Publikasi Berkala Pendidikan Ilmu Sosial: Vol. 5 (No. 2), 2025, 218-231
ISSN: 2797-1945, E-ISSN: 2777-0931
DOI: https://doi.org/10.20527/pakis.v5i2.16566

ETHICAL POLITICS, TEACHER ORDINANCES, AND ILLEGAL SCHOOLS: A GENEALOGY OF EDUCATIONAL DISCRIMINATION IN INDONESIA

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Article History
Received : 17-07-2025
Revised : 23-08-2025
Published : 30-09-2025

Keywords:
Ethical Politics; Teacher Ordinance; Illegal Schools; Educational Discrimination

Abstract
This study aims to unravel the roots of discrimination in Indonesian education through the implementation of ethical policies, teacher ordinances, and illegal schools during the Dutch colonial period. These discriminatory patterns were designed to maintain power. For example, the teacher ordinances (1905, 1925, 1932) and the illegal schools emphasized colonial state control through restrictions and even the elimination of educational rights. This article uses a library method, drawing on sources from books, websites, and relevant journals accessed using Google search engines, Google Scholar, the Open Access Library, and others. Ethical politics, a policy intended to improve the welfare of the colonial population, in fact, gave rise to educational segregation between indigenous and European groups. The patterns of segregation, ideological control, and unequal access to education during the colonial period have resonance today, namely through disparities in quality, access, and central policy control over learning spaces for communities in remote areas. Understanding the roots of this discrimination can serve as a basis for collective reflection to build a more just, inclusive, and relevant education system to meet the needs of the times.

Kata Kunci:
Politik Etis; Ordonansi Guru; Sekolah Liar; Diskrimisnasi Pendidikan

Abstrak
Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguraikan akar diskriminatif pendidikan Indonesia melalui pelaksanaan politik etis, ordonansi guru dan sekolah liar di masa kolonial Belanda. Pola diskriminatif dalam penerapan nya didesain untuk mempertahankan kekuasaan. Seperti kebijakan ordonansi guru (1905, 1925, 1932) dan Sekolah Liar yang menekankan kontrol negara kolonial dengan pembatasan hingga pemberangusan hak pendidikan. Penulisan artikel ini menggunakan metode kepustakaan yang mengambil sumber dari buku, website, jurnal-jurnal relevan yang di akses menggunakan mesin pencari Google, Google Scholar, Open Access Library dan lainnya. Politik etis sebagai kebijakan yang hadir untuk memperbaiki kesejahteraan rakyat jajahan, nyatanya melahirkan segregasi pendidikan diantara kaum bumiputera dan golongan Eropa. Pola segregasi, kontrol ideologi, dan ketidaksetaraan akses pendidikan di masa kolonial memiliki resonansi hingga sekarang. Yakni melalui disparitas mutu, akses, serta kontrol kebijakan pusat terhadap ruang belajar masyarakat dipelosok. Dengan memahami akar diskriminasi

ini dapat dijadikan bahan refleksi bersama untuk membangun sistem pendidikan yang lebih adil, inklusif, dan relevan dengan kebutuhan zaman.

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Available online at https://ppjp.ulm.ac.id/journals/index.php/pakis
How to Cite:
Mardiani, F., Syaharuddin, S., Handy, M. R. N., Susanto, H., Fathurrahman, F. (2025). Ethical Politics, Teacher Ordinances, And Illegal Schools: A Genealogy Of Educational Discrimination In Indonesia. *Publikasi Berkala Pendidikan Ilmu Sosial*, *5*(2). https://doi.org/10.20527/pakis.v5i2.16566

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian independence was celebrated with a spirit of freedom, equality, and brotherhood. The end of colonialism brought great hope to the people that the limitations and discrimination in life would disappear. As a formerly colonized country, colonialism became a dark tale, present in the form of cruel oppression and exploitation. Since the Dutch colonial era in Indonesia, education has served as an instrument of power. Its existence was annulled by the results of the Ethical Policy, a point of change in policy towards indigenous communities in the Dutch East Indies. This policy was supported by criticism from liberals in the Netherlands who demanded moral accountability from the colonial government for the fate of the people in the colonies. The Ethical Policy emphasized three main programs: irrigation, emigration, and education (Nasrowi, 2023).

