



Education Quality Gap Between Types of Education Services: *Education Report Data Analysis 2025*

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine disparities in educational quality across different types of educational services, including public schools, madrasas, religious education, equivalency education, and special schools, using comparable indicators across educational levels. The study employed a qualitative descriptive-comparative approach based on secondary data from the 2025 Indonesian Education Report. Data were analyzed across fifteen educational service types at elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary/vocational levels using four core indicators: literacy, numeracy, student character, and learning quality. The analysis involved data condensation, comparative data display, identification of achievement patterns, and verification of recurring disparities across service types and educational levels. The findings reveal persistent disparities in literacy and numeracy, particularly among equivalency education services, which frequently fall into the lower achievement categories. Several madrasas also demonstrate lower achievement, whereas religious education services show substantial variation across educational levels. Student character achievement is comparatively more homogeneous, while learning quality shows a predominantly declining trend across several service types. The findings demonstrate that educational inequality is multidimensional and cannot be adequately explained by a public–non-public dichotomy. Education quality policies should therefore adopt differentiated interventions based on educational pathways, service types, and specific quality indicators.

INTRODUCTION

Educational equity is a fundamental concern because the quality of education learners receive influences their opportunities for personal development, social participation, and future economic prospects. Equal access alone does not guarantee equitable educational outcomes when learners receive substantially different levels of instructional quality and institutional support. Recent studies emphasize that educational inequality involves interconnected dimensions, including access, resources, service quality, and learning outcomes (Jaylaiza & Galigao, 2025; Nursaptini & Tohani, 2026; Sims et al., 2025). Evidence from different educational contexts also demonstrates that disparities may persist among groups with different institutional and socioeconomic conditions (Rana, 2024; Wu, 2024; Afrina et al., 2023). Therefore, identifying where educational quality gaps occur is essential to ensure that educational policies not only expand participation but also provide comparable opportunities for meaningful learning.

This issue makes systematic examination of educational disparities important for both policymakers and society.

Indonesia faces a complex educational equity problem because its education system consists of multiple pathways and institutional types with different administrative structures. Public schools, madrasahs, religious education institutions, equivalency programs, and special schools serve diverse learners, yet their capacity to provide quality education may differ substantially. Research indicates that differences in educational services can be associated with institutional governance, resource allocation, and policy implementation (Kusnanto et al., 2023; Randolph et al., 2023). Such differences become particularly important when educational pathways are expected to provide comparable opportunities for learners. Educational inequality may consequently emerge not only between regions but also between institutional types operating within the same education system. Addressing this problem requires evidence that identifies which educational services experience persistent disadvantages and which dimensions of educational quality are most affected. Without such evidence, equity-oriented policies risk applying uniform solutions to fundamentally different educational conditions.

The problem is visible in the diverse performance of educational services across Indonesia. Recent evidence shows persistent challenges in equivalency education, particularly in implementing programs designed to provide alternative learning opportunities for populations outside conventional schooling (Abas et al., 2026; Fitriani et al., 2025; Putri et al., 2026). At the same time, differences among religious and non-religious educational institutions demonstrate that institutional affiliation does not necessarily produce uniform educational outcomes. Studies of school selection and religious education also indicate that parents and communities consider educational characteristics beyond institutional labels when evaluating schools (Haryati et al., 2024; Rokhman et al., 2023). These conditions suggest that educational disparities may occur within as well as between broad categories of educational services. Consequently, examining educational quality through disaggregated service types is necessary to reveal patterns that may remain hidden when education is analyzed only through conventional public–private or regional comparisons.

Previous research has substantially contributed to understanding educational inequality by examining access, educational services, school types, and policy implementation. Studies have identified disparities in educational quality and access among underrepresented groups and across different institutional contexts (Abdul et al., 2024; Rana, 2024; Amir et al., 2025). Research on school type has similarly demonstrated that educational environments may produce different academic and non-academic outcomes (Danish et al., 2024; Warmayana, 2025; Fontdevila & Vanderhoven, 2025). However, much of this literature examines particular populations, school categories, or individual dimensions of educational quality. Comparatively less attention has been given to simultaneously examining multiple educational service pathways using common indicators within a single regional education system. This limitation is important because broad categories such as public, religious, or non-formal education may conceal substantial variation among specific service types. A more disaggregated comparison is therefore needed to provide a clearer understanding of educational inequality.

