

Public schools and critical education: Alternative education policy in Indonesia

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Abstract

Purpose: This study analyzes the implementation of community school policies within the framework of critical education, based on Presidential Instruction No. 8 of 2025 on the eradication of extreme poverty.

Research Methodology: This research uses qualitative methods based on policy studies to evaluate the effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities of community school programs in supporting poverty reduction through education.

Results: "Sekolah Rakyat" can build critical awareness in poor communities, strengthen local participation, and integrate education with local wisdom. However, the success of this program still faces the challenges of inter-agency coordination, limited human resources, and inadequate facilities. Therefore, sustainable policy support, cross-sector collaboration, and community engagement are essential to strengthen the impact of Community Schools as a tool of social transformation and inclusive education.

Conclusions: The implementation of "Sekolah Rakyat" as an alternative education policy in Indonesia has great potential to reduce social and economic disparities, especially for the poor and marginal communities. Paulo Freire's critical education approach provides not only practical knowledge but also critical thinking skills and social awareness to play a role in social change. Education based on local wisdom is considered relevant to the needs of the community.

Limitations: This research shows that the "people's school" policy has great potential as a strategy to reduce extreme poverty through education. The government needs to push the mainstream of alternative education policies based on social empowerment into national policies.

Contribution: The study emphasizes that "Sekolah rakyat" are not only Centers for academic learning, but also for life skills, character development, and social awareness.

Keywords: *Critical Education, Policy Education, Sekolah Rakyat*

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1. Introduction

Education is one of the fundamental pillars of a nation's social, economic, and cultural development (Irianto, 2017). However, in Indonesia, inequality in access to quality education remains a serious problem, particularly among marginalized and poor communities. Despite numerous government initiatives to alleviate poverty and improve education access, many children from low-income families and remote areas still struggle to receive adequate learning opportunities (Lestari, Robiani, & Sukanto, 2023; Rasdi & Kurniawan, 2019). This persistent inequality shows that formal education alone is insufficient to address the structural barriers faced by the poor.

The root of the problem lies not only in economic limitations but also in the nature of education itself, which often prioritizes cognitive achievement over critical and social awareness. Many conventional schools fail to nurture learners' abilities to understand and transform their social realities. This condition reflects a broader gap between educational policy and social empowerment: while education is promoted as a tool for poverty alleviation, its implementation rarely addresses issues of inequality, participation, and justice at the grassroots level. The "Sekolah Rakyat" (People's School) initiative seeks to address this gap.

"Sekolah Rakyat" is an alternative education model designed to expand access for those excluded from the formal education system in Indonesia. It emphasizes community-based learning, empowerment, and local wisdom integration, focusing on academic achievement, life skills, social responsibility, and collective awareness (Edo & Yasin, 2024). Within this framework, education becomes a process of liberation rather than mere instruction, empowering communities to recognize their rights and actively engage in social transformation.

This concept aligns closely with Paulo Freire's theory of critical education, which positions education as a dialogical process that helps individuals develop critical consciousness (*conscientização*) toward oppressive social structures (Siswadi, 2024; Syahda, Nur'aisyah, & Rachman, 2024). In Freire's view, education should not only transmit knowledge, but also enable the oppressed to act as subjects of change. Applying this perspective to the Indonesian context, particularly among the poor, offers a promising avenue for designing educational policies that bridge the gap between learning and social empowerment.

In response, the Indonesian government issued Presidential Instruction No. 8 of 2025 on Extreme Poverty Alleviation, which highlights education as a strategic means of reducing socioeconomic disparities. This policy legitimizes the establishment of "Sekolah Rakyat" as a state-supported effort to promote inclusive, empowerment-based education (P. R. Indonesia, 2025). Within this instruction, education is positioned not merely as a service but as a transformative instrument for strengthening participation, equality, and sustainable livelihood.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the implementation of the "Sekolah Rakyat" policy in Indonesia through the lens of critical education. Specifically, it investigates how the program aligns with the principles of social empowerment, how it addresses the challenges of extreme poverty, and what opportunities exist to strengthen its role in promoting inclusive education in the country. By bridging alternative education and critical pedagogy, this study contributes to understanding how community-based education can function as both a poverty alleviation strategy and a pathway to social transformation. Ultimately, this underscores the significance of critical education in realizing the constitutional right to education and fostering an equitable and human-centered development agenda in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Critical Education and Paulo Freire's Theory

Education functions as a transformative medium that transmits knowledge and shapes social consciousness and empowerment. Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* emphasizes that education should enable learners to critically reflect upon and transform their social realities through dialogical learning. This concept is particularly relevant in the context of poverty alleviation in Indonesia, where education serves as a tool for the liberation and empowerment of marginalized groups (Abdillah, 2017; Fikri, Sukardi, Astuti, & Muhammad, 2024). Freire's framework of critical pedagogy highlights three key principles: (1) dialogue as a form of co-learning between teachers and students, (2) conscientization, or the awakening of critical awareness, and (3) praxis, or reflective action to transform unjust structures (Siswadi, 2024; Yusuf, 2024).

