



## Invisible Barriers: Social Inequality and its Impact on The Teaching and Learning Process

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose**—This study aims to determine and analyze the role of teachers in overcoming social inequality for students at UPTD SD Negeri 1 Kuala. The background of this research stems from the existence of social inequality in basic education, which affects students' academic and social development, especially in rural areas.

**Methodology** - This research used a qualitative approach. Data were collected through observation, interview, and document analysis techniques at UPTD SD Negeri 1 Kuala. Informants in this study included principals and teachers, who were selected based on representativeness considerations. Data were analyzed using interactive qualitative analysis techniques, which include data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

**Findings** - The results showed that teachers have an important role in overcoming social gaps by building personalized social interactions with students, conveying religious and character values, and conducting discussions about bullying. Teachers also design bullying prevention programs and provide physical and non-physical support to victims. In addition, teachers provide guidance so that students can adapt to their friends and instill a sense of caring and kinship between students.

**Contribution** - This study contributes to the development of inclusive education by highlighting the strategic role of teachers in creating a fairer and more equitable learning environment.

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## INTRODUCTION

Social inequality in Indonesia is a complex phenomenon with significant implications for the education process at the primary level. These disparities reflect inequalities in access to educational resources, teaching quality, and learning facilities, all of which can affect students' academic and social development. Several factors contribute to social disparities and their impact on students.

First, socioeconomic disparity is one of the leading causes of education. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often experience limited access to adequate learning facilities, which can interfere with their learning process (Anisha, 2024; Amanullah & Wantini, 2023). Fabela and Khairunnisa confirm that social inequality in Indonesia consists of significant differences in economic aspects that impact the quality of education students receive (Fabela & Khairunnisa, 2024). Within the school environment, students with diverse economic backgrounds often experience different experiences, which can lead to marked differences in academic performance.

In addition, environmental factors also play a role in creating this gap. Nurrohman explains that the lack of educational facilities and insufficient curriculum exacerbate disparities in access and quality of education (Nurrohman, 2023). Other research shows that differences in parenting patterns and parental support affect students' social and academic skills (Ren et al., 2022; Salavera et al., 2022). A study also suggested that parental involvement and social support strongly influence students' academic achievement in primary school, suggesting a complex interaction between social factors and learning outcomes (Alamsyah et al., 2020)

The impact of social inequality is not only limited to academic aspects, but also includes students' social skills. Students who lack social support tend to have difficulty building healthy relationships with their peers, which impacts their character development and interpersonal skills (Hossain et al., 2024). Social skills are an important element for students at the primary level, as they build their ability to interact and resolve conflicts in the future (Maksum et al., 2021).

Governments and educational institutions have recognized the importance of addressing social disparities in education. Various policies, including more equitable resource distribution and enrichment programs for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, have been introduced, but their implementation in the field still faces challenges (Ayu et al., 2024). The results of these policies are expected to reduce inequities in education and encourage all students to reach their full potential.

Previous studies have shown that social inequality significantly impacts teaching and learning in primary schools. Research conducted by Akmaliah & Yasin (2025) revealed that students' socioeconomic background affects access to learning resources, participation in learning, and academic achievement. This is reinforced by a study from Pasondi (2024) that shows that teachers in schools with the most students from low socioeconomic groups face greater challenges in creating inclusive and supportive learning environments. These findings confirm that social inequality affects the quality of education at the primary school level. Further research is needed on the impact of social inequality in schools on teaching and learning to reduce its negative impact on teaching and learning.

Based on the author's observations, social inequality occurs in the school environment, mainly because the teachers in focus are those considered to have social inequality in their school, adding that this has not been a focus in previous studies. Therefore, it aims to explore the analysis of factors that cause social disparities in schools, social disparities in the teaching and learning process, and the role of school principals and teachers' councils and committees in preventing social problems in schools. Related to the problem chosen to reveal the problem of social inequality, the researcher formulated three research questions, namely:

1. What are the factors that cause social inequality in schools?
2. What is the impact of social inequality at school on the teaching and learning process?
3. What is the role of the principal, teachers' council, and committee in preventing social problems at school?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The method used in this research is a qualitative case study. As stated by Creswell (2017), case study research with a qualitative approach is a method that aims to explore and understand phenomena in depth by presenting actual data. The qualitative case study approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth and contextually rich exploration of the real-life dynamics of educational inequality in public primary school 1, Kuala Lumpur. Compared to other qualitative methods such as ethnography or phenomenology, the case study method is more appropriate for this research because it focuses on a limited system (in this case, specific schools) and allows the incorporation of multiple data sources - interviews, documents and photographs - to build a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The research objective justifies this methodological choice: to examine the complex interactions between institutional practices, stakeholder roles, and contextual factors in addressing educational disparities at the primary school level. Using a case study design allows the researcher to capture the uniqueness and commonalities across different school settings, thus providing a nuanced and holistic explanation of the phenomenon under study.