Recent research also indicates that non-formal and equivalency education should be considered an integral component of educational equity rather than merely an alternative mechanism for addressing school exclusion. Community learning and

equivalency programs can expand educational opportunities and support learners who are unable to follow conventional pathways (Hayat et al., 2026; Abas et al., 2026; Ortíz-Martínez et al., 2023). Meanwhile, research on educational disparities emphasizes the importance of examining both educational access and the quality of learning services provided (Jaylaiza & Galigao, 2025; Nursaptini & Tohani, 2026). Nevertheless, existing studies rarely compare equivalency education, madrasahs, religious education, public schools, and special education services simultaneously across educational levels using consistent achievement indicators. This creates a research gap in understanding whether disparities are concentrated in particular pathways, indicators, or educational levels. Addressing this gap is important for developing more precise and context-sensitive educational equity policies.

The novelty of this study lies in its disaggregated comparative framework, which examines educational quality across multiple service types rather than reducing inequality to a public–non-public or regional distinction. The study simultaneously considers literacy, numeracy, student character, and learning quality across elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary/vocational levels. By placing different educational pathways within the same analytical framework, the study identifies whether disparities are persistent across levels or concentrated within particular services and indicators. This approach provides a more nuanced picture of educational equity in South Sulawesi and allows policymakers to distinguish between generalized and pathway-specific problems. The importance of this approach lies in its potential to support differentiated interventions: policies can be directed toward the educational services and quality dimensions where the largest and most persistent gaps are observed.

This study therefore addresses the research problem of how educational quality disparities are patterned across different educational service types and levels in South Sulawesi Province. It argues that educational inequality is multidimensional and cannot be adequately understood through institutional status alone. By analyzing Education Report data across comparable indicators, the study seeks to identify recurring patterns of advantage, disadvantage, and change across educational pathways. The expected contribution is an empirical basis for designing more targeted education quality policies, particularly by distinguishing between problems related to specific service types and those affecting the broader education system. The study also provides a framework for understanding educational equity as a combination of comparable learning outcomes, service quality, and institutional conditions rather than simply equal educational access. Thus, the analysis is intended to support evidence-based policy responses that are more differentiated and responsive to the actual pattern of educational disparities.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine disparities in educational quality across different educational service types in South Sulawesi, Indonesia (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024; Villamin et al., 2024). A qualitative approach was selected because the study aims to interpret patterns and differences in educational achievement rather than statistically test causal relationships. The analysis focused on literacy, numeracy, student character, and learning quality across public schools, madrasahs, formal religious education units, equivalency education units, and special schools. This approach is appropriate because educational disparities involve multiple dimensions, including differences in access, quality, resources, and institutional

characteristics (Abdul et al., 2024; Jaylaiza & Galigao, 2025). Educational equity also requires attention to differences in educational opportunities and service quality across diverse educational pathways.

The study was conducted in South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, using the 2025 South Sulawesi Education Report as the primary documentary source. The province was selected because the report provides standardized information across various educational service pathways, enabling systematic comparison at equivalent educational levels. Document analysis was employed as the data collection technique. Data were obtained from the Education Report covering elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary/vocational education services. The analysis included public schools, madrasahs, formal religious education units, equivalency education units, and special schools. Four indicators were examined: literacy, numeracy, student character, and learning quality. Equivalency education was included because it represents an alternative pathway for learners who cannot participate in conventional schooling and contributes to educational equity.

Data were analyzed through three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data condensation, information was selected and classified according to educational level, service type, and the four indicators. Data display was conducted using comparative tables to identify achievement patterns categorized as Good, Medium, or Poor. The analysis then compared service types at equivalent educational levels and examined changes from the previous reporting period. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified by interpreting recurring patterns of educational disparities in relation to previous research on educational quality, school-type differences, and disparities between educational pathways (Kusnanto et al., 2023; Natalia et al., 2025). This process enabled the study to identify and interpret persistent differences in educational achievement across service types.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Overview of Educational Quality Indicator Achievement

The 2025 South Sulawesi Education Report presents four core educational quality indicators—literacy, numeracy, student character, and learning quality—across educational service types at the elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary/vocational levels. The data were organized according to educational level and service type to identify achievement patterns and changes from 2024. Achievement was classified into three categories: Good, Medium, and Less. The arrows (↑/↓) indicate an increase or decrease compared with 2024, while indicators without arrows indicate that comparable data from the previous year were unavailable. The results of the data display are presented in Tables 1–3.

