

One Region, Unequal Opportunities: Educational Disparities and Social Mobility Prospects in Kediri City and Regency, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Regional inequality is still one of the main challenges in realizing equitable development in Indonesia, including between Kediri City and Kediri Regency. Despite being in the same geographical area and having close socioeconomic ties, the two regions still show differences in access to education, quality of human resources, and economic opportunities. This study aims to analyze the regional inequality between Kediri City and Kediri Regency and examine the role of education in encouraging community social mobility. The research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with the library *research* method. The data used are secondary data obtained from the Central Statistics Agency government reports and various relevant scientific literature. The results of the study show that Kediri City has higher achievements of the Human Development Index (HDI), average length of schooling, and the availability of better educational facilities than Kediri Regency. These differences affect job opportunities, income levels, and people's social mobility. Education plays a role as an investment in human *capital* that can increase the competence, productivity, and

competitiveness of the workforce so that it becomes an important instrument in reducing regional inequality. Therefore, it is necessary to distribute equal access to education, improve the quality of educators, and strengthen educational infrastructure in Kediri Regency to support inclusive development and increase community social mobility.

Keywords: Regional Inequality, Education, Social Mobility, Human Capital, Kediri City, Kediri Regency

INTRODUCTION

Regional inequality is still one of the main challenges in development in Indonesia. Differences in the level of economic growth, the quality of infrastructure, access to public services, and the quality of human resources cause development results not to be felt equally by all regions (Evellin Dewi Lusiana, Henny Pramoedyo, and Sudarmawan 2021; Walujadi, Indupurnahayu, and Endei, 2022). This condition does not only occur between provinces, but can also be found in administratively close areas, such as Kediri City and Kediri Regency in East Java Province. From a development economics perspective, regional inequality has the

potential to widen the gap in people's welfare if it is not balanced with equity-oriented development policies.

Kediri City is developing as a center of trade, services, education, and industry that has relatively more dynamic economic activities than Kediri Regency. On the other hand, Kediri Regency is still dominated by the agriculture, plantation, and micro business sectors that have different development characteristics. These differences in economic structure affect the quality of human development, especially in the aspects of education, employment opportunities, and community income. Data from the Central Statistics Agency in 2024 show that the Human Development Index (HDI) of Kediri City reached 81.24, while Kediri Regency was 74.88. In addition, the average length of school and the expectation of length of school in Kediri City are also higher than that of Kediri Regency. The difference in these indicators shows that development inequality is not only reflected in the economic aspect, but also in the quality of education owned by the community.

Education is seen as one of the important factors in improving the quality of human resources while expanding people's opportunities to obtain a better life (Li, 2022). The Human Capital Theory proposed and developed by Min (2025) explains that investment in education can increase individual knowledge, skills, productivity, and income. Thus, education not only functions as a process of knowledge transfer, but also becomes a strategic instrument in increasing the competitiveness of the workforce, expanding employment opportunities, and encouraging social mobility of the community (Hulík & Hulíková Tesárková, 2020; Susanthi et al., 2023). Various government policies have been directed to expand access to education through the construction of educational facilities, assistance with education fees, and improving the quality of educators (Dean, 2024). However, studies show that access to quality education is still not

completely equal, especially between urban and rural areas. People in urban areas generally have better access to quality schools, universities, information technology, and skills training than people in relatively disadvantaged areas (Cuba & Kangas, 2026; Gentry et al., 2024). These disparities in access ultimately affect opportunities for formal employment, income levels, and social mobility. Several previous studies have examined the relationship between education, economic development, and social mobility. Goczek, Witkowska, and Witkowski (2021) explained that improving the quality of education contributes to economic growth through increased labor productivity. Milner (2025) also shows that access to quality education can increase opportunities for intergenerational social mobility. At the national level, several studies have discussed the influence of education inequality on economic development and the quality of human resources (Munir & Kanwal, 2020). However, most of these studies still focus on provincial- or national-level analysis. In contrast, studies that compare two administratively adjacent areas with different development characteristics are still relatively limited (Alshadidi & Aldabiwee, 2022). In addition, the relationship between regional inequality, education, and social mobility in the context of Kediri City and Kediri Regency has not been widely discussed in an integrated manner.

