

## The Completion of Elementary School Education in Indonesia: Gender and Regional Comparison

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### Abstract

Primary education plays an important role in forming the foundation of children's knowledge and skills. However, the level of primary school completion in Indonesia faces multiple challenges, such as gender inequality and unequal access across provinces. The present study comparatively analyses the primary school completion rate based on gender and region with data generated from the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS). The results show that female students show a higher level of completion than male students. Meanwhile, the five provinces with the lowest completion rates, namely Papua, West Papua, Gorontalo, East Nusa Tenggara, and West Kalimantan, are among others in the last places. To overcome the low completion rate, the government needs to improve educational infrastructure, provide incentives for educators in disadvantaged areas, and expand scholarship programs to ensure equality and accessibility of education throughout Indonesia. Further research is recommended to use data covering all levels of education, while discussing the problems in more depth and presenting appropriate solutions to increase the level of education completion at each level.

### Keywords

Primary school, completion rate, education for all

### Introduction

Schools are one of the important places for children to gain knowledge, build character, and develop basic skills. Elementary school is the initial level for students in pursuing formal education (Aka, 2016). Learning at the elementary school level plays an important role in forming the foundation of knowledge that will be used as provisions for the next level of education. In addition, elementary schools also play a role in forming knowledge, character, basic skills, and habits that will continue to develop based on the next level of education. The success of education in schools depends on the learning process in the classroom (Yulihartati et al., 2014). Likewise, with the level of completion, elementary education generally equips students with reading, writing,

and arithmetic skills (Langi et al., 2013). Low levels of completion of elementary school education can increase illiteracy, unemployment, and poverty in the future due to limited basic skills. In its implementation, the level of completion of education for female students is higher than that of male students. Likewise, with the location of the province, such as in Papua Province, with the lowest level of completion of education in Indonesia. This can happen due to the lack of equality and attention to education, which results in minimal access to education in certain areas.

The obstacles that trigger delays in completing education are caused by several factors, namely family economy, distant and difficult access to education, limited learning facilities, and even individual and people's awareness of the importance of education (Maghfirah, 2019). In addition, gender inequality is also a problem in education between men and women (Suhaeny, 2020) . Gender inequality in education occurs because of the traditional view that prioritises the education of boys over girls. These factors can be crucial problems that cause delays in completing education.

To overcome various problems in completing education, the government has provided various assistance programs, such as scholarships for students from underprivileged and high-achieving families (Mustaufa, 2023). In addition, a 12-year compulsory education program is also implemented to ensure that all children can complete their education from elementary to high school (Nurdin et al., 2024). Other efforts that can be made include improving the quality of the teaching and learning process through teacher coaching and developing professionalism in teaching practices. Although various programs have been designed, there are still obstacles in their implementation, especially related to access to education in remote areas. On the other hand, gender inequality in education, which previously prioritised men, has now decreased. More and more women are now completing their education.

Based on Human Capital theory, education is an important form of investment in human resource development that plays a significant role in increasing economic productivity. Through education, individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to work effectively and productively. Quality basic education, in particular, serves as the main foundation in improving an individual's cognitive abilities and basic skills (Arifin, 2023) . The level of education completion is an important measure in assessing the success of the education system and ensuring that students complete their education (Kurniawan et al., 2024). This indicator reflects the

effectiveness of various aspects, such as the quality of teaching, social support, and education policies. By analysing it, related parties can identify causal factors and take corrective steps to improve the quality of education and human resource development. From here, it can be seen that education plays an important role, especially at the elementary school level, as the initial stage for children to get to know formal education. In addition to building an academic foundation, elementary schools also shape character, discipline, and learning motivation. The level of education completion is influenced by accessibility, family support, economic conditions, and education policies. Optimal completion of education can improve the quality of human resources, which contributes to economic growth and sustainable development.