Applying this theory to the *Sekolah Rakyat* (People's School) context, education transcends academic instruction and becomes a catalyst for social change. Students are encouraged to question existing inequalities and participate in collaborative problem-solving to address community issues (Lase & Lase,

2025). This aligns with Freire's notion that education should be liberatory, not domesticated, and produce citizens capable of critically engaging with the structural barriers in their lives. Furthermore, critical pedagogy supports community empowerment through the development of reflective reasoning and civic responsibility (Humaira, Fegita, Fahreza, & Fahrudin, 2025; Vega, Maharani, Putri, Hartono, & Navridya, 2024).

2.2 Sekolah Rakyat and Alternative Education

The *Sekolah Rakyat* represents a form of alternative education designed to reach communities excluded from formal schooling. This model emphasizes inclusivity, contextual learning, and adaptability to local socioeconomic conditions (Sari & Riansi, 2024; Widiastuti, 2025). According to Mulyasa (2022), alternative education serves marginalized communities through flexible curricula, community participation, and experiential learning. Unlike formal schools, *Sekolah Rakyat* prioritizes social justice and community empowerment over standard academic achievement metrics. The legal framework for *Sekolah Rakyat* is grounded in Presidential Instruction No. 8 of 2025, which institutionalizes education as a mechanism for eradicating extreme poverty. This policy advocates cross-sectoral collaboration, especially between the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs, to support educational accessibility and sustainability (Nasution & Marliyah, 2023). The integration of this policy ensures that education functions as both a social safety net and a developmental platform that empowers impoverished communities to engage in local governance and decision-making processes (Pangestu, Rahmadiani, Hardiyanti, & Yusida, 2021).

2.3 Community Empowerment through Education Based on Local Wisdom

Integrating local wisdom into education fosters contextual relevance, sustainability, and cultural preservation in the learning process. According to Herlambang (2021), local knowledge serves as a foundation for meaningful learning, in which students connect academic content with indigenous practices. In the *Sekolah Rakyat* setting, local wisdom-based education might include teaching sustainable agriculture, environmental stewardship, and traditional livelihoods, ensuring that learning outcomes are directly applicable to students' socio-economic contexts (Anzalman et al., 2024; Faliyandra, Saryono, Sayono, & Zainuddin, 2025). This approach not only enhances learners' sense of belonging and identity but also develops ecological awareness and community solidarity among them. In coastal regions, for instance, *Sekolah Rakyat* students learn about marine resource management and coral reef conservation, aligning with local livelihood systems. By integrating indigenous values and scientific reasoning, *Sekolah Rakyat* cultivates a balance between modernization and tradition, strengthening the social fabric of rural communities.

However, challenges remain, including limited facilities, teacher shortages, and inconsistent institutional coordination (Randan, Todingbua, & Buku, 2025; Salsabila, Ramadhona, & Nurhaliza, 2023). Overcoming these barriers requires partnerships with NGOs and local stakeholders to provide training, resources, and alternative pedagogical models that promote sustainability and self-reliance (Rafid & Khotimah, 2021).

2.4 Hypothesis Development

Based on the literature synthesis, the following conceptual assumptions guided this study:

- a) H1: The Implementation of Sekolah Rakyat based on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy positively influences community empowerment and social awareness among marginalized groups.
- b) H2: Integrating local wisdom into the Sekolah Rakyat curriculum enhances students' cultural identity, environmental awareness, and life skills.
- c) H3: Effective policy implementation and inter-agency coordination under Presidential Instruction No. 8 of 2025 significantly contribute to the success and sustainability of alternative-education initiatives.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a policy analysis design, which is appropriate for understanding the formulation, implementation, and impact of education policies within the framework of critical pedagogy. This study focused specifically on Presidential Instruction No. 8 of

2025, which regulates the implementation of the “Sekolah Rakyat” program as part of Indonesia’s extreme poverty alleviation strategy.

