



Merdeka Belajar: Review of Special School Education Management in North Sulawesi

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Abstract

Creating quality human resources requires various facilities and infrastructure, such as investment in the education sector. However, collaborative governance has not achieved the desired results. The analysis shows that education management is based on several indicators, including initial conditions, facilitative leadership, institutional design, and collaborative processes. Most importantly, the collaborative process involves several parties, including the government through the Ministry of Education and Culture, and primary school leaders/school committees (principals, staff, and teachers). Only 3 out of 34 special schools in North Sulawesi use the independent curriculum, which is tailored to learners with special needs. The other 31 special schools use the Special Education curriculum. Teacher qualifications in North Sulawesi for special needs teachers are dominated by teachers with educational qualifications below D4/S1 (referring to diplomas or undergraduate degrees). Statistics on Special Schools (SLB) for the 2020/2021 academic year show an increase in classrooms every year, but only around 47.37% of classrooms are in good condition. The percentage of classroom development in North Sulawesi SLB has increased from year to year but still needs improvement. Facilities and infrastructure in North Sulawesi SLB also need attention, such as the need for separate toilets for students that are not yet adequate. The physical Special Allocation Fund (DAK) provided by the government to schools is increasing, but repairs are still needed for slightly damaged or declining classrooms.

Keywords: *Education Management; Independent Learning; Special Schools*

Introduction

Education has the task of preparing human resources for development in line with the demands of the times. The development of society always brings forth new issues that have never been contemplated before (Noordyana, 2016). Quality education is measured by its role in contributing to the nation's upbringing and promoting national culture (Sutrisno, 2021). It should succeed in nurturing a smart, virtuous, and morally upright younger generation with strong personalities. Therefore, it is necessary to design an education system that creates an enjoyable, stimulating, and challenging learning environment, enabling students to maximize their talents and abilities (Mailani, 2018).

The government's attention to educational matters needs improvement. This is evident in the increasing complexity of educational problems (Widodo et al., 2012). The quality of students remains low, teachers lack professionalism, the cost of education is high, and the legal regulations in the field of education are still inadequate.

Solving educational problems should not be approached separately; comprehensive steps or actions need to be taken (Wardani, 2017). Merely focusing on budget increases is futile if the quality of human resources and education in Indonesia remains low. The issue of implementing nine-year compulsory education is still a significant challenge. It is apparent that many peripheral areas lack adequate educational facilities (Hidayat, 2012). Without significant policy changes under these circumstances, it will be difficult for the nation to overcome existing educational problems, let alone compete in the global era.

Despite the availability of accessible technology facilities such as Zoom, Google Meet, and video conferencing, these tools are not effectively utilized in the field of education (Batubara et al., 2022). A report by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) highlighted the challenges of distance learning (PJJ) faced by teachers, students, and parents. Students often feel overwhelmed by increased assignments, while parents struggle with limited internet access and other necessary resources, given Indonesia's vast territory (Abidin et al., 2020; Listyarti, 2020). Although the North Sulawesi Provincial Government has made efforts to provide free internet access with quotas to support online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ogen, 2020).

Internet access difficulties persist, particularly in border areas. In emergency situations, the Education Office has created a learning program that utilizes technology, using Digital Versatile Disk-Read Write (DVD-RW) as a means of delivering learning materials from Elementary School (SD) to Senior High School (SMA). This free learning policy is applicable at all levels and types of education, extending to educators and students. Special schools, including Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB) for children with disabilities, actively support the government's freedom to learn program. These special schools have implemented the program comprehensively since the 2021 academic year (Budiman & Pristiwaluyo, 2022).

In support of curriculum improvement in Indonesia, the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia issued Decree Number 56/M/2022, which provides guidelines for curriculum implementation in the context of learning recovery and development (2022). This decree signifies full support for advancing Indonesia's sovereignty, independence, and national identity by fostering students who think critically, creatively, independently, have faith, fear God Almighty, possess noble character, promote cooperation, and embrace global diversity through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum is an option available to schools ready to implement it from 2022 to 2024, specifically in response to the pandemic. However, schools that are not prepared for the Merdeka Curriculum still have alternatives, including continuing to use the 2013 Curriculum or the Emergency Curriculum until a review of the learning recovery curriculum is conducted in 2024 (Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022).

The Merdeka Curriculum or Independent Curriculum promotes freedom and student-centered learning. It grants schools, teachers, and students the autonomy to innovate, learn independently, and foster creativity. This shift from the 2013 curriculum, as stated by Sherly et al. (2021), begins with empowering teachers as the driving force behind a pleasant learning atmosphere. This change is in response to numerous complaints from parents and students about the pressure of achieving minimum scores, particularly during the pandemic. Under the Merdeka Curriculum, there is no longer an emphasis on meeting minimum completion scores but instead prioritizes quality learning to produce students of high quality, characterized by the Pancasila student profile, with competencies to face global challenges.

The structure of the Merdeka Curriculum for special education students aligns with the structure for regular elementary, junior high, and high school students. However, there are adjustments made for

learners with intellectual barriers. Students with special needs who attend special schools but do not have intellectual disabilities can follow the regular curriculum with necessary adjustments. The Directorate of Community Education and Special Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture specifies these adjustments, which primarily focus on functional skills and subjects that support individual needs. Additionally, the Learning Outcomes (CP) for special education are prepared based on the regular CP but modified according to the characteristics and needs of students with special needs. Special education students who do not have intellectual barriers can utilize the same CP as students in regular education, as stated on the social media page of the Directorate General of Teachers and Education Personnel of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The Merdeka Curriculum for special education students places a significant emphasis on skill subjects. This emphasis is driven by the goal of fostering independence in learning, preparing students for employment, and enabling them to become entrepreneurs. Alongside these points, there are several other key aspects to understand about the Merdeka Curriculum for Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB). Quoting from the website of the Directorate of Community Education and Special Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the following details should be noted:

1. In SMPLB and SMALB, the skills group maps constitute the largest portion of lesson hours, while in SDLB, it is art and culture.
2. In grade VIII, SMPLB and SMALB students choose one type of skill based on their talents and interests. In grade VII, students have the option to choose two or more types of skills.
3. Schools have the freedom to independently develop skill types based on the needs and characteristics of their regions and the availability of human resources.
4. Cultural arts subjects in SMPLB and SMALB, included in the general subject group, serve as means of appreciation and therapy, while art subjects in the skills group serve as professional training.
5. Special needs programs in SMALB are compulsory subjects, as in SDLB and SMPLB.
6. Teachers for special needs programs can be special education teachers, other subject teachers, or classroom teachers deemed suitable by the school principal. Other subject teachers or classroom teachers are required to receive special needs program competency training.
7. Student phase determination is based on the results of diagnostic assessments.
8. Students with special needs from special schools can continue their education in inclusive education units by attending transition classes.
9. The allocation of lesson hours is flexible, allowing education units and schools to adjust the learning load according to their characteristics, learning needs, and academic, cultural, social, and other requirements.
10. The subject content related to beliefs in God Almighty is conducted in accordance with legislation governing educational services for religious beliefs.
11. The apprenticeship program is further regulated by the leader of the main unit responsible for curriculum, assessment, and books.
12. The process of identifying and developing students' interests, talents, and abilities is carried out by teachers coordinated by counseling teachers. If the BK teacher is insufficient, the coordination is carried out by other teachers.

The North Sulawesi Regional Education Office (Dikda) is making efforts to enhance the quality of graduates from special schools (SLB) in the region, enabling them to compete in the workforce. Currently, there are 34 special schools in North Sulawesi, consisting of six state special schools and 28 private special schools distributed across 11 regencies/cities. The four districts that do not currently have special schools are Siau Tagulandang Biaro Islands District, East Bolaang Mongondow District, South Bolaang Mongondow District, and North Bolaang Mongondow District. It is hoped that these four districts will establish special schools in the future to provide education for children with disabilities in the region.

Method

This study utilizes the descriptive research method, which is employed to effectively describe and interpret a specific phenomenon. The chosen approach for this research is library research, wherein secondary data derived from relevant theories is utilized as the primary source of information. This method allows for a comprehensive analysis of the topic under investigation.

Results and Discussion

1) Education Curriculum

The concept of "*Merdeka Belajar* or Freedom to learn" introduced by the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture is aimed at advancing educational progress. Access to quality education is the right of every Indonesian citizen, including children with special needs. Inclusive education institutions have been established to provide equal opportunities for education and promote children's participation in school (equalization of educational opportunities) (Nana, A.F, 2019). The implementation of "*Merdeka Belajar*" is part of the ongoing changes in the education and teaching system, which requires careful consideration of inclusive education.

The establishment of inclusive schools is also influenced by the government's zoning program. Additionally, the lack of teaching staff with a background in special needs education is another factor contributing to the establishment of these schools. In special schools (SLB), the National Examination has been replaced with a minimum competency assessment and character survey, promoting independent learning for children with special needs. The assessment process involves creating a Teaching Program Plan (RPP) as a reference material, including learning activities and assessments. The learning assessment is conducted after the learning process, following assessment procedures and tools to achieve learning objectives (Hamzah et al., 2020).

The students' abilities are evaluated through the recapitulation of learning assessments, which helps track their learning progress. Assessments are crucial to understanding the profile of students with disabilities (Mustafa et al., 2020). The character survey captures the basic abilities that students must master. While the minimum ability assessment and character survey focus on cognitive and material understanding, it is essential for teachers in special schools (SLB) to update their approaches. This includes integrating competency assessment concepts, engaging in discussions and innovative learning strategies based on literacy and numeracy, evaluating the impact of traditional learning methods, implementing innovative forms of learning as competency assessment, and reflecting on literacy and numeracy models developed by students.

Table 1. SLB Curriculum in North Sulawesi Province

SLB NAME	LOCATION	CURRICULUM
SLB NEGERI LOLAK	Bolaang Mongondow District	Independent SMLB
SLB CINTA KASIH IMANDI		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB KASIH BUNDA GMIST	Sangihe Islands District	SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB NEGERI MANGANITU		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB NEGERI 1 TALAUD	Talaud Islands District	SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB FEYBE MANGARAN		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB BERKAT YOSUA	Minahasa District	SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB KREASI MANDIRI		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB DORKAS KAKAS		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB THERESIA SONDER		Freedom Preschool
SLB PERMUTI AMURANG	South Minahasa District	SDLB Special Education 2013
SLB NEGERI AMURANG		SMALB Special Education 2013

SLB SYALOM TOLOMBUKAN SATU	Southeast Minahasa District	SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB NEGERI PUSOMAEN		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLBS ANUGERAH DIMEMBE	North Minahasa District	SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB GMIM MARANATHA AIRMADIDI		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB EFATA	Bitung City	SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB FINJIL		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB KASIH ANGELIA		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB TRIKORA INDAH BITUNG		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB FINJILI PULAU LEMBEH		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB KRISTINIA BITUNG		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLBN POYOWA BESAR	Kotamobagu City	Freedom Preschool
SLB MUTIARA KASIH	Manado City	SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB YPAC MANADO		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB (AUTIS SPECIAL) AGCA CENTER MANADO		Freedom Preschool
SLB B/C KRISTEN EMMANUEL		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLBS GMIM NAZARETH TUMINTING		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB KHUSUS AUTIS PERMATA HATI		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB KHUSUS AUTIS HIZKIA		Merdeka High School
SLB A BARTEMEUS		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB PAULUS TOMOHON	Tomohon City	SMALB Special Education 2013
SLBB DAMAI GMIM TOMOHON		SMALB Special Education 2013
SLB TUNA GRAHITA ST ANNA		SMALB Special Education 2013

Source: <https://sekolah.data.kemdikbud.go.id/>

According to the data in Table 1, it is evident that among the 34 special schools in North Sulawesi province, only 4 of them utilize the independent curriculum. These schools are SLB NEGERI LOLAK, SLB THERESIA SONDER, SLB (SPECIAL AUTIS) AGCA CENTER MANADO, and SLB KHUSUS AUTIS HIZKIA. The curriculum structure of these schools is based on the curriculum structure of regular primary schools (SD/MI), junior high schools (SMP/MTs), and senior high schools (SMA/MA), with adjustments made for students with intellectual disabilities. Students without intellectual barriers can follow the regular education curriculum, which is modified to suit their needs. The curriculum structure adjustments focus on functional skills and subjects that support these specific needs. On the other hand, the remaining 30 special schools adopt the 2013 SDLB Special Education and 2013 SMALB Special Education curriculum.