Relevant research has shown that it is pivotal to provide equal access to curriculum and learning resources in elementary schools (Alifia Nur Zahra et al., 2024). The level of formal education in Indonesia does not directly determine individual income, because income is influenced by factors other than education. Although education aims to improve welfare, in reality, differences in education levels are not always directly proportional to the level of income obtained (Gofur et al., 2020). To overcome these challenges, appropriate methods, models, and media are needed so that learning objectives are achieved (Sutrisna et al., 2024).. It is clear that the challenges of education in elementary schools include curriculum obstacles, internal and external factors of students, and mismatches between education levels and income, which require solutions in the form of equalising facilities, adjusting the curriculum, and appropriate learning methods.

This study discusses the completion of education at the elementary school level based on gender and province. The level of completion of education in women is higher than in men. In addition, there are 5 provinces with the lowest level of completion of education. After the introduction, this article continues with the method, results, discussion, and conclusion.

## Method

This study uses a quantitative descriptive method. Quantitative descriptive research is a type of research conducted to answer a problem and obtain more in-depth information about a phenomenon by applying the stages of a quantitative approach (A. Siroj et al., 2024) . The descriptive method is a research method that aims to describe the object or

subject being studied according to the actual situation (Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023) . This method also examines various problems in society, including applicable rules, certain situations, the relationship between activities, attitudes, views, and ongoing processes, and the impact of a phenomenon. This method provides an initial overview of the data, helps understand the characteristics of the data and makes more accurate conclusions.

The obtained data is a secondary one generated from BPS. Secondary data refers to information obtained indirectly from the research object. This data can be obtained through internet sites or other reference sources that are relevant to the topic being researched by the author (Sari & Zefri, 2019) . Secondary data sources were obtained from the Central Statistics Agency *website* regarding the level of completion of elementary school education based on gender (<https://www.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/2/MTk4MiMy/tingkat-penyelesaian-pendidikan-menurut-jenjang-pendidikan-dan-jenis-kelamin.html> ) and based on 5 provinces with the lowest level of education completion in Indonesia ( <https://www.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/2/MTk4MCMY/tingkat-penyelesaian-pendidikan-menurut-jenjang-pendidikan-dan-provinsi.html> ).

The resulting data were analysed using comparative descriptive statistics. Comparative descriptive research is a type of research conducted to compare two or more conditions, situations, or objects to find differences or similarities (Nur & Awaru, 2021) . According to Silalahi Ulber (2005), comparative research is a type of research conducted to compare two or more phenomena. This research can be divided into two types, namely descriptive comparative *and* correlational comparative. So, in descriptive comparative research, a comparison is made of the same variables in different samples.

## Results

This study uses two datasets from BPS related to the level of completion of elementary school education based on gender and province in Indonesia. Gender and provincial differences have a significant influence on the results of the study, which shows fluctuating data variations. Here is a more detailed explanation.