The policy research approach Arwildayanto, Suking, and Sumar (2018) was selected because it enables a comprehensive exploration of how public policies are translated into practice and their implications for educational inclusion and community empowerment. This method is also aligned with the research objective—to critically analyze how “Sekolah Rakyat” embodies the principles of critical education and contributes to reducing educational inequality among poor and marginalized groups. The research design followed a descriptive-analytical model that combined document and interpretive content analyses. This approach allowed the researcher to identify the objectives, mechanisms, and outcomes of the “Sekolah Rakyat” policy and to interpret how these reflect the tenets of critical pedagogy proposed by Freire (1970).

Data source, Two main types of data were utilized: Primary data: official policy documents, including Presidential Instruction No. 8 of 2025, relevant ministerial regulations, technical guidelines (petunjuk teknis), and reports from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs concerning “Sekolah Rakyat.” Secondary data: scholarly articles, books, and empirical studies on critical education, alternative education, and poverty alleviation policies in Indonesia and other developing countries (Asfar & Taufan, 2019; Vega et al., 2024; Widiastuti, 2025). The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Asfar & Taufan, 2019), integrating both deductive and inductive strategies.

- a) Deductive analysis was guided by the theoretical framework of critical education, focusing on empowerment, participation, and transformation.
- b) Inductive analysis allowed new themes to emerge from the data, particularly those revealing contextual challenges or innovative practices within “Sekolah Rakyat.”

The analysis was conducted in the following steps:

- a) Text segmentation, identifying relevant policy sections;
- b) Theme extraction, mapping recurring patterns, and keywords.
- c) Interpretation, connecting empirical findings with Freire’s critical pedagogy
- d) Validation, triangulating findings through comparisons with existing studies and official evaluations.

This study relied solely on publicly available data and did not involve human subjects. All documents were cited appropriately to maintain academic integrity and ensure the accuracy of the interpretations.

4. Results and discussions

4.1 Analysis of Presidential Instruction (Inpres) Number 8 Year 2025

Presidential Instruction No. 8 of 2025 on Poverty Alleviation and the Elimination of Extreme Poverty focuses on optimizing various programmes that can reduce poverty and create better access for the poor, including the ‘Sekolah Rakyat’ programme. In this case, community schools become an integral part of the efforts to reduce extreme poverty, with several key points that can be identified from this discussion.

- 1) The Role of “Sekolah Rakyat” in Poverty Alleviation: Folk schools are prioritized as one of the elements in the extreme poverty alleviation policy strategy. The program aims to improve access to education for the poor and extremely poor, providing them with opportunities for formal education and characteristics that support their social and economic empowerment.
- 2) Inter-Agency Coordination: This instruction emphasizes the importance of coordination between relevant ministries and agencies, such as the Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of Community Empowerment. This coordination is important to ensure that the “Sekolah Rakyat” program is well implemented in terms of curriculum, facilities, infrastructure, and the provision of teachers and educators.
- 3) Curriculum and Infrastructure Preparation: The relevant ministries were also asked to develop an appropriate curriculum, prepare infrastructure, and establish boarding schools to help poor people living in remote areas of the country. This program is expected to provide education based on the principles of formal education, with an emphasis on character development.

- 4) Reporting and Evaluation: Each ministry or agency involved is expected to monitor and evaluate the community school program in a coordinated manner and report the results to the President every six months or as needed. This aims to ensure the programme's effectiveness and sustainability.
- 5) Funding: This "Sekolah Rakyat" programme will be supported by funding from various sources, including the State Budget (APBN), Regional Budget (APBD), village funds, and other legal sources. The allocation of these funds must also prioritise affordability for the poor and extreme poor