Based on these conditions, this study seeks to fill the research gap by analyzing the relationship between regional inequality and education as a factor that affects the social mobility of people in two regions that have different development characteristics. The novelty of this research lies in the comparative analysis between Kediri City and Kediri Regency by integrating the perspective of regional inequality, Human Capital Theory, and social mobility in explaining the difference in the quality of human development. This approach is expected to provide a more comprehensive

picture of the importance of equal distribution of education as a strategy to reduce regional inequality.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze regional inequality between Kediri City and Kediri Regency and examine the role of education in encouraging community social mobility. The results of the research are expected to contribute to the development of development economics studies, as well as provide input for local governments in formulating policies for the equitable distribution of education and more inclusive human resource development that are more inclusive.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Regional Inequality

Regional inequality is a condition of differences in the level of economic, social, and welfare development between regions caused by differences in resources, infrastructure, investment, and the quality of human resources (Bański et al., 2024). From a development economics perspective, regional inequality is a consequence of economic growth that does not take place evenly, causing differences in income levels and economic opportunities between regions (Hamrullah et al., 2026). One of the theories that explains regional inequality is *Williamson's Regional Inequality Theory*, put forward by Stohr (2018). This theory explains that in the early stages of development, economic growth tends to be concentrated in urban areas that have better infrastructure, investment, and economic activity than the surrounding areas. As a result, there is a development gap between developed areas and relatively underdeveloped areas. However, as the equitable distribution of development, infrastructure development, and expansion of investment by the government increases, the level of inequality is expected to decrease further.

In the context of regional development, regional inequality is reflected not only in differences in income levels but also in the quality of human development, which

includes education, health, and job opportunities (Rai, 2023). Therefore, human development indicators are often used to describe the level of inequality between regions because they reflect the ability of communities to access various development resources.

In the context of Kediri City and Kediri Regency, Williamson's theory explains that the concentration of economic, industrial, trade, and service activities in Kediri City encourages improvements in the quality of human development, compared to Kediri Regency, which is still dominated by the agricultural sector and rural areas. These differences affect people's access to education, employment opportunities, and welfare levels. Thus, this theory is the basis for explaining that inequality in development between regions is not only influenced by economic factors, but is also closely related to the equal distribution of access to education as one of the elements of human development.

2. Human Capital Theory

The Human Capital Theory, introduced by Schultz and further developed by Baker (2025), states that education is a form of investment that can improve the quality of human resources. Education not only enhances individual knowledge and skills, but also contributes to increased productivity, income, and labor competitiveness.

In economic development, investment in education provides long-term benefits because it produces a workforce that is more competent, innovative, and able to adapt to changing needs in the world of work (Tawil et al., 2026). Individuals with higher levels of education have a greater chance of obtaining formal employment, increasing income, and improving their standard of living. Thus, education not only provides benefits to individuals, but also contributes to increasing regional productivity and sustainable economic growth.

For local governments, investment in the education sector is one of the important

strategies in improving the quality of human resources while narrowing the development gap between regions. The better the quality of education received by the community, the greater the opportunity to create a competitive workforce to improve community welfare and strengthen regional development (Y. Li et al., 2024).

3. Social Mobility

Social mobility is the transfer of social or economic status of a person or group from one social layer to another. According to Tang (2023), social mobility can occur vertically or horizontally, depending on changes in the individual's position in the social structure. Education is one of the main factors that enable vertical social mobility because it increases a person's competence, job opportunities, and income level. In the context of regional development, people who have access to quality education tend to have a greater opportunity to improve their socioeconomic conditions. Education provides the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed in the world of work, so that it opens up opportunities to get more productive and higher-income jobs. On the other hand, limited access to education can hinder social mobility, thereby strengthening inequality between regions and between generations (Jorrat & Marqués-Perales, 2022).

Thus, education serves as a mechanism that links improving the quality of human resources with opportunities for social mobility. The more equitable access to education that the community has, the greater the opportunity to improve welfare and reduce social disparities in a region.

4. Education as an Instrument of Regional Development

Education is one of the main indicators in measuring the quality of human development. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the education dimension in the Human Development Index (HDI) is measured through the indicators of Length of School

Expectancy and Average School Length. Both indicators reflect the ability of a region to provide access to quality education for the community (Urzúa & Vilbert, 2023). Improving the quality of education will produce a more productive workforce, increase innovation, and strengthen regional competitiveness in attracting investment. In contrast, areas with low access to education tend to experience lower productivity, limited employment opportunities, and higher poverty rates (Abdulla et al., 2022). Therefore, the development of the education sector is one of the strategic policies in reducing regional inequality and increasing people's social mobility.

