



RESEARCH

Digital Divide and Equity Rhetoric in Indonesia's School Connectivity Policy: A Single-Case Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Indonesia's education digitalization agenda confronts a persistent connectivity gap concentrated in underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost (3T) regions, while policy evaluations typically rely on input indicators such as connected-school counts and platform-user figures. This study describes the achievements and targets for expanding school internet connectivity in Indonesia during 2025-2026 as communicated in an official interview, identifies the policy framework accompanying these targets, and critically evaluates the extent to which success claims rest on comparative evidence. The study employed a descriptive-interpretive qualitative design grounded in single-case policy discourse analysis; data were collected through a structured interview with one informant and analyzed thematically, triangulated with public policy documents. Results revealed that the connectivity target nearly doubled, rising from 8,265 to 16,557 educational units, with the informant framing this increase as part of an equity agenda that echoes global policy rhetoric. Platform usage figures appeared alongside limited baseline comparisons, so these success claims reflect the informant's own interpretation more than independently verified evidence. This study extends the capability approach into macro-level policy discourse analysis and offers a conceptual distinction among verified descriptive claims, unverified descriptive claims, and normative aspirational claims. Its originality lies in treating a single official policy interview, rather than survey data from students or teachers, as the primary object of discourse analysis, a design that remains uncommon in the Indonesian digital divide literature. Practically, the findings encourage governments and platform administrators to publish region-specific 3T data and year-on-year usage trends, ensuring that digital-equity rhetoric in Indonesian education policy remains genuinely accountable.

Keywords digital divide; school connectivity; digital education policy; policy discourse; capability approach; 3T regions; Indonesian education digitalization

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has become one of the most pressing agendas in global education development. Since the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted in-person learning for more than 90% of students worldwide, internet connectivity and digital devices have shifted from supplementary facilities to basic prerequisites for continued learning (Kallon, 2024). The Giga initiative, launched by UNICEF together with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in 2019, aims to connect every educational institution in the world to the internet by 2030. By the end of 2023, the initiative had mapped more than two million schools and connected millions of students across dozens of countries. As shown in Figure 1, Indonesia's national internet penetration rate has risen consistently over the past seven years, from 64.80% in 2018 to 80.66% in 2025 (Arif & Umum APJII Arfizar Zulkarnaen, 2025).

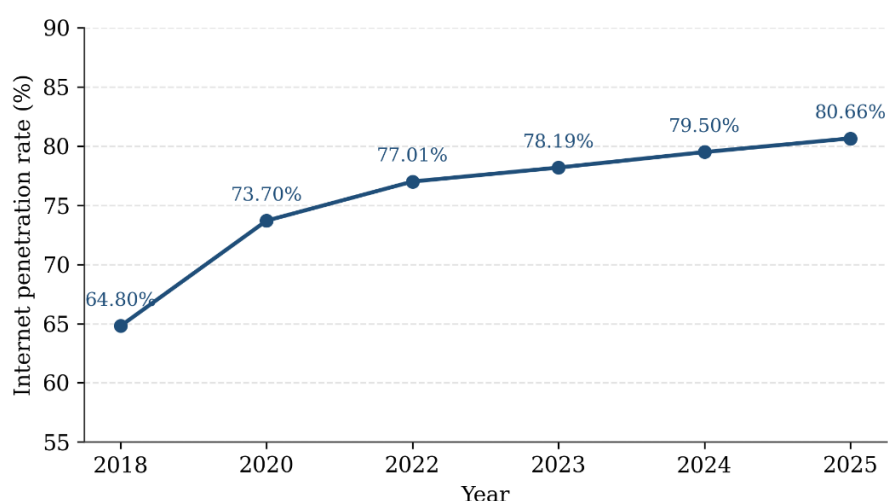


Figure 1. Indonesia's National Internet Penetration Rate, 2018-2025

However, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) cautions that the digital divide in education is not merely a matter of network availability (Rami Reddy Assistant Professor, n.d.). It also involves digital literacy, institutional readiness, and the quality of technology use (Cambeses-Franco & Cambeses-Franco, 2026). Indonesia faces an additional challenge, its vast archipelagic geography includes administratively designated underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost regions, commonly referred to by the Indonesian acronym 3T (*tertinggal, terdepan, terluar*), which have historically lagged in telecommunications infrastructure development (Falah & Hadna, 2022). This national aggregate, however, masks a persistent geographic divide: as illustrated in Figure 2, urban penetration reached 85.53% in 2025 compared with 76.96% in rural areas (Arif & Umum APJII Arfizar Zulkarnaen, 2025, a gap that is likely more pronounced still in the 3T regions that are the focus of this study.