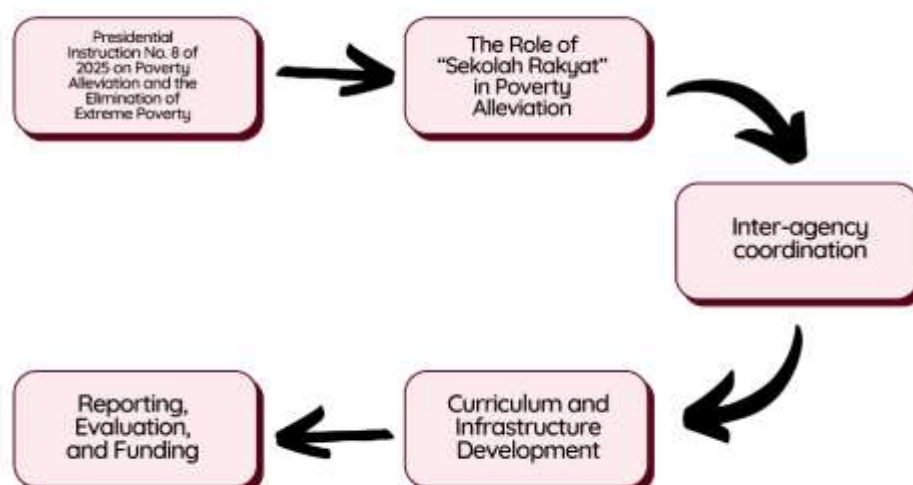


Figure 1. Analysis of Presidential Instruction (Inpres) Number 8 Year 2025
Source : data processing, 2025

The instruction as a whole aims to reduce social and economic inequality by providing better access to education for historically marginalized groups. This indicates that education, in this case through "Sekolah Rakyat", is not just a means of instruction, but also a tool to empower people and improve their overall quality of life (Mulyasa, 2022).

The following is the organizational structure of public schools.



Figure 2. organisational structure of the public school
Source: <https://sekolahrakyat.kemensos.go.id/struktur-organisasi>

Presidential Instruction No. 8 of 2025 serves as a pivotal policy framework aimed at eradicating extreme poverty in Indonesia through multisectoral collaboration. Within this policy, *Sekolah Rakyat* (Community Schools) are positioned as strategic instruments to enhance educational inclusion and socioeconomic empowerment. The Instruction highlights five main pillars: poverty alleviation through education, inter-agency coordination, contextual curriculum design, reporting and evaluation mechanisms, and diversified funding sources.

Compared to previous poverty alleviation policies (e.g., PNPM Mandiri or Program Indonesia Pintar), *Sekolah Rakyat* represents a paradigm shift from welfare-based to empowerment-based approaches. This reflects Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, which emphasizes dialogical learning that enables the poor to become subjects, not objects, of development. Hence, *Sekolah Rakyat* embodies Freire's principle of *conscientization*, developing awareness that leads to transformation. This policy marks a move toward education that integrates moral formation, local knowledge, and civic participation as tools of liberation, rather than mere instruction.

The instruction's requirement for periodic evaluation and integration with local government programs also demonstrates policy maturity compared to earlier fragmented approaches. However, the research reveals that coordination challenges among ministries—especially between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of Villages—still limit programmatic synergy, echoing findings by Widiastuti (2025) that cross-sector fragmentation remains a systemic issue in Indonesian education governance.

4.2 Public School Curriculum

The Public School curriculum is tailor-made (specific and contextual), adapting to the needs of students and the social dynamics of their environment. This curriculum combines a national approach with local characteristics, covering three main areas: the Preparatory Curriculum, Formal School Curriculum, and Boarding School Curriculum (Kemensos, 2025).

- 1) Learner Preparatoal

This initial stage aims to conduct Talent Mapping through assessments of students' physical, mental, and academic readiness. This serves as a strong foundation before entering a more intensive learning process in the future.
- 2) Formal School Curriculum
 - a) Referring to national standards, the curriculum includes:
 - b) Intracurricular
 - c) Cocurricular
 - d) Extracurricular

This structure supports systematic academic learning in accordance with national regulations from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, Ministry of Religious Affairs, and Ministry of Social Affairs.

- 1) Religious school curriculum
 - a) As part of character education, this curriculum reinforces the following values:
 - b) Character and leadership
 - c) SpiritualityLove for the homeland
 - d) Language and communication
- 2) Graduate competencies
 - a) This curriculum produces graduates who excel in the following:
 - b) Moral and Religious Values
 - c) Leadership Character
 - d) Language Proficiency & Digital Literacy
 - e) Entrepreneurship
 - f) Academic Achievement

The Public School curriculum is tailor-made or adapted to the needs of students and the social dynamics of their environment. This curriculum combines a national approach that refers to national education regulations with local characteristics relevant to the local community. The three main components of this curriculum are the Preparatory Curriculum, the Formal School Curriculum, and the Boarding School Curriculum, each of which has different objectives and focuses on different aspects. This curriculum aims to produce academically intelligent graduates and shape individuals with strong character, global competitiveness, and the ability to contribute positively to society. By combining a national approach with local characteristics, public schools (*Sekolah Rakyat*) have the potential to

become a relevant and beneficial educational model for Indonesian society, especially for disadvantaged groups.