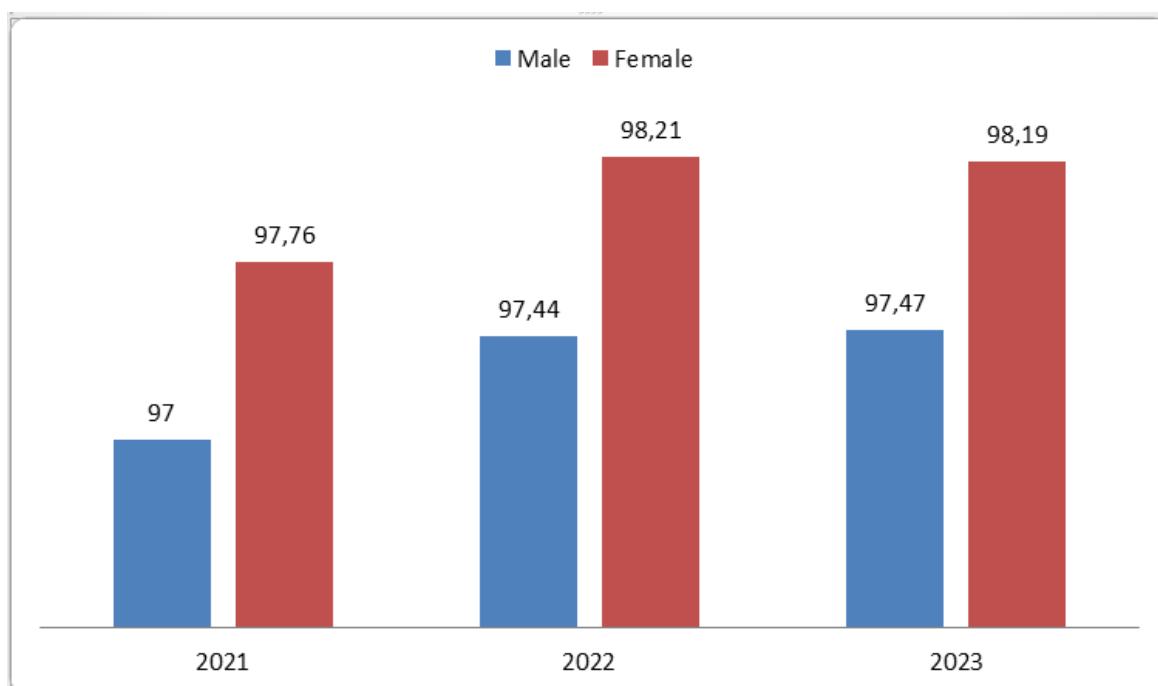


Figure 1. Completion Based on Gender

Figure 1 shows the completion rate of elementary school/equivalent education from 2021 to 2023 based on gender. From these results, it is known that female students have a higher completion rate than male students. The highest score for female students was recorded in 2022, which was 98.21, while for male students, the highest was in 2023 with a score of 97.47. The lowest score was for male students in 2021, which was 97, while for female students it was obtained in 2021 at 97.76. This difference indicates a gap in educational achievement between male and female students.