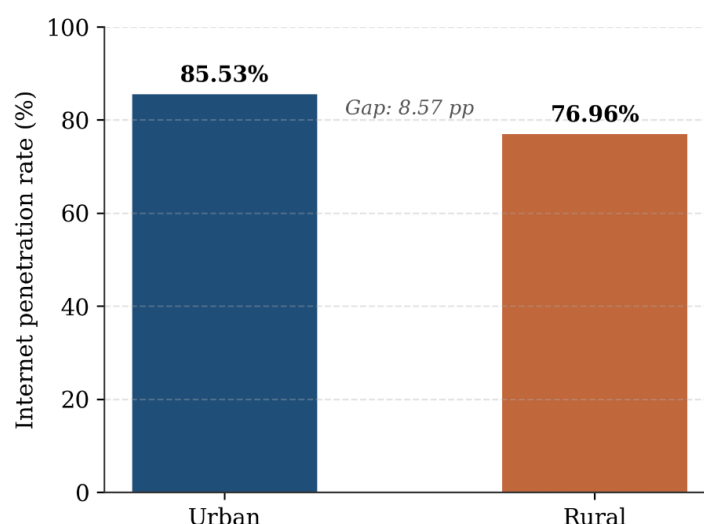


Figure 2. Urban-Rural Internet Penetration Gap in Indonesia

Since 2022, the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) policy has introduced national digital platforms such as Rapor Pendidikan (Education Report Card) and the Merdeka Mengajar (Freedom to Teach) Platform, which official records indicate have been used by more than 284,000 educational units for data-driven planning. In January 2025, these platforms were consolidated under a single super-application, Rumah Pendidikan (Education Home), within which the former Merdeka Mengajar Platform was rebranded as Ruang GTK, alongside complementary modules such as Ruang Murid (Student Space) and Ruang Sekolah (School Space) referenced later in this article. This policy direction was subsequently reinforced by Presidential Instruction No. 7 of 2025 concerning the Acceleration of Learning Digitalization, which now serves as the regulatory umbrella for expanding school connectivity. Given this background, examining how policymakers communicate the achievements, targets, and challenges of education digitalization is academically relevant and extends beyond mere news reporting.

Empirical studies illustrate how the digital divide, examined more closely in the Conceptual Framework below, manifests across different populations and domains. Sezgin & Firat (n.d.) and Al-Nua'emi (2026) found comparable patterns among open-education undergraduate students, and a similar pattern emerged in the digital health domain, where Bhoyar et al. (2024) and Goldberg et al. (2025) confirmed that infrastructure-only interventions tend to be ineffective without accompanying literacy development. This cross-domain consistency reinforces the argument that the digital divide constitutes a structural problem rather than a temporary technical shortfall. Within the Indonesian context, Farhatin (2025) identified unstable internet access, limited devices, and low digital competence among teachers and students as the primary drivers of the widening education quality gap in 3T regions, while Falah & Hadna (2022) and Ahmad Faisal & Hesti Puji Lestari (2026) demonstrated that this problem intensified during the pandemic. An information and communication technology (ICT) utilization model that does not fully depend on stable connectivity, such as offline digital libraries (Umar & Argungu, 2025; Wiguna et al., 2024), whereas the implications of limited digital access for twenty-first-century competency development (M. Badaruddin et al., 2025; Ndibalema, 2025). Compared with one another, these Indonesian studies remain predominantly small-scale, descriptive-qualitative investigations confined to single regions. Consequently, they offer contextual depth but limited generalizability and weak linkage to national-level policy discourse.