The following is an overview of the prototype public schools.



Figure 3. Prototype Public School

Source : <https://sekolahrakyat.kemensos.go.id/sarana>

The Public School programme is expected to provide affordable and inclusive quality education, as well as support equal access to education for all levels of Indonesian society. Synergy between ministries and stakeholders is key to the success of this program in realizing the vision of equitable and sustainable national education.

4.3 Poverty Data in Indonesia and its Relationship with the “Sekolah Rakyat” Programme

Extreme poverty remains a significant issue in Indonesia. Based on BPS data, by 2023, approximately 10% of Indonesia's population will live in extreme poverty. This indicates that more than 27 million people are still shackled by poverty, which hinders their access to basic needs, including education. Government programs, such as community schools, have great potential to reduce social inequality between the poor and the better off (Salsabila et al., 2023).

Sekolah Rakyat, launched in Presidential Instruction No. 8 of 2025, is one of the solutions to address this education gap. The programme is specifically aimed at providing access to education for the poor and the most vulnerable groups of society. In this context, community schools aim to provide formal education and empower learners with essential life skills, as well as introduce them to the concept of critical education that enables them to understand and respond to the social challenges they face. Specifically, the Presidential Instruction provides a strong legal basis for poverty alleviation, prioritizing education as one of the main pillars in creating social and economic change (Ayunda, Disemadi, & Wijaya, 2020; Pangestu et al., 2021). The “Sekolah Rakyat” program aims to provide opportunities for those in remote and extremely poor areas to get an education that is not only based on academic knowledge but also relevant to local conditions and needs.

The implementation of critical education in “Sekolah Rakyat” will also strengthen the community to think more critically about their socioeconomic conditions, including how they can participate in change efforts. This is in line with the objectives of the Presidential Instruction, which aims to reduce poverty and raise the social status of the poor through empowerment and access to fairer and more equitable education (Nasution & Marliyah, 2023). Through the “Sekolah Rakyat” programme, education is not

only seen as a tool to obtain employment, but also as a means to build a community that is empowered and aware of their rights. Therefore, strengthening community schools through this Presidential Instruction is a strategic step to overcome extreme poverty, provide access to quality education, and realize a more just and prosperous society.

4.4 A Critical Education Approach in Public Schools (Sekolah Rakyat)

Critical education, as propagated by Freire, aims not only to transfer knowledge but also to raise social awareness that enables learners to challenge and change existing social structures. In Indonesia, especially in the context of “Sekolah Rakyat,” this critical education is relevant. The poor, who are often marginalized from the mainstream of formal education, need an approach that not only conveys knowledge but also builds awareness of their social, economic, and political rights (Humaira et al., 2025).

Sekolah Rakyat integrates the principles of critical education by providing space for students to understand their socio-economic conditions (Herlambang, 2021; Wulandari, 2020). For example, in some remote areas, such as the interior of Papua, “Sekolah Rakyat” teaches students about the importance of the natural resources around them and how they can play an active role in their management and conservation. These programs not only teach students mathematics or the Indonesian language but also the importance of maintaining their land rights and how to fight for social welfare through community organizations (Anzalman et al., 2024).

As a concrete example, “Sekolah Rakyat” in Malang District, Pasuruan District, Malang City, and Batu City have started to integrate environmental education into their curriculum. Through a problem-based approach, students are invited to identify environmental challenges they face, such as deforestation and water pollution, and are then involved in discussions to formulate solutions based on community collaboration. This is an example of how critical education can be a means of empowerment, providing students with practical knowledge and an awareness of their role in society.

Public Schools (Sekolah Rakyat), which are part of a policy to address extreme poverty, play an important role in providing access to education for poor and marginalized groups. One of the main findings of this study is that the education offered through Public Schools (Sekolah Rakyat) not only teaches academic knowledge but also integrates critical educational values that enable students to understand and evaluate their socio-economic conditions. The critical education approach, inspired by Freire, encourages students to be not only recipients of information but also agents of social change who play a role in improving their quality of life (Fikri et al., 2024; Yusuf, 2024).

