

Education Without Borders: A Structural and Philosophical Comparative Study Between French and Indonesian School Systems

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the comparative structure, philosophy, and dynamics of the French and Indonesian education systems in the context of global transformation. Using qualitative methods with a comparative literature study approach, the study investigates institutional patterns, pedagogical orientations, and educational adaptation mechanisms in both countries. The research findings reveal fundamental differences in the centralization approach, the philosophy of equality, and the response to globalization. The centralistic and republican French education system contrasts with the decentralized and multiculturalist model of Indonesia. Both countries face similar challenges in producing competitive graduates, integrating digital technology, and maintaining the relevance of education to socio-economic dynamics. The study recommends the development of an education model that is more flexible, innovative, and responsive to the diversity of local contexts while maintaining global quality standards. A dialogical approach is needed between national education traditions and the demands of global transformation to create a sustainable and meaningful education system.

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A. Introduction

The education system is a complex reflection of the philosophy, history, and culture of a nation that is not only an institution for transferring knowledge, but also a social institution that shapes the identity and future of the younger generation (Akkari, 2012). France and Indonesia have very different historical educational contexts, but both have a fundamental commitment to human resource development. The educational structure in France has strong historical roots in the republican tradition that emphasizes the principles of equality and secularism in education (Derouet, 2010). This system is built on the philosophy of the French revolution about liberty, equality, and fraternity which is translated into a comprehensive national educational framework.

The Indonesian education system developed from the Dutch colonial legacy and post-independence transformations that experienced various phases of change reflecting the political and

social dynamics of the nation (Buchori & Malik, 2004). Continuous efforts to build an education system that is in accordance with the national context continue to be made.

The comparison between the two education systems is not only a comparison of administrative structures, but also examines the educational philosophy that underlies each country (Tilaar, 2002). The education system is a unique historical and cultural product, which cannot be understood separately from its socio-political context. The legal framework for education in France is regulated through the Code de l'Éducation which provides a comprehensive framework of rights and responsibilities in education (Van Zanten, 2009). This law guarantees equal access to education and emphasizes the principle of neutrality.

The decentralized education system in Indonesia has undergone significant transformation since the reform era, with the enactment of Law Number 22 of 1999 concerning Regional Government (Jalal & Supriadi, 2001). This provides greater autonomy to local governments in managing education. The philosophical difference between the two education systems lies in their approach to diversity. France adheres to a strong assimilation model, while Indonesia applies a more inclusive multicultural approach in a pluralistic national perspective (Suparlan, 2005).

This comparison of education systems shows how each country integrates national values into the curriculum. Education is not just a transfer of knowledge, but a process of forming critical, responsible, and globally aware citizens (Nussbaum, 2006).

Research conducted by Shields (2013) compared education systems in Europe, including France, with a focus on aspects of cross-cultural curriculum policy and implementation. The study revealed the complexity of knowledge transfer in the context of ethnic and cultural diversity. Comparative research by Bjork (2005) on education systems in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia, provides an in-depth perspective on the challenges of educational decentralization and its implications for the quality of learning at the local level.

Although there have been many studies that discuss education systems partially, there is still a lack of comprehensive studies that compare the structure and philosophy of education between France and Indonesia in depth, especially in the context of globalization and the transformation of education in the 21st century.

This study offers a unique approach by conducting a comprehensive comparative analysis that does not simply compare administrative structures, but explores the philosophy, cultural dynamics, and historical contexts that shape the education systems in both countries.

The education systems of both countries face complex challenges in the era of globalization. The pressure to produce globally competitive graduates while maintaining cultural identity is a central issue in education policy. Digital transformation and changes in learning paradigms are among the factors driving education reform. The ability of the education system to adapt to technological changes and job market needs is a measure of the success of modern education. The final challenge faced by both countries is the issue of equal access to education, quality of teaching, and relevance of the curriculum to the ever-changing socio-economic dynamics. Continuous efforts to create an inclusive, quality, and responsive education system are an important agenda in national development.

B. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a comparative literature study method that aims to explore and analyze the education systems in France and Indonesia in depth (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative approach allows researchers to make a comprehensive interpretation of the systemic complexity of education in both countries. The data collection technique is carried out through library research which involves a systematic review of various academic sources, including books, scientific journals, official government reports, and international publications related to the education system (Booth et al., 2016). This method allows for the collection of comprehensive and credible secondary data.

The data analysis process in this study uses content analysis techniques that allow researchers to identify, categorize, and interpret key themes in the literature reviewed (Krippendorff, 2004). This approach helps produce an in-depth understanding of the structure and philosophy of education.