At the global policy level, Giga positions school connectivity as basic infrastructure on par with clean water and electricity, relying on a funding model that involves governments, the private sector, and multilateral agencies. This approach aligns with OECD's recommendation (*OECD Digital Education Outlook 2023*, 2023) that effective education digitalization policy must combine infrastructure provision with institutional capacity building. School internet access serves as a primary prerequisite for equitable digital education services in Indonesia (Hannan & Eynon, 2025), whereby the benefits of

digitalization accrue disproportionately to schools that already possess superior infrastructure. At the same time, network provision alone does not automatically translate into meaningful use without adequate teacher readiness (Cambeses-Franco & Cambeses-Franco, 2026; Zhang et al., 2026). Strengthening teachers' digital competence from the pre-service stage, teachers across educational levels continue to face significant challenges integrating technology into pedagogical practice, even though sustained professional development demonstrably helps (Amemasor et al., 2025). The success of interactive learning media depends heavily on teacher readiness and adequate supporting facilities (Devianti et al., 2026). Theoretically, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), remains the dominant framework for explaining the adoption of digital education platforms. Zhou et al. (2022) found that system quality and interactivity significantly predict students' intention to use online learning platforms, while broader reviews indicate that infrastructure readiness constitutes a critical determinant distinguishing TAM outcomes in developing countries from those in developed nations (Başaran & Hussein, 2023; Wang et al., 2026). A persistent weakness in this technology-adoption literature is its tendency to stop at the level of individual users without explicitly connecting these findings to macro-level policy discourse and targets.

Much of the education digitalization policy literature, including official government reports, tends to evaluate program success solely through input indicators such as the number of connected schools or platform users (Croitoru et al., 2025), a tendency that, overlooks the equitable distribution of benefits and the quality of technology use. As an alternative, the capability approach, detailed in the Conceptual Framework below, offers a way to assess digital equity beyond mere resource availability (Mlambo et al., 2026; Summak & Kalender, 2025). Synthesizing the literature above reveals three research gaps (Tang et al., 2024). First, digital divide literature, both globally (Halim & Hidayat, 2025; Sezgin & Firat, n.d.) and in Indonesia (Falah & Hadna, 2022; Farhatin, 2025), relies predominantly on surveys of students, teachers, or households, whereas studies that specifically analyze official policy narratives as objects of inquiry remain scarce. Second, although global frameworks such as Giga have been widely examined across countries, their application within Indonesia's national policy context following the issuance of Presidential Instruction No. 7 of 2025 has not yet received substantial academic attention, given that this regulation is relatively recent. Third, evaluations of education digitalization policy tend to stop at input indicators without critically examining the gap between policy claims and publicly available supporting evidence. This study addresses these three gaps by qualitatively analyzing an official interview transcript concerning Indonesia's education digitalization achievements and targets for the 2025-2026 period, while explicitly distinguishing claims supported by comparative evidence from those that remain aspirational or unverified against other policy documents.

Building on these gaps, this study aims to describe the quantitative achievements and targets for expanding internet connectivity across Indonesian educational units during 2025-2026, as communicated in an official interview; to identify the policy framework and digital platforms accompanying these targets, including their relationship to Presidential Instruction No. 7 of 2025; and to critically evaluate the extent to which claims of education digitalization success are supported by comparative evidence, applying the capability approach as an analytical lens for digital equity. These objectives are specific to a single official interview transcript, traceable through triangulation with available public policy documents, achievable within the scope of a single-document and single-interview inquiry, relevant to ongoing academic debates on digital equity in education, and temporally bounded to the 2025-2026 policy period. Because this study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in policy discourse analysis, it advances two research propositions to guide the analysis rather than formal statistical hypotheses. The first proposition suggests that claims regarding connectivity achievements and platform use in the official interview are likely presented without adequate historical baseline data, consistent with the general tendency of education digitalization policy to emphasize input indicators. The second proposition suggests that the 3T regional gap likely remains a structural challenge not yet fully reflected in national quantitative targets, consistent with recurring