The 2013 curriculum emphasizes the understanding of natural, social, artistic, and cultural phenomena. It aims to develop students with noble character (affective), skills (psychomotor), and sustainable knowledge (cognitive). This approach fosters creativity, innovation, and productivity among students. The 2013 curriculum represents an advancement from previous curricula, emphasizing the improvement and balance of soft skills and hard skills, including attitude, skills, and knowledge competencies. The curriculum for children with special needs (ABK) is closely related to the general curriculum. Its purpose is to shape the behavior of students, both for children with special needs and typically developing children. However, there are slight differences for children with special needs (ABK), particularly in the evaluation process. The development of the 2013 curriculum for children with special needs (ABK) takes into account their individual abilities and specific obstacles or deficiencies they may face.

2) Human Resources / Human Resources Educators

Human resource management is one of the fields of general management that encompasses aspects of planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling. This process can be found in the functions or areas of production, marketing, finance, and staffing. Due to the recognition of the increasingly crucial role of human resources in achieving goals, various experiences and research findings in the field of human resources (HR) are systematically gathered under the umbrella term of human resource management. The term "management" refers to a collection of knowledge regarding how to effectively manage human resources (Rivai, 2005).

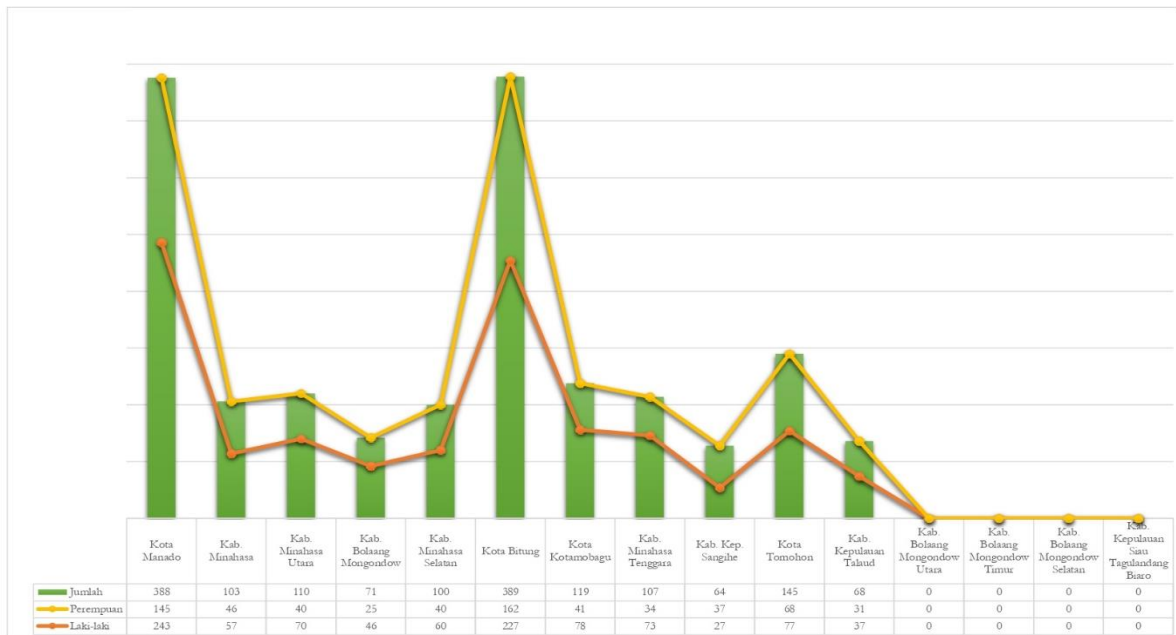


Figure 1 Data on Students in North Sulawesi Province Even Semester 2022/2023

Source: <https://dapo.kemdikbud.go.id/>

In terms of the distribution of special education students across 15 cities/districts in North Sulawesi Province, the highest number of special education students came from Bitung City with 389 students, followed by Manado City with 388 students. Conversely, the lowest number, even no students at all, came from North Bolang Mongondow Regency, East Bolang Mongondow Regency, South Bolang Mongondow Regency, and Siau Tagulandang Biaro Islands Regency, commonly referred to as Sitaro Islands. This is because these four districts do not have special schools. Additionally, overall, special education students are predominantly male. Out of a total of 1,664 students in North Sulawesi Province, 60% are male (995 students), while 40% are female (669 students).

The North Sulawesi Provincial Teacher Training Center demonstrates a strong commitment to developing the human resources of educators in the province. Various strategies have been implemented in activity programs, including Panada. Panada stands for Jumpa Bermakna Daring (meaningful online meeting). This weekly virtual activity provides a platform for learning community activists in North Sulawesi to share good practices. This initiative aligns with the Kemdikbudristek program, which voluntarily expands the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the 2023-2024 school year (BGP Sulawesi Utara, 2023).

Based on data from the regional education balance sheet, the number of special education teachers in North Sulawesi Province is 304, comprising 73 male teachers and 231 female teachers distributed across various cities/districts. The largest number of special education teachers is found in Manado City with 68 teachers (19 male and 49 female teachers), followed by Bitung City with 42

teachers (8 male and 34 female teachers), Kotamobagu City with 32 teachers (10 male and 22 female teachers), Tomohon City with 28 teachers (7 male and 21 female teachers), Minahasa Regency with 26 teachers (5 male and 21 female teachers), and South Minahasa Regency with 24 teachers (7 male and 17 female teachers). Moreover, Southeast Minahasa District has 18 teachers (3 male and 15 female teachers), Sangihe District has 18 teachers (3 male and 15 female teachers), Talaud District has 17 teachers (4 male and 13 female teachers), North Minahasa District has 15 teachers (2 male and 13 female teachers), and Bolaang Mongondow District has 13 teachers (5 male and 8 female teachers). Meanwhile, four districts do not have special schools.

