



When the Dignity of Teachers is Underestimated and the Allowance of the House of Representatives is Perpetuated, An Analysis of Inequality in Education Management

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ABSTRACT

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The paradox of education in Indonesia is clearly seen through the inequality between the budget for the political elite and the condition of vocational schools at the grassroots level. SMK Nurul Qarnain, a Visual Communication Design major established in 2023 with around 180 students, faces limited facilities, including the absence of a computer laboratory. The policy allows students to bring personal laptops as an adaptive solution that reflects the creativity of pesantren-based education management. Meanwhile, the large salaries and allowances of members of the House of Representatives and the discourse on teacher salaries cause fiscal injustice and weaken the legitimacy of public policy. The qualitative analysis of the case study shows that the limitations of facilities encourage managerial innovation, but still affirm the urgency of redistributing the education budget so that vocational schools receive proportionate support. These findings strengthen academic discussions on the relationship between fiscal justice, policy legitimacy, and the sustainability of vocational education in Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

Vocational education in Indonesia continues to be in the public spotlight due to the glaring budget disparity between allocations for political elites and the most basic needs of educational institutions. For example, the budget for teachers and professional allowances reaches trillions of rupiah, but the controversy over the discourse of "teachers is a burden on the state" has created a widespread misunderstanding in society about the value of teachers' work (Amikom Blog, 2025). Meanwhile, champions of the public budget, such as members of the House of Representatives, continue to receive housing allowances and large incomes that are rarely accompanied by performance accountability. This inequality has raised questions about the legitimacy of the fiscal allocation of education.

This level of injustice is further exacerbated by the reality of the field at pesantren-based vocational schools such as SMK Nurul Qarnain, which was established in 2023. The school does not yet have graduates and operates with about 180 students in the Visual Communication Design major. This condition is a clear picture of how basic education institutions are still facing serious resource limitations. Students of SMK Nurul Qarnain are even allowed to bring personal laptops to school, because there is no adequate computer laboratory.

On the other hand, the government has set a policy of allocating at least 20% of the State Budget and Regional Budget for education in accordance with the constitutional mandate (DPR RI, 2023). However, the realization and distribution of the budget often does not reflect this provision fairly. The education budget center is usually sucked up for teachers and supporting infrastructure, but efforts to evenly distribute vocational schools in the region are still far from ideal. The gap between formal policy and implementation at the grassroots illustrates the dynamics of tension in national education management.

This financial paradox creates pressure on the effectiveness of education management, especially in institutions such as pesantren. Despite having strong character values, modern Islamic boarding schools such as SMK Nurul Qarnain still need adequate support of facilities to produce quality graduates. The book "Education Management of Schools, Madrasas, and Islamic Boarding Schools" emphasizes that the success of education is highly dependent on the ability to manage resources with realistic strategies (Widodo & Nurhayati, 2020). Without fair allocation and equitable distribution of facilities, the goal of vocational education is difficult to achieve.

Therefore, this study raises the case study of SMK Nurul Qarnain as a concrete illustration of the inconsistency of education budget policies and the operational reality of pesantren-based vocational schools. This focus is relevant because the SMK reflects the meeting point between limited facilities, the need for student character development, and systemic pressure on education management in the midst of fiscal paradoxes. Thus, this research has a high urgency to bridge the gap between theoretical policy and real practice in the field.

This study aims to critically examine how education management at SMK Nurul Qarnain is organized in conditions of limitations, as well as how the adaptation strategies used can be a model for similar schools. The emphasis on the dimensions of fiscal justice and managerial effectiveness is expected to enrich the discourse on vocational education management in Indonesia. Finally, the results of this study lead to concrete policy recommendations that are in favor of equal distribution of education.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it provides space to explore the phenomenon of education management in depth on one specific research object, namely SMK Nurul Qarnain majoring in Visual Communication Design which was just

established in 2023. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative case studies allow researchers to understand social, cultural, and managerial dynamics in the educational environment in more detail. In Indonesian education research, this approach is increasingly relevant to be used to uncover management practices in pesantren-based schools (Hasanah, 2021).