findings in the literature on the digital divide in 3T regions (Falah & Hadna, 2022; Farhatin, 2025; Sarbaini et al., 2026).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Three concepts underpin the analysis that follows. The digital divide denotes unequal distribution of digital technology access, skills, and benefits across social groups (Kallon, 2024). Early formulations equated the concept with binary connectivity gaps, but the construct has since expanded to include literacy, institutional readiness, and the quality of technology use (Cambeses-Franco & Cambeses-Franco, 2026). This study adopts the multidimensional formulation because official policy communication, as noted earlier, tends to foreground access level indicators while leaving skills and outcome level dimensions unexamined, a broader lens is therefore needed to interrogate what such claims actually capture. Prior research consistently identifies socioeconomic status, geography, and gender as determinants of the divide (Al-Nua'emi, 2026; Sezgin & Firat, n.d.), and Indonesian studies confirm that 3T regions face compounding disadvantages in infrastructure and competence (Falah & Hadna, 2022; Farhatin, 2025). These studies, however, remain anchored in survey data from end users. What they do not examine is how the divide is represented within official policy discourse itself, a gap this study addresses by treating an official interview, rather than user-level data, as the object of analysis.

The second concept, the capability approach developed by Sen (1999), conceptualizes wellbeing not as the possession of resources but as the real freedom individuals have to achieve functionings they value. Applied to digital education, this means that owning a device or having network access is insufficient, what matters is whether that access converts into a genuine opportunity to learn. This study applies the capability approach because it supplies a normative benchmark against which input indicators, such as the number of connected schools or platform users, can be evaluated. An indicator-only evaluation risks conflating provision with equity, whereas a capability lens asks whether provision translates into meaningful use. Recent literature has extended the approach to digital-education equity, largely at the level of individual students or classrooms (Mlambo et al., 2026). Few studies, however, have applied it to macro-level policy discourse, that is, to how policymakers themselves frame achievement claims. This study extends the capability approach to that scale, using it to distinguish claims of access from claims of genuine equity.

The third concept, policy discourse analysis, examines how the language policymakers use constructs, justifies, and legitimizes claims of achievement, treating official communication as data rather than as a neutral record of fact (Sinclair, 2026). Within this framework, equity rhetoric refers specifically to appeals to fairness and inclusion that policymakers mobilize to frame targets and results as evidence of progress. This concept is essential to the present study because its primary data source is a single official interview; without a discourse-analytic lens, the informant's statements would be read only as factual reporting rather than as strategically framed claims. (Sinclair, 2026) established the single-case discourse approach adopted here, though largely within general policy contexts rather than education digitalization specifically. Consequently, how equity rhetoric operates within Indonesian school-connectivity policy remains underexamined. This study addresses that gap by applying discourse analysis to differentiate rhetorical framing from claims that are independently verifiable against public policy documents.

These three concepts are interconnected rather than independent. The digital divide identifies the substantive object of policy claims, namely what achievements and gaps are being reported. The capability approach supplies the normative criterion for judging whether these achievements represent genuine equity gains or merely expanded provision. Policy discourse analysis, operationalized through the notion of equity rhetoric, supplies the analytic lens for examining how such achievement and equity claims are constructed, framed, and legitimized in official communication. Used together, the three concepts allow this study to move beyond describing what was claimed toward evaluating how it was claimed and whether the claim withstands comparative

scrutiny. This integrated framework directly operationalizes the distinction, drawn above, among verified descriptive claims, unverified descriptive claims, and normative aspirational claims, and it structures the design described next.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive-interpretive qualitative design, using a single-case policy discourse analysis approach (Sinclair, 2026). This design was selected because the unit of analysis consists of a single official interview transcript with a key informant regarding Indonesia's education digitalization achievements and targets. A descriptive qualitative design is best suited to this purpose because it allows for the exploration of meaning, context, and nuance within the informant's statements while still allowing for triangulation with official policy documents.

The research site for this study is not a physical location but the institutional and discursive context of Indonesia's national education digitalization program, specifically the policy communication activities of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikdasmen) concerning school internet connectivity. This institutional context was selected because it represents the primary authority responsible for communicating the achievements and targets of the 2025-2026 connectivity expansion to the public, making it the most relevant site for examining official policy discourse.

The primary data source for this study is a single structured interview transcript with a key informant who holds formal authority to communicate information regarding the national school internet connectivity expansion and education digitalization program. Informant selection followed purposive sampling (Pahwa et al., 2023), applying a single but stringent inclusion criterion: the individual must hold, or be authorized to represent, a government institution responsible for officially communicating education digitalization policy achievements and targets to the public.