Teacher qualifications in North Sulawesi Province for special education teachers are predominantly individuals with educational background qualifications below D4/S1. This indicates that there are still many SLB teachers who do not meet the Ministry of National Education regulations, which require teachers to have a minimum education of D4/S1 with a special major in teaching. The number of certified teachers in North Sulawesi Province amounts to 30.7% of SLB teachers. This indicates that the percentage of teachers who have been certified in North Sulawesi Province is below 50% of the total number. The lack of certified teachers is not only due to educational qualifications but also due to difficulties in fulfilling credit points. Teachers working on small islands or in remote areas face challenges in meeting the required credit points. Alongside the issue of teacher shortage, a common problem in Indonesian education is the lack of welfare, particularly for honorary teachers. According to data from the Regional Education Balance Sheet of North Sulawesi Province (2021), civil servant teachers account for 36.2% in SLBs, while the remaining 63.3% are non-civil servants.

The challenge of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development, particularly in rural areas, lies in literacy limitations, which refer to the management and utilization of human resources (Ginting, 2017). If managers or local governments possess good e-literacy skills, the management of various programs can be significantly improved (Praditya, 2014). The lack of internet users who engage in productive activities (Tawaang, 2015), limited internet usage confined to social media and entertainment (Masyhur, 2016), and a perception of not needing the internet (Nasution, 2017) are common issues.

Out of the 335 special education teachers in North Sulawesi Province, only 263 teachers possess IT skills, while the remaining 72 individuals have yet to master IT. Additionally, concerning the distribution of special schools in North Sulawesi Province, four city/district areas do not have special schools, namely Sitaro Islands District, East Bolaang Mongondow District, North Bolaang Mongondow District, and South Bolaang Mongondow District.

Apart from literacy challenges, there is a need for an improved model of Information and Communication Technology development. The provision of mobile broadband services is the simplest and most favored model among communities due to the convenience of using mobile devices. However, telecenters are also considered suitable for many remote areas. Nevertheless, based on past experiences, telecenter programs must be carefully planned. The implementation of telecenter programs should involve collaboration among various stakeholders. Telecenter construction tasks should be divided to lighten the workload. Some parties can provide infrastructure, others can prepare the receiving environment, while some can develop services and applications to be provided, and finally, there should be those who devise human resource development programs.

Table 2. Percentage of SLB teachers in North Sulawesi Province

SLB NAME	QUALIFICATION	CERTIFICATION	Civil servant
SLB NEGERI LOLAK	100	33.3	16.67
SLB CINTA KASIH IMANDI	100	0	0
SLB KASIH BUNDA GMIST	83.33	50	33.33

SLB NEGERI MANGANITU	58.33	75	83.33
SLB NEGERI 1 TALAUD	100	7.14	0
SLB FEYBE MANGARAN	66.67	33.33	0
SLB BERKAT YOSUA	0	16.67	0
SLB KREASI MANDIRI	33.33	0	0
SLB DORKAS KAKAS	42.86	28.57	28.57
SLB THERESIA SONDER	100	22.22	22.22
SLB PERMUTI AMURANG	33.33	16.67	16.67
SLB NEGERI AMURANG	94.44	22.22	44.44
SLB SYALOM TOLOMBUKAN SATU	50	0	0
SLB NEGERI PUSOMAEN	75	35.5	87.5
SLBS ANUGERAH DIMEMBE	71.43	57.14	28.57
SLB GMIM MARANATHA AIRMADIDI	50	25	37.5
SLB EFATA	75	12.5	0
SLB FINJIL	66.67	0	0
SLB KASIH ANGELIA	91.67	50	41.67
SLB TRIKORA INDAH BITUNG	85.71	28.57	0
SLB FINJILI PULAU LEMBEH	33.33	0	0
SLB KRISTINIA BITUNG	62.5	12.5	0
SLBN POYOWA BESAR	96.88	34.38	46.88
SLB MUTIARA KASIH	80	20	20
SLB YPAC MANADO	85.71	85.71	78.57
SLB (KHUSUS AUTIS) AGCA CENTER MANADO	75	0	37.50
SLB B/C KRISTEN EMMANUEL	60	60	60
SLBS GMIM NAZARETH TUMINTING	88.89	55.56	44.44
SLB KHUSUS AUTIS PERMATA HATI	66.67	13.33	26.67
SLB KHUSUS AUTIS HIZKIA	80	20	0
SLB A BARTEMEUS	87.5	87.5	75
SLB PAULUS TOMOHON	57.14	42.86	14.29
SLBB DAMAI GMIM TOMOHON	90	100	90
SLB TUNA GRAHITA ST ANNA	81.82	63.64	54.55

Source: <https://sekolah.data.kemdikbud.go.id/>

Table 2 illustrates the academic qualifications of educators or teachers in 34 special schools in North Sulawesi Province, where almost all of them hold academic qualifications of S1 or higher. Among the four special schools, SLB NEGERI LOLAK, SLB CINTA KASIH IMANDI, SLB THERESIA SONDER, and SLB NEGERI 1 TALAUD, 100% of the teachers possess S1 or higher qualifications. On the other hand, three SLBs have less than 50% of teachers with qualifications below S1, namely SLB BERKAT YOSUA, SLB DORKAS KAKAS, and SLB FINJILI PULAU LEMBEH.

The government has also implemented regulations pertaining to special education teachers, as stated in Permendiknas No. 32 of 2010, which outlines the "Standards for Academic Qualifications and Competencies of Special Education Teachers". Educating students with special needs poses greater challenges compared to educating typically developing children. Teachers in this field require advanced knowledge, skills, and dedication to achieve national education goals. Given these circumstances, teachers in special schools (SLB) must fulfill specific requirements to become professional educators, including meeting academic qualifications, demonstrating competencies, and obtaining educational certificates.

The standards for academic qualifications and competencies for special education teachers are further elucidated in Permendiknas No. 32 of 2010. This regulation emphasizes that PAI (Islamic Religious Education) teachers at certain levels and types of educational institutions must meet specific qualifications and competencies. Former teachers who hold only PGA (Program Guru Agama) qualifications may be appointed as permanent teachers, although the process is lengthy and challenging. However, they are not required to possess academic qualifications and teaching competencies.