This research was conducted in Bireun District, Aceh Province's primary schools in the odd semester of the 2024/2025 school year. This research was conducted in 4 schools in Kuala District, Bireuen Regency, namely UPTD SD Negeri 1 Kuala, which is located in Lancok Village - Lancok, UPTD SD Negeri 2 Kuala, which is located at Jalan Kuala Raja Ujong Blang Village, UPTD SD Negeri 3 Kuala, which is located on Jalan Hajjah Umami Salamah Lhok Awe-awe Village, Kuala District, and UPTD SD Negeri 6 Kuala, which is located in Krueng Julu Timu Village, Kuala District..

### **Participant**

In this study, the interviewees totaled seven people, consisting of 4 principals, two teachers, and one school committee member. These informants were chosen because they are directly related to this research. In addition to informants, there are also sources of information used in this study, namely documents, photos, and others. The sampling technique uses the purposive sampling technique. The reason is that four principals have a maximum educational background of a bachelor's degree in education and have served for more than five years. They come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, ranging from lower to middle class. Their roles include implementing school policies and empowering school members to succeed regardless of their economic or social backgrounds. Both teachers hold a Bachelor's degree in education and have more than three years of teaching experience. They come from middle-class backgrounds and actively participate in inclusive education programs and initiatives to support underprivileged students. The school committee members do not have a Bachelor of Education degree and represent parents and the local community. They come from lower-middle socioeconomic backgrounds. The committee plays an important role in advocating for equitable access to education and bridging communication between the school and families with social gaps.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, interviews, and documents. Researchers collect data through observation by directly observing how social inequality occurs in society and its impact on the teaching and learning process at school. Data collection through interviews is conducted with four principals, two teachers, and one school committee at UPTD SD, School Committee. The author reviews documents related to student cases at school related to social problems and social gaps recorded at schools that are identified as problems to be studied.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in this study follows Sugiyono., (2021) including four stages, namely: data collection, which is recording the results of observations, interviews, and documentation in the form of descriptions and reflections; data reduction, which is the process of simplifying and sorting rough data to become more focused and structured, carried out during the research process; data presentation, which is organizing data in the

form of matrices or other visual displays to facilitate analysis and drawing conclusions; and conclusion drawing and verification, which is the process of understanding the meaning of data by looking for patterns, cause-and-effect relationships, and ensuring the validity of conclusions through rechecking the data that has been collected.

## FINDINGS

The results of this study are the findings obtained from the analysis of qualitative data collected through interviews and document studies. This research focuses on social inequality on the learning process in elementary schools in Bireuen Regency which aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the impact of social inequality on the teaching and learning process in elementary schools.

### Factors for Social Inequality

These factors that cause social inequality in the teaching and learning process as conveyed by DM, one of the principals at one of the elementary schools in Kuala Sub-district, he said:

*The social gap that occurs in my school is caused by the different quality of teachers between one teacher and another, senior teachers often teach in their comfort zone, do not innovate in learning, so that students experience a decline in learning, while young teachers teach with full innovation and implementation, so that students' understanding of the material provided increases. As a result of these factors, there will be a gap between one class and another.*

From the DM statement, it is stated that the factor causing social inequality in schools is the difference in quality or competence possessed by a teacher, namely the difference in competence possessed by senior teachers and junior teachers, where senior teachers, due to their lack of competence, do not innovate in teaching, while junior teachers, because they are competent in teaching, always innovate. Furthermore, teacher DM added that there are still differences in teacher competencies in various types of schools that trigger social inequality, as quoted in this interview:

*If I observe, differences in teacher competence are more common in public schools, especially because many senior teachers have been teaching for a long time and tend to be reluctant to innovate. Younger teachers are usually more enthusiastic and open to new methods. In private schools, because the system is more competitive, teachers are required to keep developing, otherwise they can be replaced.*

Meanwhile, another school principal in Kuala District, MHD, stated:

*In my school, there is often a gap between certified teachers and non-certified teachers, certified teachers often ask for help from non-certified teachers in completing their assignments at school, this is because the average age of certified teachers is approaching their retirement age, and non-certified teachers because they consider themselves juniors always help certified teachers if asked for help, however, when receiving certification funds, these certified teachers rarely appreciate it (do not give a little money for the hard work of Non-Certified Teachers) which causes this gap.*

From the interview with MHD, it is known that the factor causing social inequality in schools is the difference between certified teachers and non-certified teachers, and where their duties are the same but their income is very different. Meanwhile, HSN, who is also the principal, from the interview conducted by the author said that:

*From the interview with MHD, it is known that the factor causing social inequality in schools is the difference between certified teachers and non-certified teachers, and where their duties are the same but their income is very different.*

The results of the interview with HSN found a social gap factor that occurred in his school, namely the difference in social status between civil servant teachers and honorary teachers, where their duties are the same but their income is different where honorary teachers are more dominant in carrying out the tasks I give, but I can only give them a salary that is only enough for their transportation to school, while civil servant teachers whose salaries have been paid in full by the state, their work does not meet expectations. Furthermore, Mrs. DAN, the Young Principal in Kuala District said that:

*Lack of facilities and infrastructure also causes social inequality in schools, as happens in schools, all teachers want to teach using videos as a learning medium, to make students able to watch the video, teachers must use an infocus so that the image is bigger, but the infocus facility in our school is only one, so it cannot be used by teachers every day, so teachers have to share the schedule for using the infocus, but this is not effective considering that students only enjoy the infocus once a week, the gap that occurs here when the infocus is used by one class, other classes cannot enjoy it, because they have to wait their turn.*

According to RAN, from the interviews conducted, the social gap that occurred in his school was caused by the lack of facilities and infrastructure in the school, namely the facilities and infrastructure, especially learning media available in the school, were very limited, which meant that the learning media could not be used evenly by teachers and students.

In addition to the teacher competency factor, the availability of facilities at school also influences the principal's leadership role and strategy. In the interview, the informants explained that the different conditions of infrastructure in schools make the principal have to adjust his role to the existing situation, as stated by RAN.

*Yes, the role of the principal is clearly different between schools with minimal facilities and those with sufficient facilities. .... In schools with limited facilities, principals are usually required to be more creative and active in finding solutions. .... Whereas in schools with sufficient facilities, the principal's role is more managerial-how to optimally manage existing resources, ensure that everything runs efficiently, and encourage teachers to continuously improve the quality of learning. So, the challenges are different, but still equally important.*

Meanwhile, FH, an elementary school teacher in Kuala District, stated that:

*The cause of the social gap is the unequal treatment by the principal towards his teachers at school, for example, there are teachers who are treated specially, and there are also teachers who are looked down on by the principal, for example, if a teacher who is treated specially by the principal makes a mistake, it is considered normal and is not taken seriously by the principal, while if a teacher who is looked down on by the principal makes a mistake, the treatment will be different, even verbally reprimanding him, even in schools there are teachers who are the principal's golden children. Such treatment by the principal results in a gap between teachers, and even small groups will be formed at school, thus having an impact on the learning process in the classroom.*

A similar thing was also stated by Mr ARM in an interview conducted by the author, ARM stated that:

*The gap that occurs in schools is caused by the difference in treatment that occurs in schools, where all work on additional teacher duties in schools is assigned to honorary teachers, while civil servants only carry out their main duties in the classroom, while in my school the honorary teachers' teaching hours are the same as full-time civil servant teachers, honorary teachers should only teach in class, and civil servants are given additional duties in addition to their main duties, because civil servants routinely receive a salary every month, while honorary teachers only receive it once every 3 months when BOS funds are disbursed.*

From the interviews conducted by the author with FH and ARM, both stated that:

*The social gap that occurs due to unfair treatment by the principal towards his teachers at school, in schools there are still teachers who are treated specially by the principal who are usually called the principal's "golden children".*

From several interviews conducted by the author with both the principal and teachers in Kuala sub-district, Bireuen district, it can be seen that social disparities still occur in schools, these disparities are caused by several factors, namely: 1) differences in quality or competence possessed by a teacher, namely differences in competence possessed by senior teachers and junior teachers, where senior teachers because of their lack of competence, do not innovate in teaching, while junior teachers because they are competent in teaching always innovate; 2) lack of concern for each other, namely not having a sense of caring between one teacher and another so that they do not want to collaborate with other fellow teachers at school; 3) differences in social status, namely differences between certified teachers and non-certified teachers, and also civil servant teachers and honorary teachers, where their duties are the same but their incomes are different; 4) lack of facilities and infrastructure at school, namely facilities and infrastructure, especially learning media available at school are very limited, which causes the learning media to not be used evenly by teachers and students; 5) there is different treatment by the principal or not being fair, namely there is unfair treatment by the principal towards his teachers at school, at school there are still teachers who are treated specially by the principal.