However, education existed in Indonesia long before Western powers occupied the nation. Since Indonesia was still known as the Archipelago, people at that time had extensive connections with the outside world through international trade activities, and even after being exposed to various influences from the spread of diverse religions and cultures. Influences from India, China, and Arabia (the Middle East) through the arrival of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam enriched the nation's heritage and way of life. This mutual understanding was inseparable from their way of communicating with the global world. Initially, communication through spoken language was hampered by regional exclusivity, but there are other ways to connect (exchange information) with people beyond our reach. Language is a system that presents arbitrary sound symbols, used by members and groups of society to collaborate, interact, and identify themselves. The existence of language in human life makes it easier for them to carry out everything in their daily lives.

They then communicated using nonverbal language. This communication involved using sign language, a language that facilitates easy connection with others. This interaction involved specific movements and facial expressions to be easily understood by the other person. This interaction then encouraged people to think and find ways for people from various ethnicities around the world to understand each other, and gradually, a universally

understood language was formed.

The emergence of the concept of "lingua franca" marked the formation of the nation in Indonesia, according to the Al-Azhar Language Center (Al-Azhar Language Center, 2010). Lingua franca is a language used as a common means of communication by a group of individuals who do not have the same mother tongue. Moreover, from the Archipelago to Indonesia today, we recognize Malay as a unifying language, one that will later be perfected into a unified language for all people, namely Indonesian. Without this unifying language, it is unimaginable how the ideals of forming a nation will be realized, while the reality of the heterogeneous archipelago society (ethnicity, race, and religion) consists of thousands of ethnic languages/local languages. This triggers the process of interaction and changes in attitudes and behavior of a person or group of people, aiming to connect knowledge for the purpose of fulfilling life through teaching. This activity is called education.

When Western colonialists such as the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and British established their power in the Indonesian Archipelago, they undoubtedly brought with them a set of knowledge and ways of life from their regions of origin, opening new intellectual avenues for local communities (Daulay et al., 2021). These colonizing nations generally established educational institutions, and this, of course, also initiated the emergence of new educational systems in the colonies. However, the existing educational systems of the local population were systematically opposed and weakened, or at least completely ignored.

Examining how the current Indonesian education system is an adaptation and extension of the long-standing Dutch education system is truly sad, given that education was not a priority during the colonial era. This happened because the program was considered less impactful and not urgent. It is therefore not surprising that when this policy was introduced, they carried out various manipulative efforts only to reap one-sided profits (Hamzah, 2024). Throughout the early 19th century, the dynamics of education were dominated by church groups, so that in addition to teaching general knowledge, they also indirectly spread Christianity through the establishment of theological schools (Sultani & Kristanti, 2020). The implementation of education in the Archipelago, initially driven by missionary efforts of the Portuguese and Spanish, underwent a significant shift during the Dutch occupation through the Zending program.

During Dutch colonialism in the Indonesian Archipelago, education was designed to serve the interests of the colonial power. This naturally created a space for social and intellectual segregation between Europeans and Native Indonesians. Dutch education was oriented explicitly towards civil servants, with a hierarchical educational system that

prioritized only the upper classes. Not all Native Indonesians were able to access the education offered at that time. Referring to the essence of ethical politics, this was far from its original purpose. The colonial educational structure strictly regulated social stratification, with Europeans at the top, followed by those from the Middle East at the second level, and Native Indonesians at the bottom. Therefore, all educational access was designed to conform to this stratification.

The emergence of ordinances on teachers and Islamic education that stifled the rights of "illegal schools" (schools established independently by Native Indonesians without the assistance or subsidies of the Dutch colonial government) was concrete evidence of the restrictions on access and control by those in power. The existing education system among the indigenous population was immediately opposed and weakened, or more precisely, considered illegal. Especially for the Islamic education system, which became a scourge for the colonial government, this sentimental assumption led to the interpretation of it as "dangerous" and could disrupt the course of government. Therefore, its existence needed to be suppressed and eradicated, both from the teaching staff and the existence of schools that had to be limited in accordance with government regulations. On the other hand, the government allocated more generous space for the implementation of Zending and Missionary schools.