The situation described above applies to educational institutions in North Sulawesi Province, specifically special schools. The teaching and learning process in these schools requires teachers to possess knowledge and skills in understanding students' sign language. Teachers also develop lesson plans to facilitate a smooth learning process. They are also required to use sign language to communicate effectively with students, adapting their communication based on the students' physical and mental disabilities. Through this approach, teachers can better understand the students' needs. Despite the limitations faced by students in North Sulawesi Province's special schools, teachers strive to impart religious teachings and foster positive values in their students. Many students in special schools exhibit more polite, ethical, and commendable behaviors compared to their typically developing peers. This reflects the teachers' abilities and competence in providing exemplary instruction. However, it is noted that sometimes teachers deviate from the lesson plan, resulting in less effective and efficient learning. Irregular scheduling further hampers the learning process, making it challenging to achieve the same level of effectiveness as other subjects (Utami, 2014).

Regarding teacher certification, the percentage of certified teachers varies among the 34 special schools in North Sulawesi Province. DAMAI GMIM TOMOHON SLBB has the highest percentage of certified teachers at 100%, followed by eight other SLBs with certification rates above 50%. This indicates that only nine out of the 34 SLBs have certified teachers, while the remaining 25 SLBs have teachers who are yet to be certified.

In terms of management status, public schools are under government administration, while private schools are managed by foundations or private institutions. The majority of teachers in public schools are civil servants (PNS), whereas teachers in private schools are employed by foundations or private institutions (Safitri & Nursalim, 2013). Based on data from SLBs in North Sulawesi Province, only three SLBs, namely SLB NEGERI MANGANITU, SLB YPAC MANADO, and SLB TUNA GRAHITA ST ANNA, have more than 50% of their teachers as civil servants. The remaining 31 SLBs have non-civil servant teachers or educators, often referred to as honorary teachers. This indicates that a significant number of SLB teachers and educators in North Sulawesi Province have yet to be appointed as civil servants.

3) Education Supporting Infrastructure

The education problem in North Sulawesi Province stems from various obstacles, including inadequate facilities and infrastructure. These limitations lead to a lack of enthusiasm among students, reduced motivation, and a mismatch between teachers' competence and educational qualifications. Consequently, the learning process becomes conventional, with teachers merely delivering lectures without incorporating innovative or modified learning systems that can enhance students' potential and foster creativity. Geographical constraints also hinder educational progress in the region, given the vast area of North Sulawesi, comprising 12 mainland districts and 3 island/border districts, coupled with inadequate communication facilities. The distance between students' homes and schools further exacerbates the challenges faced by education stakeholders responsible for improving human resource quality (Gighile et al., 2018).

According to the 2020/2021 statistics on Special Schools (SLB), the development of classrooms in North Sulawesi Province shows an increasing trend each year. In the fiscal year 2018/2019, there were 64 SLBN schools and 178 SLBS schools. In 2019/2020, these numbers rose to 114 SLBN schools and

294 SLBS schools. By 2020/2021, there were 124 SLBN schools and 275 SLBS schools. However, when analyzing the condition of these classrooms, it is observed that only a portion of them are in good condition. Out of the total 399 SLB classrooms in North Sulawesi Province for 2020/2021, 189 classrooms (around 47.37%) were considered to be in good condition. This shows a slight increase compared to the previous years, where the percentage of good classrooms was 40.20% in 2019/2020 and 43.39% in 2018/2019.

The quality of facilities and infrastructure is also reflected in the indicator of school sanitation. Referring to the 2020/2021 SLB statistical data, the average percentage of SLBs in North Sulawesi Province with a proper water source is 90.32%. The breakdown shows that SLBN schools have a proper water source in 83.33% of cases, while SLBS schools have it in 92% of cases. This indicates that most SLBs in North Sulawesi Province have access to proper water sources. However, when considering separate student toilets, the percentage drops significantly. Only 66.67% of SLBN schools and 36% of SLBS schools have separate toilets for students, resulting in an average of 41.94% across all SLBs. This highlights the inadequate provision of separate toilets for SLB students in North Sulawesi Province.

Table 3. Facilities and Infrastructure at Special Schools in North Sulawesi Province

SLB NAME	INTERNET ACCESS	POWER SOURCE	ELECTRICAL POWER	CLASSROOM	SANITATION
SLB NEGERI LOLAK	None	None	-	-	-
SLB CINTA KASIH IMANDI	Telkomsel Flash	PLN	450	-	-
SLB KASIH BUNDA GMIST*	None	None	-	-	-
SLB NEGERI MANGANITU	Telkomsel Flash	PLN	2,999	-	-
SLB NEGERI 1 TALAUD	Telkomsel Flash	PLN	5,000	B=4, S=1, R=11	-
SLB FEYBE MANGARAN	None	PLN	1,300	-	-
SLB BERKAT YOSUA	Telkomsel Flash	PLN	1,300	R=4	-
SLB KREASI MANDIRI	Telkomsel Flash	PLN	2,200	B=2, S=1, R=1	R=2
SLB DORKAS KAKAS	None	PLN	3,990	B=13	B=5
SLB THERESIA SONDER	Smartfren	PLN	1,300	R=1	-
SLB PERMUTI AMURANG	Smartfren	PLN	1,300	-	-
SLB NEGERI AMURANG	None	PLN	900	-	-
SLB SYALOM TOLOMBUKAN SATU	None	PLN	450	B=4	B=4
SLB NEGERI PUSOMAEN	Smartfren	PLN	2,300	S=4, B=2	-
SLBS ANUGERAH DIMEMBE	Telkomsel Flash	PLN	1,300	-	-
SLB GMIM	XL (GSM)	PLN	1,300	-	B=1