Table 1. Achievement of Elementary Education Quality Indicators in South Sulawesi Province				
Types of Educational Services	Literacy	Numeracy	Character	Learning Quality
Public Elementary School	Medium ↑	Medium ↑	Good ↑	Good ↑
MI	Less	Less	Medium	Medium
Religious Education Elementary School	Good	Good	Good	Good
Equality Elementary School	Medium ↑	Less ↓	Medium ↓	Medium ↓
SDLB	Medium ↓	Good ↓	Good ↓	Medium ↓

Table 1 shows considerable variation among elementary educational services. Religious Education Elementary School recorded Good achievement across all four indicators. Public Elementary Schools achieved Medium literacy and numeracy and Good character and learning quality, with improvement across all indicators compared with 2024. MI recorded Less achievement in literacy and numeracy and Medium achievement in character and learning quality. Equality Elementary School showed Medium literacy with an increasing trend, but Less numeracy and Medium character and learning quality, all of which declined. SDLB recorded Medium literacy and learning quality and Good numeracy and character, although all four indicators decreased compared with 2024.

Table 2. Achievement of Junior High School Education Quality Indicators in South Sulawesi Province

Types of Educational Services	Literacy	Numeracy	Character	Learning Quality
General Junior High School	Medium ↑	Medium ↑	Good ↑	Good ↓
MTs	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Religious Education Junior High School	Less	Less	Medium	Good
Junior High School Equivalency	Less ↓	Medium ↓	Medium ↑	Medium ↓
SMPLB	Good ↑	Medium ↓	Good ↓	Medium ↓

At the junior secondary level, General Junior High Schools recorded Medium literacy and numeracy and Good character and learning quality. Literacy, numeracy, and character increased compared with 2024, while learning quality decreased. MTs showed a consistent Medium category across all four indicators, with no change compared with 2024. Religious Education Junior High School recorded Less literacy and numeracy, Medium character, and Good learning quality. Junior High School Equivalency recorded Less literacy and Medium numeracy, character, and learning quality. Literacy, numeracy, and learning quality declined, while character increased. SMPLB achieved Good literacy and character and Medium numeracy and learning quality. Literacy increased, whereas numeracy, character, and learning quality decreased compared with 2024.

Table 3. Achievement of Quality Indicators of Education at the High School/Vocational Level in South Sulawesi Province

Types of Educational Services	Literacy	Numeracy	Character	Learning Quality
Public High School	Medium ↑	Medium ↑	Good ↑	Good ↓
MA	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
High School of Religious Education	Medium	Medium	Good	Medium
Equivalence High School	Less ↓	Less ↓	Medium ↑	Medium ↓
SMALB	Medium ↑	Medium ↓	Good ↑	Good ↓
Public Vocational School	Medium ↑	Medium ↑	Good ↑	Medium ↓

At the senior secondary and vocational levels, Public High Schools recorded Medium literacy and numeracy and Good character and learning quality. Literacy, numeracy, and character increased, while learning quality decreased compared with 2024. MA recorded Medium achievement across all four indicators. High School of Religious Education achieved Medium literacy, numeracy, and learning quality and Good character. Equivalence High School recorded Less literacy and numeracy, both of which declined, while character improved to Medium and learning quality remained Medium but declined. SMALB recorded Medium literacy and numeracy and Good character and

learning quality. Literacy and character increased, while numeracy and learning quality decreased. Public Vocational Schools recorded Medium literacy and numeracy and Good character, with improvements in literacy, numeracy, and character but a decline in learning quality.

Comparative Pattern of Literacy and Numeracy

The cross-level comparison indicates that literacy and numeracy achievement vary substantially among educational service types. Public schools generally remained in the Medium category for both indicators, with improvements at the elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary levels. Religious-based services showed greater variation. Religious Education Elementary School recorded Good literacy and numeracy, whereas Religious Education Junior High School recorded Less achievement for both indicators. At the senior secondary level, High School of Religious Education recorded Medium achievement in both indicators.