This policy of favoritism ultimately gave rise to mutual suspicion and then hostility within the community, further marginalizing the Islamic education system. Islamic education in the Archipelago during the 20th century was isolated, with the Dutch government issuing numerous regulations to monitor and restrict Islamic activities. Furthermore, there were concerns that Islamic education could become a vehicle for the spread of anti-Dutch ideology and strengthen the resistance movement against the Dutch colonial government.

Since its independence in 1945, Indonesia has become a self-sufficient nation and has strived to eradicate this discriminatory legacy. The constitution mandates inclusive and equitable education for all citizens. Various compulsory education programs, school construction, and improvements in teacher welfare have been implemented. However, while significant progress has been made in access to formal education, the challenges of disparities in quality and equity remain a chronic issue (Indah, 2020). Ironically, instead of racial segregation, we are now faced with socio-economic and geographic-based discrimination, manifested in the labeling of "superior schools," "favorite schools," and "regular schools" as well as "schools in the 3T (Frontier, Outermost, and Disadvantaged) areas." This phenomenon then raises the question of why the patterns of past segregation now clearly exist, only in a different form. It is evident that today, the irony of Indonesian education is once again

overshadowed by similar educational stratification. While not explicitly discriminating based on race or ethnicity, the existence of various school models tends to reproduce social inequality, whether in terms of access, quality, or educational outcomes. Therefore, in this article, the author aims to examine the roots of discrimination in Indonesian education, which have been present since the implementation of ethical policy, teacher ordinances, and illegal schools. This can open up space for reflection on current education policies.

METHOD

The method used by the author in this article is a literature review, namely an approach that aims to review, analyze, examine, and evaluate data sourced from various literature references. Literature study is conducted by collecting materials from library collections without conducting field research (Zed, 2014). According to Adlini et al. (2022)A literature study is a method of collecting data by reviewing and understanding information or data from various written sources, such as books, journals, articles, or other sources. There are four steps in literature study: preparing the necessary equipment, creating a working bibliography, organizing time for reading and recording materials, and compiling important information for writing. In this study, the researcher searched relevant website sources using the Google search engine, Google Scholar, Open Access Library, and the National Library (Perpusnas) to find suitable articles, books, and other educational resources. The criteria for the sources reviewed included research articles relevant to the study of educational restrictions and discrimination in Indonesia, particularly during the Dutch Colonial era, as well as Indonesian educational history books and various supporting data that could be considered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ethical Politics and Education of the Colonized People of the Dutch East Indies

In the 19th century, some Dutch began to show interest in the welfare and status of indigenous people in the Dutch East Indies. They made personal efforts to improve these conditions. Several individuals were involved in efforts to improve the welfare of the people of the Dutch East Indies. According to Siregar (2016), Van Deventer, who put forward Ethical Politics (Politics of Reciprocity), was a legal expert from the Netherlands. Through his ideas, ethical politics came with the motto "deEe Reschuld" (debt of honor) and the slogan "Educatie, Irrigate, Emigrate" (Education, Irrigation, Emigration). Ethical politics itself emerged as a manifestation of humanitarian issues; this was also part of the transition process of pressure from liberal political groups. This idea emerged when the government responded to what had been written by Van Deventer regarding the excellent results obtained

by the Netherlands derived from the results of the significant contributions of its colonies, and became an affirmation of what was conveyed by Queen Wilhelmina in her speech about the decline in the level of people's welfare. Therefore, there was a need to address this issue by conducting investigations and creating development programs to improve it again. This policy was officially implemented on September 17, 1901 (Nasution, 2001; Nurhakim, 2024).

According to Daliman (2012), the existence of ethical politics was considered a paternalistic policy by the Dutch colonial government, namely emphasizing that the mother country (colonizer) was obliged to take care of the interests of its children without the direct participation of those children. Ethical politics shares similarities with the doctrine of "the white man's burden," which entails a responsibility for advanced nations (white) to support the progress of underdeveloped nations (colored), specifically Asian and African nations.