MARANATHA AIRMADIDI					
SLB EFATA	None	PLN	900	R=1, B=5	-
SLB FINJIL	Telkomsel Flash	PLN & Diesel	1,900	-	R=1
SLB KASIH ANGELIA	None	PLN	3,400	-	-
SLB TRIKORA INDAH BITUNG	Telkomsel Flash	PLN	1,300	S=1	-
SLB FINJILI PULAU LEMBEH	Telkomsel Flash	PLN	900	R=1	-
SLB KRISTINIA BITUNG	None	PLN	1,300	R=4, B=1	-
SLBN POYOWA BESAR	Telkomsel Speedy	PLN	900	R=1	-
SLB MUTIARA KASIH	Telkomsel Flash	PLN	2,200	S=12	-
SLB YPAC MANADO	None	PLN	4,400	R=14, S=1	R=3
SLB (KHUSUS AUTIS) AGCA CENTER MANADO	Telkomsel Flash	PLN	1,297	-	-
SLB B/C KRISTEN EMMANUEL	XL (GSM)	PLN	1,300	-	-
SLBS GMIM NAZARETH TUMINTING	None	PLN	1,300	R=7, S=1	R=1
SLB KHUSUS AUTIS PERMATA HATI	Telkomsel Flash	PLN	2,200	S=16	S=3
SLB KHUSUS AUTIS HIZKIA	Telkomsel Speedy	PLN	1,000	-	-
SLB A BARTEMEUS	None	PLN	3,500	S=8, B=6	-
SLB PAULUS TOMOHON	None	PLN	5,500	-	-
SLBB DAMAI GMIM TOMOHON	Telkomsel Flash	PLN	900	S=11	S=11
SLB TUNA GRAHITA ST ANNA	None	PLN	3,500	R=19	R=14

*) Calculation is only for Good condition, Light Damage and Moderate Damage
B= severe, R= mild, S= moderate

Source: <https://school.data.kemdikbud.go.id/>

Table 3 illustrates the availability of facilities and infrastructure in SLBs in North Sulawesi Province, which is generally adequate. However, it is worth noting that there are several SLBs that do not have internet access, including SLB NEGERI LOLAK, SLB KASIH BUNDA GMIST, SLB FEYBE MANGARAN, SLB DORKAS KAKAS, SLB NEGERI AMURANG, SLB SYALOM TOLOMBUKAN

SATU, SLB EFATA, SLB KASIH ANGELIA, SLB YPAC MANADO, SLBS GMIM NAZARETH TUMINTING, SLB A BARTEMEUS, SLB PAULUS TOMOHON, and SLB TUNA GRAHITA ST ANNA. It is crucial for the government to review the distribution of internet access in these schools to ensure that students, teachers, and educators can effectively participate in the teaching and learning process, similar to schools that already have internet access.

Regarding electricity access, 32 (thirty-two) special schools in North Sulawesi Province have access to electricity through the PLN (state-owned electricity company) and diesel generators, while only 2 special schools, namely SLB NEGERI LOLAK and SLB KASIH BUNDA GMIST, do not have electricity sources. To address this issue, the local government is actively working on maximizing the provision and utilization of new renewable energy sources to ensure the availability of electricity. The utilization of solar power, wind power in the Sangihe Islands Regency and surrounding areas, Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC) in Amurang Bay, underwater current power in Likupang and Lembeh Strait, wave power, tidal power, and biomass power are being explored throughout North Sulawesi. The Governor has highlighted the potential for utilizing Lahendong Geothermal Power Plant (I-IV) with a capacity of 80 MW, PLTP 5-6 with a capacity of 40 MW (in the exploration stage), and the utilization of water resources for hydroelectric power plants like Tonsea Hydroelectric Power Plant, Tanggari I, and Tanggari II with a combined capacity of 59.80 MW. It is expected that the utilization of these potentials will meet the electrical energy needs in North Sulawesi (Polakitan, 2022).

The condition of the classroom is a critical factor in improving the quality of education in Indonesia as it directly impacts the learning process and student comfort. Some classrooms may have minor damages, and it is essential to address these issues promptly to prevent further deterioration. The level of comfort in the classroom is key to the successful delivery of learning objectives by the teachers, including the use of appropriate tools and teaching methods.

According to the data from the Ministry of Education and Culture for the 2022/2023 school year, out of the 34 (thirty-four) special schools in North Sulawesi Province, 19 schools have classrooms in various states of damage, ranging from light damage to moderate and heavy damage. SLBs with severely damaged classrooms include SLB NEGERI 1 TALAUD (4 classrooms), SLB KREASI MANDIRI (2 classrooms), SLB DORKAS KAKAS (13 classrooms), SLB SYALOM TOLOMBUKAN ONE (4 classrooms), SLB NEGERI PUSOMAEN (2 classrooms), SLB EFATA (5 classrooms), SLB KRISTINIA BITUNG (1 classroom), and SLB SPECIAL AUTIS HIZKIA (1 classroom). Other schools have experienced minor to moderate damage. It is evident that there are still SLBs whose classroom conditions are not suitable for student learning activities. The importance of having comfortable classroom conditions directly affects the students' comfort during the learning process, as mandated by the Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. Therefore, it is crucial to promptly replace any damaged infrastructure to ensure that it does not hinder the teaching and learning process at school.

According to the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 57 of 2009 concerning the Provision of Healthy School Development Assistance, a healthy school is defined as a clean, green, shady, safe, and comfortable environment where students are healthy, active, and fit, and practice clean and healthy lifestyles. One of the consequences of the absence of access to proper sanitation and clean and healthy living behaviors is the occurrence of diseases, such as diarrhea and parasitic infections, among children, which prevents them from attending school. One approach to address these issues is to implement programs that improve the condition of drinking water, sanitation, and promote clean and healthy living behaviors among students and school staff.

Regarding the condition of school environmental sanitation in SLBs in North Sulawesi Province, three schools have severely damaged sanitation facilities, while seven others have mild to moderate damage. The remaining schools have good sanitation conditions. This indicates that the overall sanitation condition of SLBs in North Sulawesi Province can be considered good. Indicators of maintaining environmentally friendly supporting facilities and infrastructure include proper lighting arrangements,

natural air ventilation, shade tree maintenance, and the use of paving blocks or grass in school grounds. Additionally, mechanisms have been established to manage and maintain school sanitation facilities, specifically toilets. The North Sulawesi Province SLBs have implemented four elements of a mechanism for managing and maintaining environmentally friendly supporting facilities related to sanitation. These elements consist of a person in charge of facilities and infrastructure, coordinators, supervisors, and disciplinary officers. With the establishment of these mechanisms, the maintenance of environmentally friendly supporting facilities and infrastructure, including sanitation facilities, can be properly carried out.