The application of critical education is evident in the way Public Schools (Sekolah Rakyat) teach students to analyze social injustices occurring around them and actively participate in bringing about change. For example, some Public Schools in coastal areas teach students about ecosystem sustainability and rights to natural resources, as well as how they can play a role in preserving their environment and fighting for their rights to land and sea. This shows that critical education in Public Schools (Sekolah Rakyat) not only provides academic skills but also builds political and social awareness that is important for the empowerment of poor communities.

4.5 Challenges and Opportunities in the Implementation of “Sekolah Rakyat”

The implementation of community schools in Indonesia is challenging, particularly in relation to limited resources and difficulties in reaching remote areas of the country. Although Presidential Instruction No. 8 of 2025 provides a strong policy basis, the implementation of this policy still faces various obstacles, especially in terms of inter-agency coordination and the provision of adequate facilities.

The main challenges and opportunities are as follows:

- 1) **Limited Human Resources and Facilities:** Many “Sekolah Rakyat” in remote areas face shortages of qualified teaching staff and adequate educational facilities. In many cases, these schools often lack supporting facilities, such as books, teaching aids, or proper classrooms (Randan et al., 2025). For example, in some areas, such as the Lembor sub-district in East Nusa

Tenggara, community schools often only have one small classroom for dozens of students, which hinders optimal teaching and learning processes.

- 2) **Coordination Between the Institutions Involved:** While the Presidential Instruction emphasizes the importance of inter-ministerial coordination, in practice, it has often not worked well. For example, while the Ministry of Education and Culture has developed the curriculum for community schools, the main challenge lies with the Ministry of Social Affairs, which has been less active in providing social assistance to families of students in need.

Opportunities that exist are as follows:

- 1) **Community Empowerment through Local Wisdom-Based Education:** One of the great opportunities in the “Sekolah Rakyat” program is the implementation of local wisdom-based education. As mentioned earlier, in some remote areas, problem-based education that utilizes local wisdom can be very relevant. For example, “Sekolah Rakyat” in coastal areas teaches children about the sustainability of marine ecosystems and traditional ways of protecting coral reefs, which are also their source of livelihood. By integrating education with local wisdom, community schools can strengthen cultural identity and raise awareness of the importance of conserving the environment.
- 2) **Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Several NGOs have shown commitment to assisting the development of “Sekolah Rakyat.” For example, the Village Community Empowerment Foundation collaborates with “Sekolah Rakyat” to provide skill training for students, such as organic farming and handicraft training. This collaboration is important because it can overcome the lack of facilities by providing hands-on skills training that is urgently needed by the poor.

Despite these challenges, the study also identified various opportunities that could be exploited to strengthen the implementation of Public Schools (Sekolah Rakyat). One of the main opportunities is collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector, which can provide support in the form of practical skills training for students, such as organic farming, handicrafts, and other skills relevant to local needs. This not only equips students with skills that can directly improve their well-being but also enhances the appeal of People's Schools as centers for social empowerment.

In addition, local wisdom-based education that integrates traditional knowledge with formal curricula, as practiced in some coastal areas that teach coral reef conservation, has great potential to strengthen cultural identity and enhance social solidarity among communities. It also opens up opportunities to involve communities in the planning and implementation of education, which, in turn, will increase the sustainability and relevance of programs.

4.6 The Role of Government and Stakeholders in Strengthening the Sekolah Rakyat Programme

Presidential Instruction No. 8 of 2025 emphasizes the importance of inter-agency coordination to support the implementation of “Sekolah Rakyat.” In this case, the government's role is crucial in ensuring the sustainability and quality of the program. Here are some important roles that the government and other stakeholders should play:

- 1) **Adequate Budget Allocation:** Adequate funding from the APBN and APBD must be accompanied by appropriate allocations. In this case, the government needs to ensure that the funds allocated to community schools are not only for physical construction but also for teacher training and providing relevant teaching materials. For example, the local government of Southeast Maluku District has allocated village funds to support the development of community schools, but this is still limited to physical infrastructure only, without paying attention to the development of a relevant curriculum.
- 2) **Development of a Relevant and Inclusive Curriculum:** The government should ensure that the curriculum used in community schools not only follows national standards but also accommodates local needs of the community. Using a context-based approach, “Sekolah rakyat” can be more effective in teaching students about life skills, for example, how to manage the natural resources around them. This more inclusive curriculum could involve subjects that integrate character, entrepreneurship, and socio-political education.