The educational program in ethical politics aimed to develop a Western education system for indigenous people, while simultaneously fulfilling the needs of low-level workers in Dutch industrial areas, which at that time were in a position of potential development, thus requiring a large number of workers to open up other areas outside Java. Like a double-edged sword with both positive and negative impacts, the implementation of this educational program had a significant impact, sparking a valuable contribution to the Indonesian nation: the emergence of nationalist awareness.

Judging by its existence, the policy of providing education for the people was certainly attractive and sympathetic to the colonial population. However, in practice, the Dutch colonial government established schools not to meet the needs of the colonized people but for its own benefit, namely, to educate people who could later become leaders employed with low wages in government. Thus, the goal of education and teaching at that time was only directed at educating civil servants, not at establishing a national education system.

When ethical politics was used as the ideal foundation in the education system in the Dutch East Indies, its implementation was dominated by the ruling class and was not driven by ethical values (Nasution, 2001). Describes the characteristics of the implementation of Dutch colonial education in the Dutch East Indies, namely: (1) Gradualism, namely the provision of education in a gradual mannerexclusiveonly to specific groups; (2) Dualism in education by emphasizing the sharp differences between Dutch education and indigenous education; (3) Central control (strict central supervision); (4) Limited objectives of indigenous schools, and the role of schools to produce employees as an important factor in educational development (employee education is prioritized); (5) the principle of concordance which causes schools in Indonesia to be the same as in the Netherlands; (6)

there is no systematic educational planning for indigenous education. The education system in the Dutch East Indies was deliberately designed to serve the interests of the Netherlands as a colonizer. Of course, there was no objective prosperity for the people of the colonial country as stated in the initial purpose of its existence.

The Dutch colonial government began establishing many schools. In 1617, the VOC established a school in Jakarta (Ahmad, 2018). Another thing mentioned by Novriyanto et al. (2023), that these Dutch schools have the same curriculum at each level as schools in the Netherlands, namely based on the concept of "Concordantie-beginsel" which means the principle of matching and equalizing, Some supervisors were even brought directly into the field to ensure that schools in the Dutch East Indies achieved the quality and standards they desired.

The educational system implemented by the Dutch colonial government during the Ethical Policy era consisted of primary, secondary, and higher education. The implementation of education was highly discriminatory (Lestari, 2022). The establishment of schools was based on the Dutch government's need for civil, medical, and military staff. Only males from the nobility were permitted to attend school. This education system was shaped by the conditions of Dutch East Indies society, particularly regarding differences in social status between the nobility and the ordinary people. This class distinction was also evident economically, with the nobility generally enjoying a stable financial situation, while the lower classes lived with limited resources. This prompted the government at that time to divide schools into several strata.

There are two types of schools (“Advice by C. Snouck Hurgronje During His Service to the Dutch East Indies Government 1889-1936,” 1990), namely Class I School (Ongko Siji School) and Class II School (Ongko Loro School). Class I School is intended for those from the nobility or priyayi class, typically residing in the capital city, afdeling, and onderafdeling, or in trading center cities. The subjects taught were reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, natural sciences, history, and drawing. In the first grade school, the lower education level (Lager Onderwijs), learning was implemented in Dutch. It consisted of three schools: ELS (Europese Lagere School), an elementary school for European children; HIS (Hollands Inlandsche School), an elementary school intended for the nobility or priyayi; and HCS (Hollands Chinese School), a Bumiputera School for the Dutch Chinese group.

Meanwhile, the second-grade school was intended for those from the lower classes, or the people/general public. The language of instruction in this lower school was Malay and regional languages, namely the second-grade Bumiputera school (Inlandsche School Tweede

Klasse), the people's school (Volkschool), and the Transitional School (Voluntary School), namely continuing education from elementary schools to higher levels of education. Namely, graduates of elementary schools or village schools who wish to pursue higher education in the Western stream, as the diploma will be obtained upon graduation from Schakel School, which is equivalent to HIS or Holland Inlandsche School.