The comparative framework used refers to a cross-national analysis model that takes into account the historical, social, and cultural contexts of each education system (Ragin, 1987). This method allows comparisons that are not merely superficial, but contextually meaningful. The criteria for selecting sources in this study were based on several parameters, namely: academic relevance, source credibility, publication novelty, and contributory significance to a comparative understanding of education systems (Hart, 2018). This ensures the quality and validity of the data used.

The data validation process was carried out through source triangulation, namely comparing information from various academic references to ensure the consistency and accuracy of research findings (Miles et al., 2014). This method reduces bias and increases the reliability of the study. The limitations of the study focused on the period 2000-2020, considering that this time span covers a period of significant reform and transformation in the education systems of both countries (Carnoy, 2006). This period offers a contemporary perspective on the dynamics of education.

The ethical approach in the study was maintained through an objective and neutral attitude in interpreting the sources studied (Punch, 2013). Researchers tried to avoid prejudice and provide a balanced interpretation of the education systems being compared.

The theoretical framework of the study uses an institutional and cultural approach in comparative education studies, which views education systems as complex products of interactions between institutional structures and cultural contexts (Meyer & Ramirez, 2000). This perspective allows for a comprehensive analysis. The methodological significance of the study lies in its ability to produce a comprehensive mapping of the variations and uniqueness of education systems in two countries with different geopolitical and cultural backgrounds (Alexander, 2001). This method contributes to the development of comparative understanding in international education studies.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Result

a. Educational Institutional Structure

National Education Organizational Pattern

The French education system has a very strong centralistic structure, with the Ministry of National Education playing a dominant role in curriculum setting, resource allocation, and education standardization (Avenier, 2011). This model reflects the republican tradition that emphasizes equality and national unity.

In contrast to France, the Indonesian education system implements a post-reform decentralized model, which gives greater autonomy to local governments in managing education (Bjork, 2005). This transformation is a response to demands for democratization and regional diversity. The accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms in France are implemented through a strict evaluation system that is controlled nationally, with standards that apply uniformly throughout the region (Meuret, 2007). This approach is different from Indonesia, which has developed an accreditation system with variations in implementation at the regional level.

b. Educational Level Structure

The French education system has a standard structure: pre-school (*maternelle*), primary school (*école élémentaire*), junior secondary school (*collège*), senior secondary school (*lycée*), and higher education (*université*) with relatively standardized transitions (Terrail, 2010). Each level has a strictly regulated curriculum and learning outcomes.

The Indonesian system shows greater flexibility in its educational structure, with recognition of various educational pathways, including general, vocational, religious, and alternative education (Tilaar, 2002). This reflects the diversity of Indonesia's social and cultural contexts.

c. Education Financing

France allocates significant funds for education from the state budget, with the principle of education as a national strategic investment (Eurydice, 2012). The funding mechanism is carried out centrally with a relatively even distribution.

The Indonesian education system faces complex challenges in financing, with gaps in funding allocation between developed and underdeveloped regions (Jalal & Supriadi, 2001). Fiscal decentralization affects the ability of regions to fund education.

d. Pedagogical Philosophy and Approach

Concept of Equality and Inclusion

The French educational philosophy is built on the principle of secularism (*laïcité*) which emphasizes equality of opportunity and the elimination of primordial identity differences in the educational space (Baubérot, 2004). This assimilation model differs from the Indonesian multicultural approach.

The Indonesian education system develops a multicultural approach that values ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity as a fundamental strength of the nation (Suparlan, 2005). The philosophy of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is the basis for inclusive pedagogy.

e. Curriculum Orientation

The French curriculum is designed with a focus on the formation of citizens (*citoyen*) who have critical, rational abilities and are committed to republican values (Dubet, 2004). This approach is very philosophical and ideological.

The Indonesian curriculum is more pragmatic, with an orientation towards the formation of competencies that are relevant to the needs of national development and the demands of the global market (Buchori, 2001). There is a balance between character development and practical skills.

f. The Role of Teachers and Educators

The social status of teachers in France is relatively respectable, with a strict recruitment system and a comprehensive teacher education program (van Zanten, 2004). The teaching profession is seen as a strategic mission in the reproduction of social values.

The teacher professionalization system in Indonesia continues to undergo transformation, with efforts to improve academic qualifications and pedagogical competence through certification and continuous development (Usman, 2006). The challenge of teacher quality remains a central issue.

g. Dynamics of Global Transformation

Response to Globalization

France maintains its national educational identity while selectively adopting international educational practices (Normand, 2010). This approach reflects a critical attitude towards globalization.