The primary research instrument is a structured interview guide comprising seven open-ended questions, designed to cover four thematic domains identified through the state-of-the-art synthesis presented in the introduction: (1) quantitative achievements and targets for school connectivity, (2) the national connectivity situation and the 3T regional gap, (3) the policy framework and supporting digital platform ecosystem, and (4) the level of platform use among users. Content validity of the interview guide was pursued by aligning question items with themes identified in the digital divide and school connectivity policy literature, whereas construct validity was pursued through alignment between the question structure and the theoretical framework of the digital divide and the capability approach that underpins the analysis.

Data collection followed a sequence designed for replication by other researchers in similar contexts. First, the interview guide was developed based on the state-of-the-art synthesis presented in the introduction. Second, a structured interview was conducted with the informant, following the sequence of the seven prepared questions, supplemented by clarifying probes that did not alter the substance of the core questions. Third, the interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve the integrity of the informant's statements. Fourth, the transcript was cross-checked against the original recording to ensure transcription accuracy. Fifth, quantitative data mentioned by the informant were extracted and organized into a baseline data table prior to thematic analysis, as presented in the results section. Sixth, relevant public policy documents were reviewed, including Presidential Instruction No. 7 of 2025 and official Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology publications concerning Rapor Pendidikan, to triangulate the informant's claims. Seventh, the triangulated and thematically categorized transcript was synthesized into the results narrative.

Table 1. Data collection techniques, data obtained, and their relevance to the research objectives.

Data Collection Technique	Data Obtained	Relevance to Research Needs
Structured interview (seven open-ended questions across four	Informant's statements on connectivity achievements/targets, the 3T regional gap, the policy	Provides the primary discourse data needed to address the first and second research objectives (describing achievements/targets

thematic domains) with the key informant	framework, and platform-usage levels	and identifying the policy framework), and supplies the raw claims to be evaluated for the third objective
Document review of public policy documents (Presidential Instruction No. 7 of 2025; Kemendikdasmen publications on Rapor Pendidikan)	Officially published connectivity targets, the regulatory framework, and publicly reported platform-usage statistics	Supplies independent comparative evidence to triangulate the informant's claims, directly addressing the third research objective of evaluating success claims against comparative evidence
Audio recording and verbatim transcription, cross-checked against the original recording	A complete and accurate transcript of the interview	Preserves the integrity of the informant's statements and ensures analytic fidelity during thematic coding, supporting the credibility of the single-case discourse analysis (Sinclair, 2026)

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis with a mixed deductive-inductive approach, following the widely used six-phase framework for qualitative thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017): familiarization with the data through repeated reading of the transcript; initial coding based on thematic domains established during instrument development (deductive), while remaining open to new codes emerging from the data itself (inductive); grouping codes into themes; reviewing themes against the entire transcript to ensure coherence; defining and naming the final themes; and producing the results narrative. Coding was conducted manually, supported by standard document-processing and spreadsheet software to organize quotations by theme. Because the informant answered all interview questions in full, no missing data required special handling.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data, this study applied three complementary strategies. First and second, content and construct validity were pursued through the alignment procedures described above in the instrumentation paragraph. Third, methodological triangulation was conducted by cross-checking the informant's claims against the public policy documents described in the fourth and sixth steps of the data collection procedure above. Together, these strategies strengthen the credibility of the findings despite the study's reliance on a single informant and a single document type as its primary data source.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The data presented in this section originate from a structured interview with a single key informant who provided official information on Indonesia's school internet connectivity expansion and education digitalization program. Before proceeding to thematic analysis, it is necessary first to outline the baseline data reported by the informant. In 2025, 8,265 educational units received internet access, a figure targeted to increase to 16,557 educational units in 2026, a target increase of nearly 100%. As shown in Figure 3, the reported target implies a near-doubling of connected educational units within a single year.

