu, Alor, and Rote Ndao. The allocation of education funds in these regions is lower than the average for the least developed, frontier, and outermost regions of East Nusa Tenggara. It is suspected to be the cause of the high educational inequality in these regions. Therefore, the ongoing educational inequality in these regions is due to inadequate educational funding. In the upper quartile, a decrease in educational inequality will follow an increase in educational funding.

The Effect of Poverty on Educational Inequality. Estimation results based on the Fixed Effects model indicate that poverty had a positive effect on educational inequality during the research period. The regression coefficient of 0.014 indicates that a 1 percent increase in poverty leads to a 0.014 point increase in educational inequality. This result aligns with Human Capital theory, which states that education is an investment strongly influenced by economic capacity, so low-income households tend to prioritize basic needs over education. This condition leads to low educational participation, such as dropping out of school or not continuing education to a higher level.

High poverty rates also limit access to educational services and create a social environment that is less supportive of educational continuity. It reinforces the findings of [16] [7], which show that poor groups have lower levels of education than more prosperous groups. Thus, the higher the poverty rates in a region, the greater the inequality in educational attainment. Poverty indicates a lack of resources, including financial resources, so households prioritize spending on basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. For

low-income families, education is a secondary priority. Children from low-income families struggle to access educational infrastructure and are vulnerable to dropping out of school. It leads to unequal access to educational facilities between social groups. It means educational inequality increases.

Furthermore, the results of the quantile regression show that the poverty rate does not differ in its influence across regions with moderate and extreme educational disparities. In both the lower and upper quartiles, poverty rates have a positive effect on educational inequality. It means that poverty rates cause educational inequality. The Effect of the Gender Gap on Educational Inequality. Based on the t-test results from the Fixed Effects Model (FEM) estimation, the gender gap did not affect educational inequality. It indicates that differences in illiteracy rates between women and men do not affect the level of educational inequality. The gender literacy gap is not a major factor influencing educational inequality. It indicates that the basic educational opportunities for men and women are nearly equal. Both men and women have taken advantage of educational opportunities. With increasing educational opportunities for women, the literacy gap between men and women has narrowed, no longer contributing to educational inequality. Therefore, the gender gap is not a dominant factor influencing educational inequality. This study's findings contradict those of [22] [23], which showed that the gender gap has a positive effect on educational inequality.

Furthermore, for regions with moderate educational inequality (the lower quartile), the gender gap has a positive effect on educational inequality. It means that a wider gender gap leads to higher educational inequality. This condition occurs in regions such as Lembata, Central Sumba, East Manggarai, Sabu Raijua, and SouthC entral Timor. The social structure in these regions is suspected of prioritizing sons and relegating women to housewives, so women's access to educational infrastructure is limited. This result supports findings [18] [19] that social structures tend to be biased against boys, making it difficult for girls to access education and making them more vulnerable to dropping out. In contrast, in regions with extreme educational disparities (the upper quartile), gender disparities do not affect educational disparities. This is likely because the social structure in some regions, such as Kupang, Belu, Alor, and Rote Ndao, allows both men and women to access educational infrastructure. Therefore, the educational disparity in these regions is not caused by gender disparities but by other factors, such as limited educational funding.

4. Conclusion

The results show that the allocation of education funding negatively impacts educational inequality in the least developed, frontier, and outermost regions of East Nusa Tenggara. However, in the lower quartile with moderate educational inequality, education funding allocation had no effect. It means that educational inequality in these groups is not caused by the amount of education funding, but is likely due to an suboptimal distribution. Meanwhile, poverty positively impacts educational inequality in both the lower and upper quartiles. Furthermore, gender gap does not affect educational inequality, but in the lower quartile, it has a positive effect in the least developed, frontier, and outermost regions of East Nusa Tenggara. A wider gender gap leads to higher educational inequality. For the upper quartile, increased education funding is necessary to reduce educational inequality. Meanwhile, for the lower quartile, it's essential to optimize the distribution of education funding while emphasizing the importance of women's education.

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