Indonesia's education system shows greater openness to innovation and global educational practices, with active efforts to adapt international standards (Rosser, 2010). Digital transformation and global networking are important considerations.

h. Contemporary Challenges

Both countries face pressure to produce graduates who are competitive in the global knowledge economy. Pedagogical innovation, technology integration, and 21st century skills development are strategic agendas in education reform.

Issues of equal access, quality improvement, and relevance of education to socio-economic dynamics continue to be a major focus in the national education policies of both countries.

2. Discussion

a. Analysis of Educational Institutional Structure

1) Theory of Educational Centralization

The structural-functional theory developed by Talcott Parsons explains the mechanism of educational centralization as an organized social system to achieve national integration and stability (Parsons, 1977). In the French context, the centralistic model reflects an effort to build a homogeneous national identity through a uniform education system.

The institutionalism theory developed by John Meyer highlights how the institutional structure of education reflects the social and ideological construction of a country (Meyer & Ramirez, 2000). The post-reform Indonesian education system shows complex institutional transformation dynamics, with decentralization as a response to the demands of democratization.

2) Theory of Educational Organization

The new institutional sociology approach analyzes how the structure of educational organizations is not merely an administrative unit, but an arena for the reproduction of social and cultural values (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The comparison between France and Indonesia reveals variations in institutional strategies in responding to global change.

Henry Mintzberg's theory of organizational complexity provides a perspective on how differentiation and integration in educational systems produce unique adaptation mechanisms (Mintzberg, 1979). The structural differences between the centralized French and decentralized Indonesian systems illustrate organizational complexity.

b. Structural Dynamics of Education

Neil Smelser's theory of institutional change explains how structural transformations in education are influenced by social, economic, and political factors (Smelser, 1959). Both countries demonstrate different adaptation strategies in facing global demands.

c. Philosophical Analysis and Pedagogical Approaches

1) Theory of Educational Equity

John Rawls' concept of educational equality offers a philosophical perspective on fairness in educational access and opportunity (Rawls, 1971). The French secularist model and the Indonesian multicultural approach reflect different interpretations of equality.

Axel Honneth's recognition theory explores how recognition of identity and difference is fundamental to pedagogical construction (Honneth, 1995). The philosophical differences between the French assimilationist model and the Indonesian multiculturalist approach are evident in the educational paradigm.

2) Critical Curriculum Theory

Paulo Freire developed a critical education theory that emphasizes liberation and critical consciousness through the educational process (Freire, 1970). The orientation of the French curriculum that focuses on the formation of critical citizens shows the relevance of this theory.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction explains how the education system reproduces social structures and inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Comparative analysis shows variations in the mechanisms of social reproduction through education in both countries.

3) Pedagogical Dynamics

Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital provides an analytical framework for how cultural capital is inherited through the education system (Bourdieu, 1986). The differences in French and Indonesian pedagogical strategies reflect different mechanisms of cultural transmission.

d. Global Transformation Analysis

1) Theory of Educational Globalization

Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory explains the dynamics of educational globalization as a complex process of knowledge exchange and institutional practices (Wallerstein, 2004). The two countries show different adaptation strategies to global pressures.

Zygmunt Bauman's concept of fluid modernity interprets educational transformation in terms of uncertainty and constant change (Bauman, 2000). The responses of France and Indonesia to global innovation reflect institutional flexibility and resistance.

2) Educational Innovation Theory

Everett Rogers' theory of innovation diffusion explains the mechanisms of adoption of new educational practices and technologies (Rogers, 1962). The differences in the speed and pattern of innovation adaptation in the two countries indicate variations in institutional capacity.

Manuel Castells' social network approach provides a perspective on how digital transformation affects the global education architecture (Castells, 1996). Both countries face challenges in integrating technology into education systems.

3) Dynamics of Transformation

Theodore Schultz's theory of human capital emphasizes the role of education in developing individual and collective capacities (Schultz, 1961). The educational strategies of France and Indonesia reflect investments in human capital development.

The complexity of the educational transformation of the two countries shows that globalization is not simply a process of homogenization, but rather a continuous negotiation between the local and the global within a dynamic institutional framework.

D. Conclusion

The comparison of the French and Indonesian education systems reveals the complexity of educational dynamics influenced by the historical, social, and cultural contexts of each country. The fundamental differences lie in the philosophical approach, institutional structure, and adaptation mechanisms to global transformation, which reflect the uniqueness of each national education system. Despite their significant differences, both countries face similar challenges in producing an inclusive, quality, and responsive education system to contemporary socio-economic dynamics. Continuous efforts to integrate pedagogical innovation, digital technology, and the development of 21st century skills are a strategic agenda in education reform in the era of globalization.

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