The most consistent lower achievement was observed in equivalency education. Elementary School of Equality recorded Medium literacy and Less numeracy, Junior High School Equivalency recorded Less literacy and Medium numeracy, and Equivalence High School recorded **Less** achievement in both indicators. The direction of change was also predominantly downward, particularly for numeracy at the elementary level and literacy and numeracy at the junior and senior secondary levels.

Comparative Pattern of Student Character and Learning Quality

Student character demonstrated a more homogeneous pattern than literacy and numeracy. Across all educational levels and service types, no institution recorded Less achievement in this indicator. Character achievement ranged only between Medium and Good. Public Elementary School, General Junior High School, Public High School, Public Vocational School, Religious Education Elementary School, High School of Religious Education, SMPLB, and SMALB recorded Good achievement. At the same time, the remaining services were categorized as Medium.

Learning quality showed greater variation. Several services achieved Good learning quality, including Public Elementary School, Religious Education Elementary School, General Junior High School, Religious Education Junior High School, Public High School, and SMALB. Other services were classified as Medium. No service type recorded **Less** learning quality. However, the direction of change was predominantly downward among services with available comparative data, particularly at the junior and senior secondary levels.

Changes in Educational Quality Compared with 2024

The comparison with 2024 shows different patterns of change across educational service types. Public educational services generally experienced improvement in literacy, numeracy, and character. Public Elementary School improved across all four indicators, while General Junior High School improved in literacy, numeracy, and character but declined in learning quality. Public High School and Public Vocational School also recorded increases in literacy, numeracy, and character, accompanied by decreases in learning quality.

In contrast, equivalency education showed a predominantly declining pattern. Equality Elementary School experienced a decline in numeracy, character, and learning

quality. Junior High School Equivalency experienced declines in literacy, numeracy, and learning quality, although character improved. Equivalence High School recorded declines in literacy, numeracy, and learning quality, while character increased. Special education services also showed mixed changes, with improvements in selected indicators but declines in others.

Synthesis of Educational Disparity Patterns

The overall comparison shows that educational quality disparities in South Sulawesi vary by both educational service type and educational level. Literacy and numeracy show the greatest variation, with equivalency education repeatedly appearing in the lower achievement categories. Religious-based education also shows substantial internal variation across educational levels rather than a uniform pattern.

Student character presents the most stable achievement pattern, with all service types reaching either Good or Medium levels. Learning quality also remains within the Good or Medium categories across all services, although its direction of change is predominantly downward. The comparison therefore reveals that the strongest disparities are concentrated in literacy and numeracy, while character achievement is comparatively more consistent across educational service types.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that literacy and numeracy disparities in South Sulawesi cannot be adequately explained by a simple public–non-public school distinction. The substantial variation within religious-based education is particularly evident: Religious Education Elementary School achieved Good literacy and numeracy, whereas MI remained in the Less category. This finding supports the argument that educational disparities are multidimensional and influenced by differences in institutional capacity, resource distribution, and educational management rather than institutional status alone (Wu, 2024; Nursaptini & Tohani, 2026). It also extends recent evidence on differences between madrasahs and general schools by showing that considerable variation may occur even within religious education itself (Awin et al., 2025; Haryati et al., 2024). Thus, the findings challenge a binary classification of educational inequality and emphasize the importance of examining disparities at the level of specific educational service pathways.

The persistently lower achievement of equivalency education represents the most prominent disparity identified in this study. Across elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary levels, equivalency services repeatedly occupied the Less or Medium categories for literacy and numeracy, with several indicators showing declines from 2024. This pattern is consistent with recent evaluations showing that equivalency programs continue to face challenges related to program implementation and their capacity to address educational exclusion (Abas et al., 2026; Fitriani et al., 2025). However, the present findings contribute a broader perspective by demonstrating that the disparity persists systematically across educational levels rather than appearing as an isolated program-level problem. The result suggests that equivalency education should not merely be evaluated according to participation or access but also according to learning outcomes, particularly foundational literacy and numeracy.