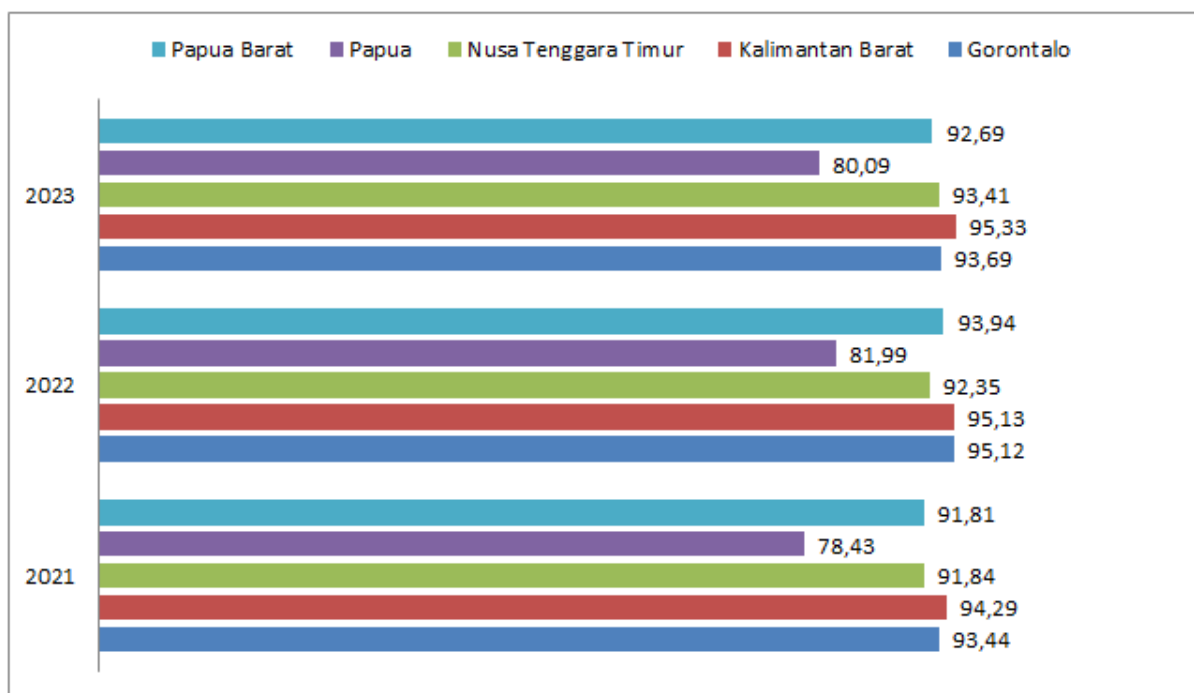


Figure 2. Completion in Five Provinces with the Lowest Figures

Figure 2 shows the completion rate of elementary school/equivalent education from 2021 to 2023 in the five provinces with the lowest figures in Indonesia, namely West Kalimantan, East Nusa Tenggara, Gorontalo, West Papua, and Papua. West Kalimantan Province showed a consistent increase from 94.29 in 2021 to 95.33 in 2023, followed by East Nusa Tenggara, which also experienced an increase from 91.84 to 93.41. However, Gorontalo Province recorded an increase in 2022 with a figure of 95.12 but decreased to 93.69 in 2023, similar to West Papua, which experienced a decline after an increase in the previous year. Meanwhile, Papua has the lowest completion rate, with a fluctuation from 81.99 in 2022 to 80.09 in 2023. These data show that despite improvements in several provinces, there are still major challenges in maintaining sustainability and increasing basic education completion rates, especially in Papua, which requires more intensive attention.

## Discussion

This study focuses on the level of completion of education at the elementary school level based on gender and the five provinces with the lowest completion rates in Indonesia. This study analyses the differences in the level of completion of education between female and male students and the factors causing them. In addition, this study examines the conditions in the five provinces with the lowest completion rates to

understand the causes of the low completion rates in the region. The level of education is defined as the level or stage of education in the formal education system. Meanwhile, the level of completion of education is an indicator in measuring how long it takes students to complete education at that level (Kurniawan et al., 2024) . Thus, this study presents factors that can influence the level of completion of education at the elementary school level, especially based on gender and the region with the lowest completion rates in Indonesia.

Based on the first data related to the level of completion of elementary school education by gender, it is known that female students have a higher completion rate than male students. This can be influenced by several factors, the first is learning motivation (Astuti et al., 2018). Generally, women have high learning motivation, which makes them complete their education equally or faster. Women tend to have higher self-confidence than men in completing their learning tasks, and contribute to better academic achievement (Utami & Yonanda, 2020) . As a result of these problems, there is a significant disparity in learning achievement between male and female students. The next impact is a delay in women's knowledge and abilities in various fields. Thus, although women show better achievement in the level of education completion, this disparity still needs to be addressed. Efforts to increase the motivation and self-confidence of male students, as well as reduce the academic gap between the two genders, are very important to create more equitable education.

Based on the results of the second data analysis on the level of completion of elementary school education in the 5 lowest provinces in Indonesia, namely West Kalimantan, East Nusa Tenggara, Gorontalo, West Papua, and Papua. This is due to the inequality of education in Indonesia, which causes inequality in education. Educational inequality is a situation where there is inequality in the number of educated graduates among the population of an area (Nisa & Samputra, 2020) . From the data produced, Papua province still occupies the last position from year to year. Factors causing this educational inequality include the lack of public awareness regarding education, especially among people living in remote areas. Other factors include problems of inadequate access to education, family economy, and a shortage of professional educators (Maghfirah, 2019) . To reduce this inequality, the government needs to focus on developing more equitable educational infrastructure, including the provision of adequate facilities and infrastructure in remote areas. In addition, improving the quality

of teaching staff and providing incentives to work in less developed areas are also important steps to reduce educational inequality in underdeveloped provinces.