## The Impact of Social Disparities in Schools

The social gap that occurs in schools has a big impact on the learning process in the classroom, as stated by DM in an interview conducted by the author, DM said that:

*The impact of this gap causes the learning process to be less than expected in classes held by senior teachers, for example, students often come in and out of class because they feel bored in class, students often disturb their friends, and students often do not attend school because they do not like the teacher, the opposite happens in classes held by young teachers, here students are very active in learning, they will always be in class even during breaks, they often spend their breaks in class making learning media projects.*

Furthermore, on another occasion MHD stated that:

*"The impact of inequality is that non-certified teachers become lazy to enter the classroom, and are often in the office during class hours, thus causing acts of student delinquency at school such as Students often leave the classroom, skip class during class hours, litter the classroom and school, disturb their friends who are learning, and sometimes even bullying".*

On the other hand, HSN, who is also the school principal, stated that:

*Social inequality will have a negative impact on school learning, where the consequences of the gaps that occur will often cause teachers to rarely go to class, this is because not all teachers will be diligent in teaching, for example civil servant teachers, they feel they are senior so they are more often in the office than in the classroom, while honorary teachers see that civil servants often do not go to class, So students are often outside the classroom rather than in the classroom, students do disturbing things such as bullying, crossing out the walls of the classroom, going in and out of the bathroom, disturbing their friends, and so on, this is because there are no teachers so that learning in our school is not active.*

Furthermore, RAN also expressed her opinion about the impact of the social gap that occurred in her school, RAN stated that

*The impact of the gap in our school due to the lack of facilities and infrastructure is that the learning process does not go as expected, the gap greatly disrupts learning activities in our school, students in our school do not enjoy an innovative learning process, where the learning process is more on the lecture method only.*

Different from the teacher's opinion about the impact of social inequality that occurs in schools, from interviews conducted with teachers with the initials FH stated that:

*The impact of the inequality that occurs in his school is that teachers are more busy taking care of others, finding fault with others, which results in teachers in teaching only asking students to take notes in books, they enter the local area only giving assignments to students, then they are busy chatting with fellow teachers, as a result the atmosphere of learning in the classroom is not calm, students disturb each other, especially male students more often disturb female students, even students often fight in the classroom.*

Furthermore, ARM, who is also a teacher, said that:

*In my opinion, the social inequality that occurs in schools will have a direct impact on the learning process in the classroom where honorary teachers who were once diligent in teaching, are now no longer diligent, they assume that why are they diligent in teaching when their salary is only enough to buy gasoline and even then it is given once every three months from the BOS fund, while civil servants whose salaries are paid in full by the government are only waiting for the clock to run out. So that classes held by honorary teachers will often have problems in the classroom, such as bullying, cheating on assignments, crossing out desks, fighting among students, and others.*

While the author also conducted interviews with school committees related to the issues studied, in this case the author conducted an interview with one of the committees at one of the elementary schools in the Kuala sub-district, namely Mr. JHR. Mr. JHR stated that:

*Social inequality does not only occur between fellow teachers at school, social inequality also occurs in society, for example the gap between the poor and the rich which causes despicable actions to occur, for example the children of the rich often bully the children of the poor at school, this is because in their environment the parents of the rich will often mock, make fun of, and others against the parents of the poor, so that this continues to their children, and will even continue to school. This will cause a lack of confidence for the poor child so that at school he will always feel ostracized, while the rich child will feel he has the upper hand, and he will look sarcastically at his friends at school this will result in an unfavorable attitude for the rich child, for example haughtiness, arrogance, bullying and others.*

From the interviews conducted, it was found that the impact of social inequality that occurs in schools is the occurrence of social problems in schools, these social problems can be in the form of: violating school rules,

students often go in and out of class, students often disturb their friends, students often do not attend school, skip class during class hours, dirty the class, cheating, fighting, and bullying.

### **The Principal's Role**

Principals have an important role to prevent social gaps that occur in schools, here extra roles are needed for principals, especially in leading schools' principals are required to be fair and wise in protecting teachers, students, and all school residents because the good and bad of a school really depends on the principal. Principals are also required to be able to lead the school well and all things that happen at school both about teachers, students, and other school residents should not escape the attention of a principal, because the principal will be fully responsible for whatever happens at school. regarding the role of the principal. as stated by Mr. MHD, he said that:

*To prevent social gaps in schools, it takes an extra role from the principal, I as the principal always make social programs in schools, for example, social visits, where every time a teacher or school staff has a disaster either the family dies, gets sick, In addition, I also always give the same treatment to all teachers and staff without regard to their employment status, and if there is a teacher who has a problem and I want to reprimand him, I will call the teacher and will advise him privately without being known by other teachers.*

Then the principal must also be able to collaborate with teachers and administrative staff at school, because the principal will not be able to carry out his duties at school without the help of teachers and administrative staff at school. As stated by Mrs. DM, she said that:

*I as the principal cannot carry out my duties if I do it alone, I appointed several of my deputies starting from the deputy curriculum, deputy student affairs, deputy facilities and infrastructure, while we both know that in elementary schools there are no deputy principals, there are only principals, I do this to increase my collaboration with my teachers, I do this collaboration so that there is no gap between teachers in my school, I distribute additional tasks for each of my teachers and they must be responsible according to their duties and they will report it once a month for evaluation material. Then for honorary teachers I give the task of fostering extracurricular students, with these tasks the gaps that occur in schools will be reduced, this happens because all teachers and administrative staff at school are busy with their respective duties and responsibilities. And the teaching and learning process will also run as expected.*

*To prevent gaps that occur in schools, wise leadership is needed from the principal, and the principal must also be able to be fair to teachers in the school and must also be a role model for teachers in the school. Social inequality in schools will not occur if the principal is firm and wise in leading the school.*

From the interview above, it can be stated that the principal has an important role in preventing gaps in the school, the principal is required to be able to lead fairly, provide tasks for teachers in accordance with their duties and functions, apply discipline at school, the principal is also required to provide equal treatment to teachers at school, so that later there is no impression that there are teachers who are excluded at school, and if there are teachers who make mistakes, the principal should be able to reprimand them privately without being known by other teachers.

### **Teacher's Role**

The role of teachers is very important in preventing social gaps in schools, the most important role of teachers in efforts to prevent social gaps is to be able to be fair both among teachers and with students in class as conveyed by DM who said that:

*Teachers play a very important role in preventing classroom social gaps, where in these prevention efforts teachers in educating students in the classroom are required to be fair to all students, for example in one class there are several students from different statuses, ranging from children of farmers, fishermen, civil servants, businessmen, officials and others. However, teachers in educating should not differentiate their treatment of these students. Do not later for the children of officials because their parents are influential and have a social status above, will be treated preferentially, if that happens then the social gap in the classroom will be unstoppable.*

Then ARM also expressed his opinion where he said:

*The role of teachers in preventing inequality in schools is that a teacher must be fair and objective towards students, not later because the student is an official's child, he will be treated specially, and will be given more points by the teacher even though in reality the student's achievement is below other students.*

Meanwhile, MHD said that the role of teachers in preventing social inequality in schools is also very necessary, this is in accordance with what was conveyed in the interviews conducted. MHD said that:

*The role of teachers in preventing gaps is very necessary, all teachers in schools should have and use their competencies, especially social competence, where if a teacher has social competence, then the teacher will be polite and respectful to each other, so that if all teachers at school have these competencies automatically gaps in schools will not occur.*

Furthermore, RAN also expressed his opinion, according to RAN:

*Teachers have an important role in preventing social gaps, because if there is a gap between fellow teachers, it will have an impact on the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Therefore, teachers must take part in preventing these gaps, the way teachers must avoid things that cause gaps in schools".*

Meanwhile, HSN briefly said that:

*If there is a gap between fellow teachers, it will result in the disruption of the teaching and learning process at school and the impact will result in school problems.*

Meanwhile, JHR as the school committee said that

*Teachers have an important role in preventing social inequality in schools, because teachers are at school every day.*

From the interviews conducted, it can be stated that teachers also have an important role in efforts to prevent social gaps in schools, especially in the classroom, teachers are required to be fair and objective, if these teachers are fair and objective towards their students in class, then social gaps will not occur.

### **The role of the school committee**

The role of the school committee in efforts to prevent social gaps in schools is more about efforts to unite thoughts for student guardians, in this case the committee has an important role in terms of providing understanding for student guardians so that they can be friendly, not arrogant, not selfish as fellow student guardians, as conveyed by JHR who stated that:

*The role of the school committee in preventing social gaps at school is more about providing understanding for student guardians so that there are no gaps among student guardians at school, because if this is done, it will result in gaps among students at school, this is because students will follow what their parents do.*

HSN also said that the role of the committee in preventing social inequality at school is also very important, he said that:

*A school committee in receiving reports or input from student guardians about the school must be fair, there should be no favoritism in receiving reports, for example because guardian A is close to him then he immediately follows up on the report, while guardian B because he is not close to him is not followed up on his report, if this is done then there will be a gap between fellow student guardians, and have an impact on the teaching and learning process in class.*

### **Summary of interview results**

The following table presents a summary of interview results related to the roles of school principals, teachers, and school committees in preventing social gaps in schools. The table includes the names of interviewees, their positions, the factors they mentioned, and the impacts of those factors.

**Table 1.** Impact of Social Disparities in Schools

Respondent	Position	Mentioned Factors	Impact
DM	School Principal	Difference in teacher quality (senior vs. junior)	Students lose interest, leave class, disrupt peers; contrast with active, engaged classes led by junior teachers.