In this study, education is positioned as a strategic factor that links regional inequality with social mobility. The difference in access and quality of education between Kediri City and Kediri Regency is seen as one of the factors that affect the quality of human resources, opportunities to get jobs, and the ability of the community to improve their standard of living. Thus, equitable distribution of education is an important part of realizing more inclusive and sustainable regional development

MATERIALS & METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with the library research method. This approach was chosen because the research aims to analyze the phenomenon of regional inequality between Kediri City and Kediri Regency and examine the role of education in encouraging social mobility based on official statistical data and various relevant scientific literature. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon through the interpretation of various sources of information, so it is suitable for studying regional development issues supported by secondary data.

The data used are secondary data obtained from official publications of the Central Statistics Agency of Kediri City, Central Statistics Agency of Kediri Regency, Central Statistics Agency of East Java

Province, National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas), Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank, as well as various scientific articles, books, and research reports relevant to the topic of regional inequality: education, and social mobility. The data analyzed included the Human Development Index (HDI), School Length of Expectancy, Average School Length, poverty rate, regional development characteristics, and supporting information regarding the socioeconomic conditions of Kediri City and Kediri Regency.

Data collection is carried out through documentation techniques by examining various documents, statistical reports, government policies, books, and scientific articles related to the research focus. All data sources were selected based on the level of relevance to the research objectives, the credibility of the publishing institution, and up-to-date information to provide a comprehensive picture of the conditions of regional and educational inequality in both research areas.

Data analysis was carried out using comparative descriptive analysis. The analysis stage begins by identifying and collecting data from various sources, then grouping data based on research indicators, namely the Human Development Index, education indicators, poverty levels, and regional development characteristics. Furthermore, a comparison of conditions between Kediri City and Kediri Regency was carried out to identify the forms of inequality that occurred. The results of the comparison were then interpreted using Williamson's Regional Inequality Theory, Human Capital Theory, and social mobility theory so that an understanding of the relationship between regional inequality, access to education, and opportunities for social mobility of the community was obtained.

To increase the credibility of the research results, triangulation of sources was carried

out of comparing data obtained from various official government publications, international institutions, and relevant scientific literature. This technique is used to ensure the consistency of information while minimizing the bias that may arise when using only one data source. The results of the analysis are then systematically compiled as a basis for drawing conclusions and formulating policy implications related to equitable distribution of education and regional development.

RESULT

The inequality of development between Kediri City and Kediri Regency is still seen in various socioeconomic indicators, especially in the aspects of education and the quality of human resources. Although the two regions are located in one administrative area in East Java Province, the development of the education sector shows a significant difference. These differences affect the quality of human resources, job opportunities, and social mobility of the community.

Table 1. Comparison of Human Development Index (HDI) of Kediri City and Kediri Regency, Year 2024

Region	HDI
Kediri City	81.24
Kediri Regency	74.88

Source: Central Statistics Agency of Kediri City and Kediri Regency (2024).

Table 1 shows that the Human Development Index (HDI) of Kediri City reached 81.24, while Kediri Regency was 74.88. The difference indicates that there is an imbalance in the quality of human development between the two regions. The higher HDI in Kediri City shows that people have better access to education, health services, and a decent standard of living compared to people in Kediri Regency.

Table 2. Comparison of Education Indicators Kediri City and Kediri Regency in 2024

Indicator	Kediri City	Kediri Regency
Long School Expectations (Year)	15.92	13.88
Average School Length (Year)	11.62	8.43

Source: Central Statistics Agency (2024)

Based on Table 2, the people of Kediri City have higher expectations of school length and average school length than Kediri Regency. This indicates that public access to secondary and higher education is better in Kediri City. On the other hand, the low average school length in Kediri Regency indicates that some people have not been able to complete education to a higher level. These differences have the potential to

affect the quality of the workforce and better job opportunities.

Table 3. Poverty Rate Kediri City and Kediri Regency in 2024

Region	Poverty Rate (%)
Kediri City	6.51
Kediri Regency	9.16

Source: Central Statistics Agency of East Java (2024)

The data in Table 3 show that the poverty rate in Kediri Regency is still higher than that of Kediri City. The high poverty rate has the potential to be one of the factors that limit people's access to quality education. Economic limitations cause some families to have difficulty financing their children's education to a higher level, so that the opportunity to improve social status through education becomes smaller.

Table 4. Characteristics of the Development of Kediri City and Kediri Regency

Aspects	Kediri City	Kediri Regency
Dominant Sectors	Trade, Services, Industry	Agriculture, Plantations, MSMEs
College Access	Relatively high	Limited
Education Infrastructure	More details	Uneven
Formal Job Opportunities	Larger	Still dominated by the informal sector

Source: Central Statistics Agency of Kediri City and Kediri Regency, processed by the author (2025).