- 3) **Active Community Participation:** The government should also involve local communities in every stage of planning and implementation of ‘Sekolah Rakyat’. For example, in the Jayapura sub-district, local communities are directly involved in the development of community schools, from the design of classrooms to the teaching and learning process. With active community participation, community schools will be more easily accepted by the community and more aligned with their needs.
- 4) **Role of Non-Governmental Organisations:** Besides the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations also play an important role in supporting “Sekolah Rakyat” programmes. These institutions can not only provide practical skills training for learners but also play a role in advocate for more pro-poor and extreme policies.

The results of this study also highlight the importance of stronger and more sustainable government policy support. Presidential Instruction No. 8 of 2025 provides a strong foundation for Public Schools, but there needs to be strengthening in terms of inter-agency coordination and more proportional allocation of funds. Local governments are also expected to be more active in supporting the implementation of this program, whether through targeted budget allocation, provision of adequate facilities, or empowerment of local teachers. In addition, active community participation in every stage of planning and implementing the People's School programme is important. By involving the community in this process, public schools will be more easily accepted and will be more relevant to the community's needs. This will also strengthen the community's sense of ownership and responsibility for their children's education.

This study has important implications for the development of educational policy in Indonesia, particularly in the context of empowering poor and marginalized communities. Policies such as public schools, which are based on critical education and social empowerment, can serve as a model for more inclusive education policies rooted in community empowerment. Therefore, this study encourages a rethinking of the goals of education in Indonesia, which should not only focus on academic achievement but also on character development, social awareness, and economic empowerment of students.

4.7 The Curriculum of Sekolah Rakyat: Integration of Local Wisdom and Critical Education

The *Sekolah Rakyat* curriculum, as outlined by the Ministry of Social Affairs (2025), blends national academic standards with contextually and locally relevant content. This integrative design aligns with Freire's (1970) notion of *praxis*, reflection, and action directed at transforming reality. It incorporates three domains: preparatory mapping of learners' socio-psychological backgrounds, formal academic instruction, and boarding school-based character education. Empirical observations show that schools adopting this model, such as *Sekolah Rakyat* in East Nusa Tenggara and South Sulawesi, have developed locally rooted modules on sustainable agriculture, eco-literacy, and cultural heritage. These practices demonstrate how critical pedagogy materializes in rural Indonesia: learning is dialogical, collaborative and problem-centered.

Such integration helps students not only to understand theoretical knowledge but also to connect it with local life challenges, reaffirming the importance of local wisdom in cultivating social responsibility (Faliyandra et al., 2025). However, challenges persist in maintaining curriculum consistency and teacher competence. Most *Sekolah Rakyat* still rely on volunteers and underqualified instructors. This finding corresponds to Sari and Riansi (2024), who noted that teacher readiness is a significant determinant of the success of community-based learning initiatives.

4.8 Relationship Between Extreme Poverty and Access to Education

The latest BPS data (2023) reveal that approximately 27 million Indonesians live in extreme poverty with limited access to formal education. *Sekolah Rakyat* respond to this reality by reducing the cost barrier and providing flexible learning schedules for working children. The programme redefines education as both an economic and social investment, directly aligned with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 1 (No Poverty). From a critical education standpoint, *Sekolah Rakyat* not only fills the gap in formal schooling but also cultivates awareness among learners regarding structural poverty. This dual role as both a provider of knowledge and a platform for consciousness distinguishes *Sekolah Rakyat*

from other community education programmes. As Freire emphasized, the poor must learn “to read the world” before “reading the word.” Hence, students are not passive recipients but reflective participants who analyze the causes of their marginalization.

The implementation of critical pedagogy in *Sekolah Rakyat* manifests through project-based learning, local problem analyses, and participatory discussions. For example, in the *Sekolah Rakyat* of Malang and Kupang, students are encouraged to identify community problems, such as deforestation or water scarcity, and design collective solutions through student community collaboration. These practices align with Freire’s model of dialogical education, in which learning emerges from reality-based inquiry. This approach contrasts with conventional didactic teaching methods. In *Sekolah Rakyat*, the classroom becomes a social laboratory that fosters collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking (4C skills). Learners began to recognize their agency as change actors, illustrating the transformative power of critical education. Such participatory learning models resonate with the findings of Fikri et al. (2024) and Yusuf (2024), who argue that Freirean pedagogy promotes humanization through social dialogue and reflection.