Respondents	Position	Mentioned Factors	Impact
Mr. MHD	Principal	Social programs, equal treatment, private reprimand	Prevents social gaps, promotes fairness, reduces exclusion among teachers.
Mrs. DM	Principal	Collaboration with teachers and administrative staff, task delegation	Reduces gaps, improves collaboration, promotes fairness, effective teaching process.
ARM	Teacher	Social competence, fairness, treating all students equally	Prevents inequality in teaching, promotes fairness and respect among students.
RAN	Teacher	Avoiding causing gaps among teachers, promoting fairness	Prevents disruption in teaching and learning, creates a fair learning environment.
HSN	Principal	Fairness, discipline, leading by example	Prevents social inequality, creates a positive school environment.
JHR	School Committee	Understanding among student guardians, promoting equality	Prevents gaps among student guardians, impacts students' behavior and relationships.
HSN	Principal	Fairness in handling reports, avoiding favoritism	Prevents gaps between guardians, impacts the learning environment and student behavior on innovative and interactive instruction.
MHD	School Principal	Inequality between certified and non-certified teachers	Non-certified teachers become demotivated, leading to student misbehavior and delinquency.
HSN	School Principal	Employment status (civil servants vs. honorary teachers)	Teachers (especially civil servants) avoid teaching; students exhibit bullying, vandalism, and disengagement
RAN	School Principal	Lack of facilities and learning infrastructure	Learning becomes passive, lecture-based; students miss out.
FH	Elementary School Teacher	Unequal treatment among teachers by school leadership	Teachers become uninterested in teaching, leading to noisy classrooms and student conflict
ARM	Elementary School Teacher	Salary disparity and unfair task distribution between civil servants and honorary teachers	Demoralized honorary teachers neglect teaching; student behavior worsens (e.g., cheating, bullying, vandalism).
JHR	School Committee Member	Socioeconomic disparity between students from poor and wealthy families	Poor students feel excluded; rich students become arrogant, exhibit bullying influenced by family environment.

**Table 3.** Teacher's Role

Respondent	Position	Factors Mentioned	Impact
DM	Teacher	Fair treatment of students from various backgrounds	Avoids classroom social gaps

ARM	Teacher	Objectivity and fairness despite social status	Prevents favoritism and inequality
MHD	Teacher	Use of social competence among teachers	Promotes respect and reduces gaps
RAN	Teacher	Avoiding causes of teacher-level social gaps	Ensures smooth teaching process
HSN	Teacher	Avoid gaps among fellow teachers	Avoids school-wide disruptions
JHR	School Committee	Daily presence and role of teachers in school	Enables constant monitoring of inequality

**Table 3.** The School Committee

Respondent	Position	Factors Mentioned	Impact
JHR	School Committee	Providing understanding to student guardians to be friendly, not arrogant, and not selfish	Prevents social gaps among students that reflect parents' behavior
HSN	School Committee	Fairness in receiving and following up reports from student guardians without favoritism	Avoids favoritism among parents that could affect classroom learning conditions

Based on the conclusion of the interview tables summarized in the four tables of findings, preventing social inequality in the school environment requires the cooperation of all elements of the school, including the principal, teachers, and school committee. The principal is central in creating a fair, collaborative, and wise leadership climate and building social programs that touch all school members without discrimination. Teachers play an important role in maintaining fairness and objectivity in classroom learning and building healthy social relations among teachers to create a harmonious working atmosphere. Meanwhile, the school committee functions as a liaison between the school and parents/guardians, fostering mutual respect and avoiding gaps between guardians that can impact students. Overall, preventing social inequality in schools is highly dependent on fair leadership practices, healthy social interactions, and the consistent active participation of all school members.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the results of research conducted on social disparities in the teaching and learning process in Bireuen Regency, which was carried out using observation, interviews and documentation, the results obtained were that the factors that influence the occurrence of social disparities in the teaching and learning process in schools are (1) differences in competence possessed by a teacher, (2) lack of concern for each other, (3) differences in social status, (4) lack of facilities and infrastructure at school, and (5) different treatment by leaders or not being fair.

Achieving equal student learning opportunities is a significant policy goal in all countries (Torres, 2021). The findings of this study indicate that one of the primary factors contributing to social inequality in schools is the disparity in the professional competence of teachers, particularly between senior and junior educators. Senior teachers often demonstrate less innovation in teaching and learning due to limited pedagogical development or outdated instructional strategies. In contrast, junior teachers, who tend to possess stronger professional competencies and greater familiarity with contemporary teaching methods, are generally more dynamic and creative in implementing innovative learning approaches. This discrepancy can result in uneven educational experiences for students across different classes. Supporting this, Chykhantsova (2022) found that social inequality in educational settings adversely affects students' motivation to learn foreign languages, leading to disparities in engagement and academic achievement. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds

are more likely to experience disinterest or boredom, which hampers their learning outcomes and diminishes teacher motivation and classroom effectiveness. The disparities in teacher competence that contribute to social inequality in schools do not occur in isolation; instead, they stem from systemic, institutional, and individual factors. Senior teachers, who have typically spent decades in the profession, may not have received the same level of training in innovative pedagogical approaches or digital literacy as their younger counterparts. Furthermore, lacking ongoing professional development opportunities or limited motivation to pursue them can stagnate instructional practices. Senior teachers often operate within their comfort zones, relying on traditional teaching methods that may no longer meet today's learners' diverse and evolving needs.