The location of the research was determined at SMK Nurul Qarnain which is under the auspices of the Nurul Qarnain Islamic Boarding School. This school was chosen because it represents the real condition of a pesantren-based vocational school that faces limited facilities, such as the absence of a computer laboratory, so that students are allowed to use personal laptops. According to Moleong (2019), the selection of the right location in qualitative research determines the depth of data that can be collected. Thus, SMK Nurul Qarnain is seen as a relevant location to answer the problem of the gap between education budget policies and school reality.

Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were carried out to understand the condition of infrastructure facilities and learning patterns in the classroom. Interviews were conducted with teachers, principals, and pesantren managers to obtain data on school management strategies in dealing with limitations. Documentation in the form of internal school archives is used to complete information about the development of the school since its establishment. This combination of techniques is in line with the principle of data triangulation in qualitative research (Sugiyono, 2020).

In addition to primary data, this study also uses secondary data in the form of public policies related to education budget allocation, DPR allowances, and the Minister of Finance's statement regarding teacher salaries. Secondary data was obtained from official government documents, DPR reports, and scientific publications related to education management. According to Yin (2018), the use of secondary data in case studies helps to strengthen the analysis because it allows triangulation between data sources. This is important to improve the validity of the research findings.

Data analysis was carried out using a critical descriptive approach with reference to the theory of education management and fiscal justice. The data obtained is analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019), critical descriptive analysis in qualitative research aims to describe phenomena as well as criticize the structural factors that influence them. Thus, this study not only describes the reality at SMK Nurul Qarnain, but also relates it to the gap in education budget policies in Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The following comparison shows a significant gap between the average income of teachers at SMK Nurul Qarnain and the income of a member of the

House of Representatives consisting of monthly salary and allowances. To maintain privacy, the nominal number of teachers is not displayed in detail, while the number of public officials is clearly shown because it is sourced from official data that can be accessed by the public.

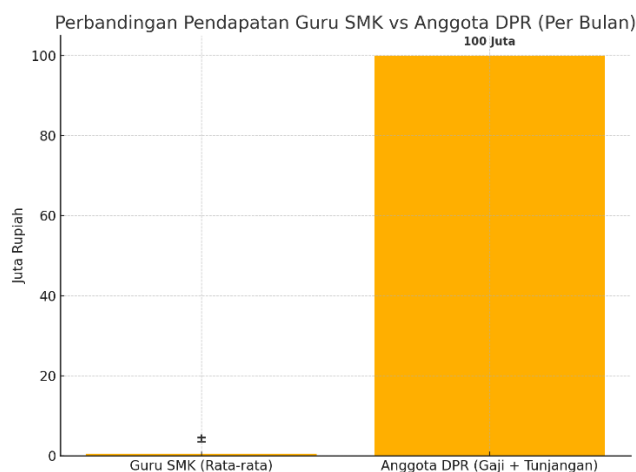


Figure 1 : Comparison of teachers' salaries with DPR allowances

This graph emphasizes the welfare gap between educators who spearhead education and political elites who receive large salaries and allowances every month. This kind of gap raises serious questions about fiscal justice and the state's commitment to placing education as a top priority for national development.

The Paradox of Education Budget Policy

In the contemporary era, a sharp irony has pervaded Indonesian education: although the budget for legislative institutions, such as salaries and allowances for members of the House of Representatives, reaches fantastic figures, many vocational schools, including Islamic boarding schools, are still grappling with limited facilities. This unequal budget reallocation has raised public dissatisfaction with the legitimacy of education policy. One study states that the higher education budget in Indonesia only reaches 0.6% of the state budget, even though the number of beneficiaries is very large (Hetifah, 2023). This kind of inequality illustrates how national budget priorities are dragged down by the interests of the political elite, while the urgent need in vocational education remains ignored.

The House of Representatives has been criticized for disproportionate allocation of education funds. In a working meeting with the government, a member of the House of Representatives highlighted that official education absorbed around Rp104.5 trillion—even though it was only enjoyed by 13,000 people—while other formal education, including primary to secondary, received Rp91.2 trillion for 62 million students (Mekeng, 2025). This inequality triggers a discourse about the fairness of budget distribution which should be more in favor of mass education than a few. This condition underscores the paradox of fiscal allocation that is biased towards the elite.