Then continue to general education, such as MULO (Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs) equivalent to junior high school (SMP), AMS (Algemene Middelbare School) is a general high school or equivalent to a senior high school (SMA), and HBS (Hogere Burger School) is a high school continuation of ELS for Europeans, Chinese, and the Bumiputera elite. At the higher education or tertiary level, there is STOVIA (School Tot Opleiding Voor Inlandsche Arsten), better known as the first Bumiputera Medical School established in the Dutch East Indies. There is also a technical school (THS) and a law school (RHS).Hogeschool) and OSVIA (Opleidingsschool Voor Inlandsche Ambtenaren), a School for training prospective civil servants, and NIAS (Nederlands Indische Artsen School), a medical school founded in Surabaya in 1913.

Marginalization of Islamic education through teacher ordinances and illegal schools

Since the time of the archipelago kingdoms, education in Indonesia has been informal and primarily aimed at the elite. During Dutch colonial times, a formal education system was introduced to the public, but it could only be achieved through formal education. A handful of people enjoyed it. Ethical politics has had many positive impacts, one of which is introducing a Western, liberal, and democratic secular perspective and lifestyle. Providing formal education and school facilities to the Bumiputera group is an effort to counter the rapidly growing Islamic education system. Why? This is because the Dutch government has a negative stance towards Islam, even Islamic education, which had existed long before their presence in power in the Dutch East Indies.

We can review the existence of Islam in the Archipelago from the beginning. The implementation of education in the Archipelago had been present long before that, with both families and communities already having well-developed social institutions (Arifin, 2021). According to Nasrowi (2023), the process of Islamic education in the Archipelago began with the arrival of Arab traders. In the interests of propagating Islamic teachings, these traders actively carried out educational activities, using a daily approach that was friendly to the people. A significant part of society in the Archipelago, including buying and selling activities, marriage, and direct preaching, is conducted both individually and collectively. In addition, it was added by Alfiani et al. (2019). It is recorded that the process of Islamic

education in the Archipelago has been carried out since the time of the first Islamic kingdom in the Archipelago, namely in Perlak (840-1292 AD), and the Samudra Pasai Kingdom (1267-1521 AD). The rapid development in the field of education is driven by the implementation of Islamic propagation, or the spread of Islamic teachings by preachers. This process is carried out through educational channels, such as mosques, prayer rooms, or even Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), which are places of Islamic religious learning for students, led by religious teachers, kyais (Islamic scholars), and religious scholars.

However, upon the arrival of Westerners, a new narrative emerged, as the spirit of ocean exploration that had drawn them to the Indonesian Archipelago —namely, the 3Gs (Gold, Glory, and Gospel) —clashed with the way of life of the Indonesian people, who had firmly embraced Islamic teachings in their daily lives. Although the Dutch were not as committed to the spread of Christianity as their predecessors, the Portuguese and Spanish, in the minds of the Indonesian people, the perception that they were all the same ultimately sparked quite fierce disagreement and frequent conflict. The Dutch colonial government initially avoided interfering with Islamic issues and their connections within society, as they lacked knowledge of Islam and its intricacies for the people of the Archipelago.

Finally, a man named Christian Snouck Hurgronje arrived, an academic and scientist, an orientalist (expert in Eastern studies) with expertise in matters related to Islam. He graduated from Leiden University with a Doctorate in Arabic Literature. He arrived in the Dutch East Indies as a research officer, specifically regarding the existence of the Indonesian Archipelago and its Islam. The government then appointed him as an advisor on matters concerning the interests of indigenous and Arab groups. This knowledge provided a wealth of information that could be used to identify potential future obstacles related to Islam in the community (Hurgronje et al., 1994).

The Dutch government's policy intensified to hinder Islamic education, and a special regulation was established to oversee and strictly regulate the Islamic education process. The Dutch government implemented a policy of association among Indonesians, encouraging native Indonesians to adapt to Dutch life and culture for the sake of preserving their colonial rule in the Dutch East Indies. On the other hand, the government's attitude toward Muslims was very cautious, given the historical reality they experienced, including much resistance from Muslims, such as the Dutch East Indies War: Father, the Diponegoro war, the Aceh war, and others. According to Setiawan et al. (2025), the existence of Islam provided a space for strengthening social solidarity and had the potential to incite conflict while simultaneously uniting the masses. Furthermore, it was able to accommodate and strengthen the political

control of a power. Therefore, from the perspective of the Dutch colonial government, the presence of Islam became something that could overthrow its power.