On the other hand, junior teachers are often more exposed to recent educational trends, contemporary pedagogical theories, and technology integration through their initial teacher education or early career development programs. They also tend to exhibit higher professional enthusiasm and adaptability, motivated by the need to establish themselves in the field. However, the unequal distribution of these teaching competencies across classrooms leads to differentiated learning experiences for students, where some benefit from engaging, student-centered instruction. In contrast, others receive outdated or less practical approaches.

Furthermore, social disparities in schools seriously impact the learning process and student behavior. One of the most dominant impacts is the decline in the quality of the learning process in the classroom, especially in classes taught by teachers who are less motivated due to differences in status or facilities, such as non-certified teachers or honorary teachers. Students lose their motivation to learn when they feel bored with uninteresting learning methods or when teachers are absent from class. This situation is further exacerbated when senior teachers or civil servants are passive because they feel they have a higher status, which honorary teachers then imitate. This finding is in line with research from Agasisti et al. (2021), which shows that structural injustice in schools has an impact on low teaching discipline, as well as increasing the level of student delinquency in the classroom.

In addition, the impact of social inequality is not only limited to teacher-student relations but also touches on the psychosocial aspects of students from different economic backgrounds. As conveyed by JHR, students from wealthy families tend to show superior behavior and belittle their friends from low-income families, which leads to bullying and the emergence of feelings of inferiority in students from lower economic backgrounds. This condition disrupts students' emotional stability and creates an unhealthy learning environment. Inequality in the availability of facilities and infrastructure and unfair treatment between teachers also encourage monotonous learning and increased social conflicts in the classroom, such as scribbling on walls, cheating, and fighting. This is consistent with research from Bhandari (2022) and Sanders et al. (2024), which concluded that unaddressed social inequality will trigger disharmony in the school environment and weaken students' character in terms of cooperation, empathy, and tolerance (Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Arfaton et al., 2025; Manda & Arifin, 2024). Therefore, preventing and handling social disparities must be prioritized to create a fair, comfortable, and conducive learning environment.

Teachers are central in preventing social inequality in the school environment, especially in the classroom. Teachers must be fair and objective without discriminating against students based on social or economic background. Teachers should not give preferential treatment to students from among officials or influential parents, because this will cause social jealousy among students. Special treatment of sure students, including giving grades, can exacerbate social inequality and erode students' trust in justice in the school environment. This finding is in line with the results of research from Alam and Mohanty (2023) and Kaufman and Killen (2022), which show that teachers who show discriminatory attitudes based on students' social status contribute significantly to the formation of exclusive social groups in the classroom that are detrimental to the learning climate.

In addition, social disparities not only occur between students but can also arise between fellow teachers. Teachers' social competence is crucial in maintaining harmonious relationships in the school environment. Social disparities can be minimized when teachers can be polite, respect each other, and establish healthy communication with fellow teachers. Disparities between teachers can impact teaching and learning because they create a non-conducive working atmosphere. This is reinforced by the findings of Endedijk et al. (2022),

which state that poor social relations between teachers can lead to decreased collaboration in classroom management and indirectly harm students and have an impact on students' academic abilities (Agasisti et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers must be fair to students and maintain harmony between colleagues to create an inclusive school environment free from social disparities.

The school committee plays an important role in preventing social disparities in the school environment, primarily through an approach to parents. The committee is tasked with uniting parents' thoughts and providing understanding so that they are friendly, not arrogant, and not selfish towards other parents. Parents' exclusive or discriminatory attitudes can be imitated by their children, thus causing social disparities between students at school. In this case, the school committee functions as a liaison between the school and parents, which helps shape the social culture of students at school.

In addition, the committee must also be fair in responding to reports or input from guardians without any special treatment. Injustice in serving guardians can trigger social jealousy between parents and students and hurt the teaching and learning process. This is in line with the opinion of Herawati et al. (2021) and Oktaviana et al. (2023) that the school committee functions as a provider of consideration, support, controller, and mediator that ensures fairness in decision-making at school. Thus, the school committee must actively build an inclusive, fair, and socially equitable educational environment.