Differences in development characteristics show that Kediri City has more diverse educational facilities and job opportunities than Kediri Regency. As a center of trade and services, Kediri City provides more opportunities for people to develop competencies and obtain formal jobs. On the other hand, the people of Kediri Regency are still dependent on the primary sector, so that social mobility takes place relatively slowly.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that there is still an imbalance in development between Kediri City and Kediri Regency, especially in the indicators of human resource quality and education. Differences in the Human Development Index (HDI), Length of School Expectancy, Average School Length, and poverty level show that the people of Kediri City have better access to

education services than the people of Kediri Regency. This condition indicates that education development has not taken place evenly, which has the potential to affect the quality of human resources and opportunities for social mobility of the community.

This finding is in line with Hale et al. (2019) and Bobkov et al. (2023), who state that in the early stages of development, economic activity tends to be concentrated in areas that have better infrastructure, investment, and public facilities. This concentration encourages the improvement of the quality of human development in urban areas, while areas that are still dominated by the primary sector tend to experience slower development (Majumdar & Sen, 2024). In the context of this study, Kediri City, as a center of trade, services, and education, has more conducive conditions in providing access to education than Kediri Regency,

where most of its territory still relies on the agricultural sector.

The results of this study also support the research of Wirandana & Khoirunurrofik (2024), who found that the effectiveness of regional fiscal policies still influences education inequality in Indonesia. The study shows that equitable distribution of the education budget has not automatically been able to reduce inequality if it is not followed by effective management of the quality of education services. Thus, the difference in education indicators between Kediri City and Kediri Regency is not only influenced by the size of resource allocation, but also by the effectiveness of the use of these resources in improving access and quality of education.

From the perspective of *Human Capital Theory*, the results of the study show that education is an investment that plays an important role in improving the quality of human resources (Baker, 2025). The high average length of schooling in Kediri City reflects opportunities for people to obtain better competencies, giving that a greater chance to enter the formal job market. These findings are consistent with Subbotin (2026), who explained that the quality of education and community skills (*knowledge capital*) are factors that contribute to long-term economic growth, even having a greater influence than the length of education alone. Therefore, improving the quality of education needs to be a major concern in addition to increasing access to education.

The differences in access to education found in this study are also related to community social mobility opportunities. People who have access to quality education tend to have a greater chance of obtaining formal employment, increasing income, and improving their socioeconomic status (Selvakumar et al., 2025). On the other hand, limited access to education can slow social mobility and maintain intergenerational inequality. These findings are supported by research on human capital investment in Indonesia, which shows that

increased investment in education positively influences the educational attainment of the next generation and helps break the chain of intergenerational poverty (Febriani et al., 2026).

Overall, the results of the study show that education has a strategic position as a link between regional inequality and social mobility. Regions that provide more equitable access to education tend to produce more qualified human resources, leading that higher competitiveness in the job market. Therefore, efforts to reduce regional inequality are not enough through economic development alone, but also require equitable distribution of education quality, increased educator competence, and educational infrastructure that can reach all levels of society (Conroy & Watson, 2023; Shkalenko et al., 2026).

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the regional inequality between Kediri City and Kediri Regency and examine the role of education in encouraging community social mobility. The results of the study show that there are still differences in the level of development between the two regions, especially in the indicators of the Human Development Index (HDI), average school length, poverty level, and regional development characteristics. Kediri City has relatively better human development achievements and access to education than Kediri Regency, which shows that equitable development, especially in the education sector, is still a challenge in realizing inclusive regional development.

The findings of the study also show that education has a strategic role in improving the quality of human resources and expanding opportunities for social mobility. Differences in access and quality of education affect people's chances of getting more productive jobs, increasing income, and improving socioeconomic conditions. Thus, education not only functions as a means of improving individual competence, but also as an instrument of regional

development that can reduce regional inequality through strengthening human capital

Theoretically, this study strengthens Williamson's Regional Inequality Theory, which holds that differences in the level of development between regions are influenced by the concentration of economic activity and the availability of infrastructure. In addition, the results of the study support Human Capital Theory, which explains that investment in education contributes to improving the quality of human resources and social mobility. This research contributes by showing that equitable distribution of education is one of the important strategies in reducing regional inequality in areas that have different development characteristics, such as Kediri City and Kediri Regency.

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