Educational inequality is often still a major challenge, especially in disadvantaged areas. The challenges in basic education identified in the study "*Identification of Challenges and Strategies for Solving Education in Elementary Schools*" (Alifia Nur Zahra et al., 2024) are also closely related to the problem of the level of completion of education based on gender and province. For example, in disadvantaged provinces such as Papua, the inequality of educational facilities and infrastructure, and the lack of a curriculum that suits the characteristics of students are significant obstacles to educational achievement, both for boys and girls. Although women tend to have higher levels of education completion, this gap is still felt between more developed and less developed areas. Therefore, to overcome this inequality, it is necessary to equalise educational facilities and implement a curriculum that can reach all students, not only based on gender, but also based on the conditions and economy of the area where they live.

The level of education also affects the economic welfare of the community. In the article "*Analysis of Differences in Education Levels on Family Income in Jember Regency*" (Gofur et al., 2020), it is shown that although the level of education can affect welfare, differences in education levels are not always directly proportional to income. This also applies in the context of educational inequality between men and women in various provinces, as occurs in underdeveloped provinces such as Papua. Although women often have higher levels of educational completion, this difference does not necessarily guarantee a significant increase in income, especially if access to economic opportunities and decent work is limited. Therefore, it is important to not only focus on increasing the level of educational completion, but also ensure equal access to jobs that can increase people's incomes across provinces.

Educational problems in elementary schools are also influenced by internal and external factors. As explained in the article entitled "*Analysis of Learning Problems in Elementary School Children*", (Sutrisna et al., 2024) educational problems in elementary schools are influenced by internal factors of students and external factors from the surrounding environment. To overcome this challenge, learning design is needed that involves appropriate methods, models, and media, so that learning objectives can be achieved effectively. This is also relevant to the existing conditions of educational

inequality, where these internal and external factors often affect the level of completion of education in various regions, especially in underdeveloped provinces.

This study focuses on the level of completion of education at the elementary school level, specifically based on gender and data from the five provinces with the lowest rates of completion of education, obtained from BPS. Furthermore, the discussion also explains in broad outline the problems regarding the completion of education in elementary schools. For further research, it is recommended to expand the scope of the data to include all levels of education, namely elementary school, junior high school, and senior high school. In addition, further research can describe in more depth the problems found and offer relevant solutions to increase the rate of completion of education at these various levels.

This study identified significant differences in primary education completion rates by gender and province in Indonesia. This study used a quantitative descriptive method with comparative data analysis. The results showed that female students showed higher completion rates than male students, which was influenced by factors such as learning motivation and self-confidence. Meanwhile, provinces with the lowest education completion rates, such as Papua, face major challenges related to unequal access to education, limited infrastructure, and a lack of professional educators. To overcome this problem, efforts are needed to equalise educational facilities, implement a curriculum that is appropriate to student characteristics, improve the quality of teaching, as well as pay attention to external factors that influence the learning process. For further research, it is recommended that the scope be expanded to include all levels of education and discuss the problems found in more depth and offer relevant solutions to increase the rate of education completion at each level.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the disparities in elementary education completion rates in Indonesia, with a specific focus on gender and the five provinces with the lowest completion levels. The findings reveal that female students tend to have higher completion rates than male students, largely due to factors such as learning motivation and self-confidence. At the same time, regions such as Papua and West Papua continue to experience persistent challenges related to limited educational access, inadequate infrastructure, and shortages of qualified teachers. These disparities underscore the

urgent need for equitable distribution of educational resources, improvements in teacher quality, and the development of context-sensitive curricula. Addressing both gender-based and regional inequalities in education is essential for fostering inclusive and sustainable educational outcomes. Future research should broaden the scope to encompass multiple educational levels and provide a more comprehensive analysis of the barriers to education completion, along with targeted strategies for policy intervention.

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