4) Education Funding

The condition of SLB level classrooms is also included in the responsibility of the Physical Special Allocation Fund (DAK Fisik), this budget has decreased from 2020 to 2021, the following diagram:

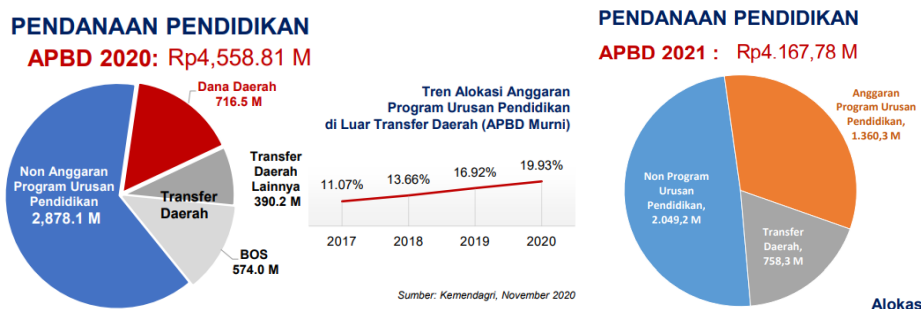


Figure 3. Distribution of Education Funding
Source :<https://npd.kemdikbud.go.id/>

In 2021, the regional budget is smaller than in 2020, amounting to IDR 4,167.78 million, whereas the APBD in 2020 was IDR 4,558.81 million. However, the budget for the education affairs program is higher in 2021, with an amount of IDR 1,360.3 million compared to only IDR 574.0 million in 2020. Despite the decrease in the government's allocated APBD in 2021, the Physical Special Allocation Fund (DAK) provided by the government to schools for supporting facilities and infrastructure in North Sulawesi Province has increased. This increase in DAK for schools may be a contributing factor to the slightly damaged condition of classrooms, as there is a decrease in the number of classrooms, indicating the need for repairs.

According to the Pemendikbudristek Number 63 of 2022, which concerns the Technical Guidelines for the Management of BOSP (Education Unit Operational Assistance) Funds for 2023, it was issued to replace the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 2 of 2022. The previous regulation was no longer in line with the development of the management of non-physical special allocation funds. Pemendikbudristek Number 63 of 2022 states that the Education Units receiving Regular BOS Funds include SD, SDLB, SMP, SMPLB, SMA, SMALB, SLB, and SMK. Additionally, Kepmendikbudristek Number 3/P/2023 specifies the Unit Costs, Fund Recipients, and Allocation Amount of PAUD BOP Funds, Regular BOS Funds, and Regular Equality for Fiscal Year 2023. Reported on the website of the Directorate of SMP of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Research, there are four new policies related to BOS funds in 2023: (1) Merging the nomenclature into BOSP. The BOS/BOP PAUD/BOP Equivalency Fund is a type/menu of activities from BOSP, while Regular and Performance BOS/BOP PAUD/Equivalency BOP Funds are classifications of activity types/themes. (2) Criteria for recipients of BOS Performance Achievement and BOS/BOP Equivalency Best Performance. For BOS Performance Achievement, the criteria include being a recipient of Regular BOS Funds in the current fiscal year, achieving at least one award or medal, and obtaining a certificate of achievement at a talent event at the provincial, national, or international level. The criteria also exclude schools designated as implementers of the Mover School Program and SMK Centers of Excellence. As for the BOS/BOP Equality Best Performance, the recipients are Regular BOS funds recipients in the current fiscal year, including the top 15 percent of education units with the best performance from those

that undergo the National Assessment. It does not include education units designated as PSP implementers, SMK Centers of Excellence, and schools with achievements. (3) The unit costs for Equivalency BOP vary. The unit cost of BOP Equivalency differs across regions, calculated based on the construction cost index (IKK) for each district/city area. (4) The distribution mechanism for Regular BOSP funds now consists of only two stages. Previously, the distribution was carried out in three stages, in January (30 percent), April (40 percent), and September (30 percent). However, for 2023, the funds will only be distributed in two stages, in January and July (50 percent each).

The School Operational Assistance Fund (BOS) is one of the funds provided by the central government to early childhood education units, basic education, secondary education, and equivalency education in order to improve the quality of learning and ensure equitable access to education services. According to Permendikbudristek Number 2 of 2022, the distribution of phase II Regular BOS funds takes place after submitting a report on phase III Regular BOS funds for FY 2021. On the other hand, PMK 119/PMK.07/2021 mandates that the distribution of BOS funds for phase II considers the remaining Regular BOS funds for FY 2020 and FY 2021.

Based on data from <https://bos.kemdikbud.go.id/> regarding the distribution of regular BOS in 2020 for North Sulawesi Province, phase 1 had a total amount of Rp.147,919,440,000, divided into three parts: Education Units at the Basic Education level (Dikdas) including elementary and junior high schools, State Secondary Education (Dikmen Negeri) including SMAN, SMKN, and SLBN, and Private Secondary Education (Dikmen Swasta) consisting of SMAS, SMKS, and SLBS. The disbursement of funds for SLBN amounted to Rp.255,000,000, while for SLBS it amounted to Rp.909,000,000. In stage 2 of the distribution of regular BOS for SLBN and SLBS, there was an increase of Rp.340,000,000 for SLBN and Rp.1,212,000,000 for SLBS from a total of Rp.197,225,920,000 that had been divided among Dikdas, State Dikmen, and Private Dikmen. However, the distribution of BOS in stage 3 experienced a decrease from a total of Rp.145,209,270,000, with SLBN receiving Rp.256,200,000 and SLBS receiving Rp.967,200,000. This decrease is due to the Ministry of Education and Culture's 2020 budget being reduced by Rp.4.9 trillion as a result of government policies to reallocate and refocus the 2020 State Budget (APBN) to support the handling of the Covid-19 non-natural disaster. This budget cut includes the cost of official visits, meetings, and events that could not be carried out within the ministry area. The government prioritizes the current education budget to assist students and schools affected by Covid-19, the KIP Program, and the implementation of distance learning.

Furthermore, due to the pandemic, there has been an increase in KIP Lecture recipients. In 2020, the Ministry of Education and Culture allocated IDR 6.7 trillion for the KIP Lecture budget, which is an increase compared to the previous year when the government allocated IDR 6 trillion. The BOS (School Operational Assistance) fund budget also increased at the beginning of 2020, with the government allocating IDR 64 trillion for the provision of BOS funds this year. This increase includes the Affirmation BOS and Regular BOS. Regular BOS is intended for the purchase of multimedia learning tools, maintenance and care of school facilities, and admission of new students. BOS Performance is given to schools that excel in improving their education quality report card to achieve national education standards. Meanwhile, BOS Affirmation is used to support the routine operations of schools in underdeveloped, outermost, and frontier (3T) areas.

Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Anwar Makarim, announced policies regarding the distribution scheme of School Operational Assistance (BOS) and Physical Special Allocation Funds (DAK) for 2021. This policy is a continuation of Merdeka Belajar, the third episode issued in 2020, which was supported by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Home Affairs, aiming to improve the quality of the mechanism for channeling and utilizing BOS funds directly to school accounts. He emphasized that the main points of the 2021 BOS fund policy include the variation in the value of the BOS unit cost based on the characteristics of each region, the flexibility of using BOS funds, including for the preparation of Face-to-Face Learning (PTM), and the requirement for online reporting of BOS fund usage through the website <https://bos.kemdikbud.go.id> to enhance accountability.

The realization of BOS funds from the Non-Physical DAK in North Sulawesi Province has increased in terms of nominal value, schools, and recipient students from 2020 to 2021. According to data from BPS, almost all elementary, junior high, high, vocational, and special schools in North Sulawesi have received an allocation of BOS funds. In 2021, the total distribution of regular BOS funds in North Sulawesi Province during stage 1 amounted to Rp. 168,550,902,000. The details for SLBN amounted to Rp. 534,765,000, and SLBS received Rp. 1,887,879,000. In stage 2, the total BOS disbursement increased to Rp. 224,966,732,000, with SLBN receiving Rp. 714,620,000, and SLBS receiving Rp. 2,521,172,000. Meanwhile, during stage 3, the total BOS disbursement for basic education, state education, and private education amounted to Rp. 166,387,875,000. This amount was divided with SLBN receiving Rp. 532,857,000, and SLBS receiving Rp. 1,981,038,000. In 2022, the total funds for BOS phase 1 in North Sulawesi Province amounted to Rp. 163,149,168,000. The distribution of regular BOS phase 1 for SLBN was Rp. 532,857,000, and for SLBS, it was Rp. 1,981,038,000. In phase 2, there was an increase with a total amount of funds of Rp. 213,887,517,913, with SLBN receiving Rp. 710,476,000, and SLBS receiving Rp. 2,616,620,000. Similar to the previous two years, the disbursement of BOS funds for stage 3 experienced a decrease compared to stage 2. The total disbursement of BOS during stage 3 amounted to Rp. 163,741,925,338, with SLBN receiving Rp. 532,857,000, and SLBS receiving Rp. 1,981,038,000.

The substantial allocation of expenditure for education has had a significant impact on increasing the value and ranking of the Human Development Index (HDI) of North Sulawesi Province. In 2020, the province managed to rank 7th among all provinces in Indonesia, moving up 1 rank compared to the previous years when it was in the 8th position. The expansion of access to education is highly beneficial, particularly for the poor or low-income individuals, as it helps improve their competencies and skills, leading to higher wage levels and the opportunity to enhance their living standards. The HDI is composed of three basic dimensions: longevity and healthy living, knowledge, and a decent standard of living.

Since 2018, the HDI of North Sulawesi Province has consistently increased, reaching a value of 1.1 in 2021, which is higher than the national value of 0.9. This increase is the 9th largest among all provinces. When examining the knowledge dimension in more depth, it consists of key components such as the average years of schooling (RLS) and expected years of schooling (HLS), which provide relevant descriptions of the state of education and its changes. Unlike the HDI, the HLS of North Sulawesi Province in 2021 was ranked 24th, but it experienced a significant increase of 0.26 during the period from 2018 to 2021. This increase is the 7th largest among all provinces. The HLS of 12.94 years indicates that children in North Sulawesi who are 7 years old in 2021 have an expectation of studying up to Diploma I level.

To further increase HLS, which will also have an impact on raising the HDI, more educational assistance is needed for higher education while maintaining or increasing education assistance (BOS) for elementary, junior high, high school, vocational, and special school levels. North Sulawesi's Gini Ratio in the second semester of 2021 was 0.359, ranking it as the 15th highest among all provinces. Expanding access to education, especially for poor families, will have a significant impact on enhancing the competence of human resources, leading to higher wages within the community, reduced poverty, and decreased inequality.

Conclusion

The "Merdeka Belajar" policy program, launched by the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, aims to restore the essence of the law in the national education system by granting freedom to schools, teachers, and students to innovate and learn independently and creatively. This freedom to innovate should be initiated by teachers as the driving force of national education. The "Merdeka Belajar" program was introduced to enhance the quality of Indonesian human resources, particularly in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and consists of four main policies: Comprehensive USBN Assessment, replacing UN with assessments, shortening lesson plans, and flexibility in PPDB zoning. The Merdeka

Curriculum, with the concept of "Merdeka Belajar" in primary schools, grants freedom to education implementers, especially teachers and principals, to develop and implement the curriculum based on the potential and needs of students and schools. The "freedom to learn" program allows teachers to design learning experiences that emphasize essential content while considering student characteristics, resulting in more meaningful, enjoyable, and in-depth learning outcomes. Project activities should be designed to align with the phase of education and relevant to the local environment, aiding students in developing the character and competence outlined in the Pancasila Student Profile.

When designing curriculum development in schools, principals should consider student characteristics, school potential, and regional potential. According to researchers, the expenditure of the North Sulawesi Provincial Government and City Districts, particularly in the field of education, is primarily focused on physical facilities and infrastructure, while lacking in improving the competence of teaching staff. Based on research evaluating curriculum management, human resources, facilities, and education funding in North Sulawesi SLB, several suggestions can be made to enhance the quality of education, especially in the facilities and infrastructure management component.

Suggestions include the need for improvements in classrooms and sanitation in the future. The government should maximize the synergy of Provincial and District/City policies to ensure that school infrastructure assistance is accurately targeted. Academic institutions should actively facilitate various activities, including socialization, mentoring, workshops, and training, to significantly improve the quality of education. Despite limited facilities, schools have demonstrated a high level of commitment by mobilizing teachers to remain active and enhance their competence. Additionally, school committees have contributed ideas, energy, and materials to development, particularly in relation to physical facilities. Collaboration among the government, private sector, and community should be optimized to achieve the best outcomes.

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