Islam was considered rigid and a barrier to progress, so it had to be balanced by increasing the level of secular progress. Therefore, Western-style education, through the development of schools, was formulated as one of the factors that could destroy Islamic hegemony in society (Daulay et al., 2021). Through Snouck Hurgronje, the Dutch colonial government gained significant insights into Islam in the Indonesian Archipelago. He categorized the problem of Islam in the Dutch East Indies into three things, namely:

1) The field of pure religion or worship,
2) Social community sector,
3) Political field.

Each sector has different alternative solutions, so in its struggle, the government launched a movement in the form of Islamic politics. The Dutch colonial government issued many regulations to monitor and limit Islamic activities in the public sphere. First, the regulation (Ordinance) issued in 1859 concerning the Hajj issue. Restrictions for everyone who will go and perform the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca (Maryani, 2023). Then, the Teacher Ordinance was first issued in 1905, which required permission for Islamic religious teachers before carrying out their duties as religious teachers. This Ordinance can be used to suppress the existence of Islam, strengthened by security and stability. The Teacher Ordinance of 1905 also included policies restricting the freedom of movement and freedom of Islamic religious teachers in carrying out their duties of preaching and spreading Islam widely—the Teacher Ordinance as contained in Staatsblad 1905 No. 550. It effectively came into force on November 2, 1905, in Java and Madura, except in Yogyakarta and Solo (Suminto, 1985). The teacher ordinance was also very selective, because the policy only applied to Islamic education, while others, such as Zending and Missionary schools, were not required.

Next, 20 years after the Teacher Ordinance was first enacted, the 1905 Ordinance, deemed inefficient, was replaced by the 1925 Teacher Ordinance, which contained similar provisions. It only required religious teachers to notify, not request permission (Ahmad, 2018). The 1925 Teacher Ordinance had a broader legal scope. It was no longer focused on Java and Madura. Since January 1, 1927, the Teacher Ordinance has been in effect for the regions of Aceh, East Sumatra, Riau, Palembang, Tapanuli, Manado, and Lombok. It has been in effect for the Bengkulu region since the 1930s. This Ordinance actually burdened educational institutions in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), because under this new regulation, both teachers and preachers were required to prepare reports and manage

administrative matters related to the purpose of providing learning (Laffan, 2011). Moreover, the existence of this regulation ultimately sparked much resistance from various Islamic groups. Responses regarding this Ordinance were echoed by local figures, community organizations, and religious groups who recognized the importance of education as a tool for liberation.

The Dutch colonial government also issued the Wild School Ordinance. In 1932, Stadsblaad 1932 No. 494 contained regulations and supervision of private schools. The regulation was established in Buitenzorg (Bogor) on September 17, 1932, and then inaugurated by Governor General De Jonge and Secretary General P.J. Gerke. The Dutch East Indies government enforced the Wild School Ordinance for schools that did not receive subsidies from the Dutch East Indies government. Teachers who wanted to teach in private schools had to request permission from local district officials. Even prospective teachers at these schools were required to be alumni of government schools or subsidized private schools, and would not disturb the peace and order of the Dutch colonial government. The aim was to prevent political influence on private schools, which were referred to as "wild schools." This Ordinance could legalize school closures if the lessons presented in their implementation were not in line with Dutch colonial interests (Ahmad, 2018). Private or non-government schools established in the Dutch East Indies include: MES (Malay English School) in 1929, Sumatera Thawalib, later known as Permi (Indonesian Muslim Association) in Minangkabau, Taman Siswa in 1922 by Ki Hajar Dewantara in Yogyakarta, Muhammadiyah School in 1912 in Yogyakarta by Ahmad Dahlan (Fauzia, 2021).

Furthermore, there are criminal provisions for violating this rule. Staatsblad No. 494 of 1932 stipulates that the penalty is up to eight days in prison or a fine of 25 guilders if:

1) The teacher does not have written permission,
2) Wrong entry description in the form,
3) Failure to provide information to the Regional Head,
4) Establishing a school without notifying first,
5) Entering incorrect information in the form,
6) Using the same school name as a government school or subsidized school without prior permission.