The relatively lower achievement of equivalency education should also be interpreted in relation to the characteristics of its learners. Equivalency programs serve learners who may have experienced interrupted schooling or limited access to conventional educational pathways. Consequently, differences in learning outcomes may reflect accumulated educational disadvantages rather than the program's effectiveness

alone. This interpretation is consistent with recent studies emphasizing the role of non-formal education in expanding educational access and supporting learners outside conventional schooling structures (Hayat et al., 2026; Abas et al., 2026). At the same time, the findings indicate that expanding access does not automatically guarantee comparable learning outcomes. The contribution of this study is therefore to highlight an important policy tension: equivalency education can function as an instrument of educational inclusion while simultaneously requiring stronger mechanisms to improve learning quality and achievement.

In contrast to literacy and numeracy, student character showed a comparatively equitable pattern across educational service types. None of the analyzed services was categorized as Less, indicating that character achievement was more homogeneous than academic achievement. This finding is compatible with research emphasizing that character and citizenship competencies can be cultivated through diverse educational environments and institutional settings (Dijkstra et al., 2023; Rizkasari, 2023). However, the present study adds an important distinction by demonstrating that relatively equitable character outcomes can coexist with substantial disparities in literacy and numeracy. This suggests that educational equity should not be assessed solely through academic achievement indicators. The contribution of this finding lies in revealing a multidimensional pattern of equity in which some educational outcomes converge while others remain substantially differentiated across service types.

The decline in learning quality across many educational services presents another important finding. Several public schools remained in the Good category but experienced downward changes compared with 2024. This indicates that relatively high achievement at one point in time does not necessarily imply sustained improvement in the quality of learning processes. The finding is consistent with broader evidence that educational quality involves multiple dimensions extending beyond student achievement, including the conditions and processes through which learning is delivered (Amiri et al., 2024; Abdul et al., 2024). The contrast between Religious Education Junior High School, which recorded lower literacy and numeracy but Good learning quality, further demonstrates that process-related quality and learning outcomes do not always move in parallel. This divergence represents an important empirical contribution because it cautions against using a single indicator to represent overall educational quality.

The findings also reveal that educational disparities vary simultaneously across service types, educational levels, and indicators. This multidimensionality is consistent with recent policy-oriented research emphasizing that educational equity requires coordinated strategies addressing differences in access, quality, and institutional capacity (Jaylaiza & Galigao, 2025; Nursaptini & Tohani, 2026). Nevertheless, the present study provides a more disaggregated contribution by comparing multiple educational pathways within the same provincial context and applying the same four quality indicators across levels. The analysis therefore moves beyond general descriptions of educational inequality and identifies where disparities are concentrated. In particular, the recurring position of equivalency education in the lower literacy and numeracy categories provides evidence for targeted rather than uniform interventions. This disaggregated perspective constitutes the study's principal empirical novelty.

These findings have important implications for education policy in South Sulawesi. First, quality improvement policies should prioritize equivalency education through targeted support for literacy, numeracy, learning resources, and instructional capacity rather than applying uniform interventions across all educational services. Second, policies for madrasahs and religious education should consider differences between

individual service types rather than treating religious education as a homogeneous category. Such differentiation is consistent with evidence that educational policy effectiveness depends on contextual resource allocation and institutional conditions (Kusnanto et al., 2023; Wu, 2024). Third, the Education Report can be strengthened as an evidence-based monitoring instrument by using disaggregated service-level data. The principal contribution of this study is therefore a more nuanced framework for understanding educational equity: reducing disparities requires not only expanding access, but also identifying which educational pathways, indicators, and levels require the most targeted quality improvement.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that educational quality disparities in South Sulawesi are multidimensional and cannot be explained solely through a public–non-public school dichotomy. The most important finding is that equivalency education consistently shows lower literacy and numeracy achievement across educational levels. In contrast, madrasas and religious education exhibit substantial internal variation, and learning quality tends to decline even among relatively well-performing public schools. The key lesson is that educational equity requires differentiated interventions based on specific service types and indicators rather than uniform policies. Scientifically, this study contributes an evidence-based, disaggregated perspective by comparing educational service types across levels using common quality indicators, thereby extending the understanding of educational inequality beyond institutional status. However, the study is limited by its reliance on secondary provincial-level data, which prevents direct examination of underlying factors such as teacher competence, infrastructure, funding, and learner characteristics. Future research should therefore combine Education Report data with district-level and primary data to examine the determinants of these disparities and evaluate the effectiveness of targeted educational interventions.

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