According to government data, the realization of the education budget has

only reached around 15-20% of the total state budget, not meeting the minimum target required by the constitution (Commission XI of the House of Representatives, 2025). Increasing targets for the coming years has indeed been planned, but the pace of implementation is still slow (Ministry of Finance, 2025). This indicates that although the discourse on fulfilling the mandate of the constitution has been echoed, the reality on the ground is not enough. This situation dampened hopes for more equitable and quality access to education for all the nation's children.

Budget inequality places a heavy burden not only on the provision of facilities and training, but also on the welfare of teachers and the motivation of educators. Studies on vocational education show that the lack of support for facilities affects the effectiveness of learning and the quality of graduates (Maulana, 2023). When teachers and educational institutions have to survive with a lack of budget allocation, their ability to provide quality education is limited. This conclusion highlights the complexity of the education budget paradox that occurs nationally.

More than just a single case, this inequality is a real reflection of the crisis of public policy legitimacy in the education sector. The study of budget politics calls for a "rational, firm and constitutional" policy so that education funding is in line with its mandate (Genesis et al., 2024). When the budget for vocational and basic education is disproportionate, it is difficult to achieve the goal of equitable human resource development. This is what creates pressure on the national education management system to correct such inequality.

The reaction of the public and academics to this condition is increasingly critical. The public demands that education, which according to the 1945 Constitution is the responsibility of the state, get a greater budget priority than certain groups. This criticism is reinforced by data, where the low allocation of higher education raises concerns about the future of research and innovation in Indonesia (ITB, 2023). Similar responses also emerged from various commissions in the House of Representatives that had criticized the dominance of the education budget in limited sectors. This discourse marked a shift in public perception towards the importance of fairer budget redistribution.

By looking at the series of facts above, it can be concluded that there is a paradox in the management of the education budget in Indonesia between the political elite and the basic needs of vocational schools. This gap not only creates structural injustice, but also delegitimizes the role of the state as an education provider. Therefore, a more equitable fiscal allocation system is needed so that vocational and basic education can develop, teachers are motivated, and the quality of graduates increases. Reform of education fiscal policy is very crucial for a competitive Indonesia in the future.

Adaptation strategy of SMK Nurul Qarnain

SMK Nurul Qarnain as a pesantren-based vocational school faces serious challenges in the management of educational facilities and infrastructure. The

limited computer laboratory facilities forced the school to take adaptive steps by allowing students to bring personal laptops to support the learning process. This strategy is in line with the finding that school management flexibility can increase learning effectiveness amid a lack of infrastructure support (Fauzi, 2022). However, this policy also raises new challenges related to the gap in technology access between students who can afford it and those who are less fortunate.

School leadership plays an important role in formulating this kind of adaptation policy. According to Suryadi (2021), visionary school principals are able to make optimal use of limited resources with a collaborative approach, involving teachers, parents, and the pesantren community. At SMK Nurul Qarnain, the involvement of pesantren as the parent institution strengthens the social support network, although it cannot cover all the shortcomings of facilities.

The limitation of technological facilities can affect the quality of graduates and their readiness to face the creative industry. Research by Rahmawati (2020) shows that the adequacy of practical facilities has a direct effect on the competence of vocational students, especially in the field of visual communication design. Therefore, the initiative to bring personal laptops is a form of management innovation, although it is not yet a long-term solution.

Teachers at SMK Nurul Qarnain are also required to adapt to learning methods that utilize students' personal devices. A study by Hidayat and Prasetyo (2021) found that teachers' competence in integrating technology is the key to the success of this kind of learning model. However, the lack of intensive training makes some teachers still face difficulties in optimizing the potential of students' digital devices.

This school's adaptation strategy is aligned with participation-based management practices. According to Wulandari (2023), the involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making process helps Islamic boarding schools find innovative solutions in the midst of limitations. At SMK Nurul Qarnain, cooperation between teachers, parents, and pesantren administrators allows learning to continue even though the infrastructure is inadequate.