Furthermore, if a repeat violation occurs within two years, the perpetrator is subject to one month in prison or a fine of 200 Guilders. If a legal entity commits the violation, criminal proceedings will also be imposed. These violations are considered criminal acts (Fauzia, 2021).

This led to the issuance of the Ordinance on illegal schools. This raised many issues because these illegal schools began to receive significant attention between 1923 and 1925. Specifically, the Taman Siswa school, founded by Ki Hajar Dewantara, introduced a more inclusive and culturally-based educational concept, reflecting the nation's identity and culture (Idris & Tolla, 2024). Taman Siswa itself chose to remain non-cooperative with the Dutch East Indies government. Taman Siswa's rapid progress among the community raised concerns for the Dutch government. Therefore, in its implementation, Taman Siswa was one of the schools marked as mandatory for reporting by the Dutch government.

Reflections on contemporary Indonesian education

The Ethical Policy, through its slogan of "returning favors," is not as sweet as its sweet promises. In reality, it still produces a discriminatory education system through school stratification based on race and social class. Looking back to the present, this discrimination problem persists in the form of disparities in educational quality between urban and rural areas, Java and outside Java, and between favored public schools and schools in the outskirts (Satria et al., 2025). Beyond the quality gap, the Teacher Ordinance's legacy can also be traced to the current state of teachers. During the colonial era, teachers were positioned as instruments of control, bound by permits and strict regulations to prevent the spread of ideas of resistance. Today, although no longer under the grip of colonialism, the bureaucratization of education through administration, certification, and strict regulations limits teachers' freedom to innovate. Teachers are more often positioned as implementers of curriculum and government policy, rather than agents of social transformation who side with the real needs of students. Education policy in Indonesia frequently changes with changes in ministers or the direction of national politics. This creates confusion at the school and teacher levels, who end up more preoccupied with adjusting administration than focusing on meaningful learning. This phenomenon is not unlike the Teacher Ordinance, where political power attempted to control the direction of education. This situation is similar to the struggles of Taman Siswa and Muhammadiyah during the colonial era, which faced repressive policies yet remained consistent in developing emancipatory education.

Another problem is our educational orientation, which remains confined to pragmatic interests. In the colonial era, indigenous schools were designed to produce low-skilled laborers with substandard wages. Today, although the context is different, many schools and universities in Indonesia remain oriented toward labor market output. At the same time, aspects of critical character development, nationalism, and social awareness are often marginalized. The colonial legacy of education as an economic tool persists to this day. In the

context of globalization, Indonesian education also faces challenges such as digitalization, unequal access to technology, and the need for 21st-century competencies. These challenges overlap with the problems faced during the colonial era: those with greater opportunities will have greater power, particularly in access to knowledge and social mobility. While access to education was once limited by colonial stratification, it is now limited by economic factors, internet access, and teacher quality.

Thus, a critical reflection on the colonial legacy shows that the problems facing Indonesian education today are not merely technical, but also structural and historical. The discriminatory roots inherited through the Ethical Policy, the Teacher Ordinance, and the Illegal School Ordinance are still evident in the form of inequality, bureaucratization, and limited alternative educational opportunities. Therefore, the actualization of Indonesian education today must truly break with the discriminatory legacy of the colonial era by positioning education as a means of renewal, strengthening the role of teachers as agents of change, and creating an education that provides a path to liberation (Merdeka).

CONCLUSION

Since the colonial era, through the Ethical Policy, teacher ordinances, and restrictions on illegal schools, these patterns of discrimination demonstrate that education was not designed from the outset as a space for liberation, but rather as an instrument for perpetuating power. From the advent of the Ethical Policy, which promised "returns" to indigenous people, to the birth of modern education policies for indigenous communities, discrimination in education in Indonesia has persisted to this day. This is evident in the disparity in school facilities, the uneven distribution of teachers, and the disparity in education between urban and rural areas. Although Indonesia has achieved sovereignty and formulated its own education policies, this discriminatory legacy has not been completely erased. The Indonesian education system today still harbors structural biases, both in the form of urban-rural disparities, the digital divide, and the pressure of educational standards that emphasize obedience over the liberation of thought.

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