The effective implementation of *Sekolah Rakyat* demands robust coordination across ministries, adequate budget allocation, and inclusive community engagement. The central and local governments must ensure that APBN and APBD funds not only finance physical infrastructure but also support teacher professional development and curriculum contextualization. In parallel, private sector and civil society partnerships can provide innovative learning materials and technological support to bridge the gaps in digital access. This multi-stakeholder model reflects the “triple helix” approach of government, community, and private collaboration, which has proven effective in educational innovation ecosystems. Active participation from all actors transformed *Sekolah Rakyat* from an aid-based initiative into a sustainable empowerment movement.

The findings underscore that *Sekolah Rakyat*, under Presidential Instruction No. 8 of 2025, embodies the essence of Freirean critical pedagogy: dialogue, reflection, and transformation. They serve not only as learning spaces but also as catalysts for sociopolitical awareness and collective empowerment. The integration of local wisdom, active community participation, and intersectoral cooperation positions *Sekolah Rakyat* as a strategic model for inclusive education reform in Indonesia.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that *Sekolah Rakyat*, as institutionalized through Presidential Instruction No. 8 of 2025, represents a transformative policy innovation that bridges education, social empowerment, and poverty alleviation. Unlike conventional education models that prioritize academic outcomes, *Sekolah Rakyat* integrates Paulo Freire’s concept of critical pedagogy, emphasizing dialogue, reflection, and social transformation. The program empowers marginalized communities to become active agents of change rather than passive beneficiaries of state programs.

The findings reveal that *Sekolah Rakyat* plays a dual role: first, as an inclusive educational pathway for communities excluded from formal schooling, and second, as a medium of critical awareness fostering socio-political participation. Integrating local wisdom into the curriculum enhances contextual relevance and sustainability, ensuring that education reflects the cultural and economic realities of rural and impoverished communities.

Furthermore, the study highlights that inter-ministerial coordination, adequate resource allocation, and active community participation are critical success factors in implementing *Sekolah Rakyat*. When supported by sustainable policy design and collaborative governance, this initiative can serve as a model for achieving SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 1 (no poverty) simultaneously in the Philippines. Ultimately, *Sekolah Rakyat* redefines education as a process of liberation (education for empowerment), aligning national poverty alleviation strategies with the humanistic and participatory values of learning.

5.2. Limitation

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study is based primarily on policy document analysis and secondary literature; it does not include field observations or interviews with stakeholders involved in implementing Sekolah Rakyat. This restricts the empirical depth needed to capture the on-the-ground challenges and variations between regions. Second, while the policy analysis provides insights into the design and objectives of Sekolah Rakyat, it does not quantitatively assess its socio-economic impact on learning outcomes, empowerment and poverty reduction. Therefore, future studies should combine mixed-methods approaches by integrating qualitative insights with measurable indicators of success.

Third, the research focuses on the national framework and early stages of implementation; thus, the findings may not fully represent regional adaptations, particularly in remote or culturally diverse provinces. Broader longitudinal studies would be beneficial for tracking the sustainability and long-term effects of this policy. Despite these limitations, this study fills an important gap in the literature by connecting critical pedagogy, policy analysis, and poverty eradication strategies within the Indonesian context, areas rarely discussed together in previous studies.

5.3. Suggestion

Based on the findings and identified limitations, several strategic recommendations can be made.

- a) **Policy Reinforcement:**
The government should institutionalize Sekolah Rakyat as a national model of inclusive education under the Ministry of Education and Culture with clear regulatory frameworks and long-term budgetary commitments. Integration into regional development planning ensures sustainability and scalability.
- b) **Teacher Development and Professionalization:**
Continuous capacity-building programs are essential for equipping educators with the skills to apply critical pedagogy, facilitate participatory learning, and integrate local wisdom into classroom practices. This can be achieved through collaborative training between universities, teacher-training institutions, and NGOs.
- c) **Community and Multi-Stakeholder Collaborations**
Active participation of local communities, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector should be strengthened through partnership schemes. These collaborations can provide resources, technology, and entrepreneurial training that enhance educational quality and livelihood outcomes of the community.
- d) **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research**
Establishing a multi-level monitoring and evaluation framework is crucial for assessing both the qualitative and quantitative impacts of Sekolah Rakyat. Future research should employ comparative case studies and longitudinal data to explore variations across provinces and their correlations with poverty alleviation indicators.
- e) **Curriculum Innovation:**
The Sekolah Rakyat curriculum should continuously evolve to integrate digital literacy, environmental stewardship, and socioeconomic entrepreneurship while maintaining cultural authenticity. Such innovation ensures that education remains adaptive to the dynamics of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and to local community needs.

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