Social inequality in schools arises from various interconnected structural and relational factors that influence the fairness and equity of the teaching and learning environment. One of the most evident forms of inequality is the unequal distribution of teacher competence, where some students benefit from innovative, student-centered instruction—often provided by younger, better-trained teachers—while others are taught using outdated methods by senior teachers who may lack current pedagogical skills. This variation in instructional quality creates disparities in student learning outcomes across different classes within the same school.

In addition, differences in employment status and professional recognition, such as between certified and non-certified teachers or civil servants and honorary teachers, contribute to workplace hierarchies and perceived injustice. Despite often sharing similar workloads and responsibilities, non-certified and honorary teachers typically receive significantly lower compensation and limited institutional support, which fosters dissatisfaction and impacts their motivation. This imbalance affects teacher morale and compromises the consistency and quality of instruction delivered to students.

Furthermore, inadequate access to school facilities and learning resources exacerbates inequality. In schools with limited infrastructure, tools such as projectors, computers, or laboratory equipment are often scarce, leading to unequal opportunities for students to engage with interactive and technology-enhanced learning. Classes with access to such resources benefit from richer learning experiences, while others are left behind.

Another key contributor to social disparity is leadership bias, where principals may display favoritism by giving privileges to certain teachers, often referred to as the "golden children," while overlooking or undervaluing others. Such unequal treatment creates division among teachers and affects collaboration and school climate, ultimately influencing student learning indirectly.

In summary, social inequality in schools is a multidimensional issue rooted in disparities in teacher competence, employment status, access to resources, and school leadership practices. These factors collectively hinder the creation of an inclusive and equitable educational environment, where all students can access the same quality of education regardless of their background or class assignment.

This research significantly contributes to the broader development of inclusive education, education policy, and school management practices. In particular, this study reveals that social inequality in the learning process in schools is influenced by various factors, such as differences in teacher competence, employment status (PNS and honorer), certification, and limited learning facilities. This finding emphasises that factors for social inequality are not only structural but also originate from internal practices in schools that are relational and cultural.

The impact of social disparities in schools is evident in the form of inequality in learning outcomes among students, lack of collaboration among teachers, and the emergence of exclusive groups that undermine a healthy learning climate. In this context, the principal's role becomes very strategic as a learning leader and change agent. Principals have an important role in creating a fair, equitable, and participatory leadership system that encourages all teachers, senior and junior, civil servants, and honorary, to develop professionally and work collaboratively. Thus, this research enriches academic studies on social inequality in education and provides a practical basis for designing policy interventions and school leadership strengthening programs that favour equity and equitable quality of education.

## CONCLUSION

Social inequality within the school environment can lead to negative social behaviours among students. These behaviours may manifest as violations of school rules, frequent classroom disruptions, absenteeism, truancy, acts of vandalism, cheating, fighting, and bullying. Such issues hinder the learning process and disrupt the overall school climate, affecting both academic outcomes and interpersonal relationships. Several interrelated factors influence the existence of social inequality in schools. These include disparities in teacher competence and professionalism, lack of mutual concern and collaboration among school members, variations in social status among students and parents, unequal distribution of school facilities and infrastructure, and discriminatory practices by school leaders. When these factors are left unaddressed, they contribute to a widening social gap, exacerbating social tensions and reducing cohesion within the school community. In response to this challenge, the roles of the principal, teachers, and school committee become crucial in promoting equity and minimizing social disparities. As a leader, the school principal is expected to exercise just and inclusive leadership by assigning duties based on teachers' competencies, enforcing discipline fairly, and ensuring all staff members are treated equally. Fair treatment includes refraining from favoritism and maintaining professional boundaries, such as providing personal feedback to teachers privately to avoid public humiliation and exclusion. Such leadership practices foster a positive and equitable school culture. Teachers also play a vital role in addressing social inequality, particularly within the classroom. Teachers are expected to uphold fairness and objectivity in their pedagogical practices as the primary agents of instruction and student interaction. By treating all students equally, regardless of background or ability, teachers can create a more inclusive classroom environment that reduces the likelihood of social stratification and marginalization among students.

Furthermore, the school committee, representing parents and the wider school community, has a significant function in building mutual respect and understanding of the culture. Through active communication and engagement, the committee can facilitate harmonious relationships among parents, encouraging values such as humility, cooperation, and empathy. This effort helps minimize social tensions from economic or social differences among families. In conclusion, preventing social inequality in schools requires a collaborative and strategic approach involving school leaders, educators, and community representatives. By fostering fair leadership, equitable teaching practices, and supportive parental engagement, schools can mitigate the negative consequences of social gaps and cultivate a more inclusive and respectful educational environment.

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