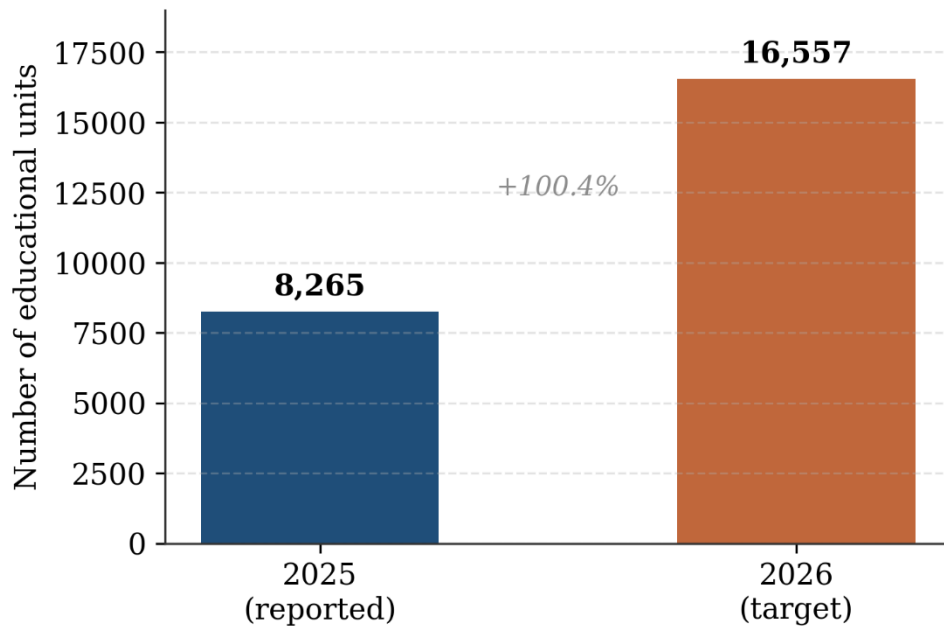


Figure 3. School Internet Connectivity

Nationally, the informant reported that approximately 77% of Indonesian educational units are already connected to the internet, while the remaining 23%, predominantly located in underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost (3T) regions, remain a government priority. Figure 4 summarizes this national coverage ratio as reported by the informant.

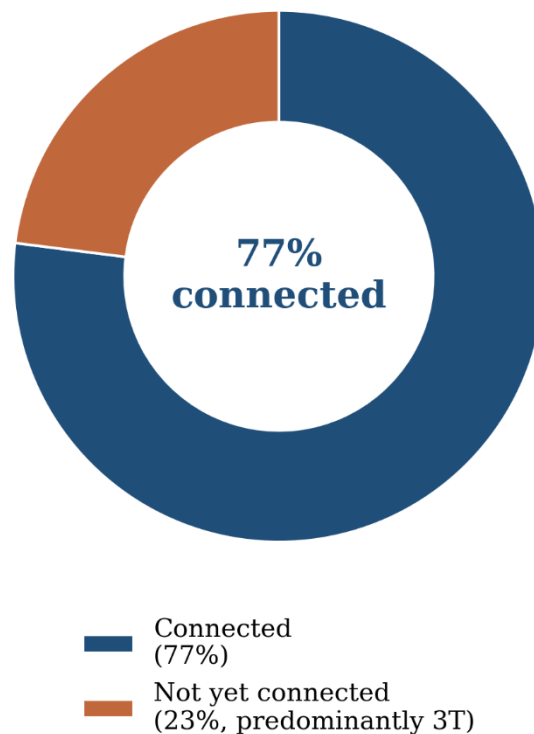


Figure 4. National School Internet Coverage

However, the informant did not clarify whether the 8,265-to-16,557 figures represent the total national count of newly connected schools, a specific connectivity program cohort, or units connected within a single fiscal year, and this population base was never reconciled with the reported 77%/23% national coverage ratio. Consequently, it remains analytically uncertain whether this target increase is numerically sufficient to close the connectivity shortfall concentrated in 3T regions, rather than representing a separate and narrower metric altogether.

Beyond achievement and target data, the informant also described the policy framework and platform infrastructure accompanying network expansion. The informant linked this technical expansion to a formal regulatory framework, stating that the government is developing the Rumah Pendidikan (Education Home) Ecosystem, the consolidated successor to the Merdeka Mengajar Platform introduced earlier, as an integrated digital education service platform, in line with Presidential Instruction No. 7 of 2025 concerning the Acceleration of Learning Digitalization. This explicit reference to the Presidential Instruction is methodologically important, as it enables triangulation with an official policy document, meaning the claim regarding the program's existence does not rest solely on oral testimony. Regarding the underlying policy rationale, the informant framed access expansion not merely as a technical infrastructure issue but as a matter of equity, stating that the initiative concerns educational access justice and that all students should have equal opportunities to learn digitally. This framing of "equity as policy justification" appeared consistently at both the beginning and the end of the interview.