Nonetheless, the policy of carrying personal laptops has the potential to widen the digital divide among students. Yuliani's research (2022) shows that unequal access to devices can create inequality in the quality of learning. Schools need to think about alternative financing or device subsidy programs to maintain equal learning opportunities.

The adaptive steps taken by SMK Nurul Qarnain reflect the importance of education management innovation in the context of pesantren-based vocational schools. A study by Santoso (2021) emphasizes that the success of vocational education is greatly influenced by the school's managerial ability to overcome limited resources. Thus, this adaptation strategy is not just a temporary response, but a form of resilience of educational institutions in the face of structural challenges.

Implications of Budget Policy Gap on Education Management

The gap in education budget policy in Indonesia has had a significant impact on education governance, especially in pesantren-based vocational schools. While most of the state budget is absorbed to finance public officials' allowances, many schools like SMK Nurul Qarnain face limited facilities, human resources, and technology. Recent studies confirm that the uneven distribution of the budget hinders the equitable distribution of the quality of education in various regions (Fadhilah, 2022). This forces educational institutions to adopt a survival strategy rather than developing.

Teachers' welfare is one of the aspects most affected by this inequality. Teachers in vocational and pesantren-based schools often face challenges in the form of low incentives and lack of learning support facilities. Research shows that low teacher welfare has an impact on decreasing teaching motivation and learning effectiveness (Hidayati, 2021). If this condition continues, the goal of producing quality human resources will be difficult to achieve.

The budget gap also narrows the space for innovation in the implementation of education. Islamic boarding school-based vocational schools, which ideally require advanced technology to support practical learning, are forced to look for alternative solutions such as policies on the use of students' personal devices. This is in accordance with the findings of Pratama (2020) which emphasizes that the limitations of technological facilities encourage schools to adopt adaptive management patterns, even though these strategies have long-term limitations.

Furthermore, budget inequality has an impact on the legitimacy of public policy. The public questioned the state's consistency in carrying out the mandate of the 1945 Constitution to prioritize education. In recent research, the mismatch between budget allocation and educational needs has been proven to reduce public trust in the government (Syafrizal, 2023). This condition threatens the stability of national education policy and triggers criticism from various elements of civil society.

From the perspective of education management, another implication is the increasing burden on school principals in managing limited resources without sacrificing the quality of learning. Research by Setyawan (2022) found that principals in pesantren-based education environments need to develop leadership innovations and establish external partnerships in order to survive in the midst of a budget crisis. Without this kind of innovation, the quality gap between schools will widen.

In addition, low budget support for vocational education reduces the readiness of graduates to enter the world of work. A study by Kurniawan (2021) shows that the lack of practical facilities hinders the formation of students' technical competencies, especially in the field of visual communication design. This makes graduates less competitive in the labor market, even though the creative industry sector demands high technology-based skills.

Finally, this condition emphasizes the importance of fiscal policy reform of education that is more in favor of vocational schools and Islamic boarding

schools. The government needs to rearrange budget allocation priorities to ensure equitable and quality access to education. This effort must also be accompanied by transparency and accountability in budget planning so that the public regains trust. Without concrete steps, education management will continue to run in inequality and legitimacy crises.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms the existence of a paradox in education management in Indonesia, namely the gap between large budget allocations for public officials and the real limitations experienced by pesantren-based vocational schools. A case study at SMK Nurul Qarnain shows that limited facilities, especially the absence of computer laboratories, force schools to develop adaptive strategies by allowing students to use personal devices. This phenomenon shows the resilience of education management at the grassroots level, but at the same time highlights the fiscal injustice that undermines the legitimacy of education policy.

The implications of these findings underscore the need for a more equitable budget allocation redesign, especially to strengthen vocational education as the basis for the development of work-ready human resources. The scientific contribution of this article lies in the understanding that resource limitations are not only an obstacle, but also encourage managerial innovation that deserves attention in educational management theory. Practically, this study provides recommendations for public policy to be more in favor of the needs of pesantren-based vocational schools, by paying attention to the welfare of teachers and the provision of adequate learning facilities.

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