In contrast to the achievement and policy data, the informant also presented actual usage data, which serves as an initial indicator of the program's uptake in practice. Ruang Murid (Student Space) reportedly has approximately 1.3 million active monthly users, while more than 280,000 educational units have used Ruang Sekolah (School Space) or Rapor Pendidikan to support data-driven management. Figure 5 displays these usage figures for the two platforms; neither is accompanied by a prior-period baseline.

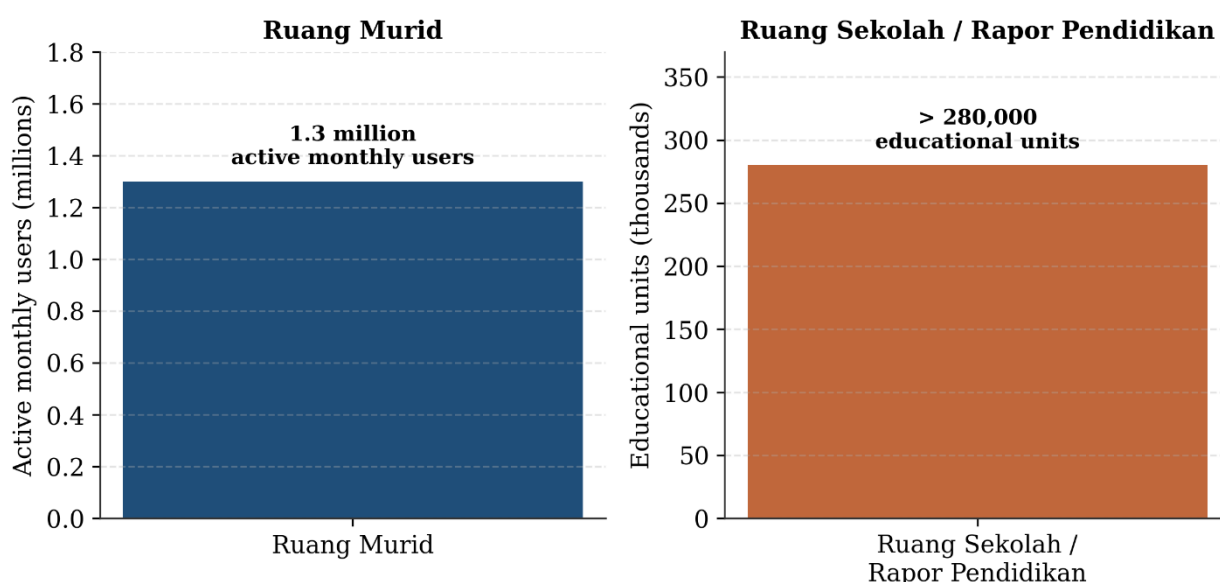


Figure 5. Reported Platform Usage

It should be noted that these usage figures were not accompanied by comparative baselines, such as prior-period user numbers or the proportion relative to the total target population. Consequently, the informant's statement that digital transformation is progressing and gaining acceptance is best understood as the informant's own interpretation rather than a conclusion substantiated by comparative data within this interview.

As a closing remark, the informant offered an aspirational statement, asserting that education digitalization is no longer optional but a necessity, and that broader connectivity combined with integrated platforms is expected to improve education quality equitably across Indonesia. This statement could not be verified as a factual finding at the time of the interview; methodologically, it must therefore be separated from descriptive claims about what has already occurred, so as not to conflate them with normative claims about what is hoped to occur.

Discussion

The finding regarding concentrated connectivity gaps in 3T regions reinforces a pattern repeatedly reported in the Indonesian education digital divide literature. Farhatin (2025), Falah & Hadna (2022), and Sapih et al. (2025) consistently demonstrate that geographic remoteness constitutes a structural barrier that national quantitative targets alone cannot easily overcome (Mlambo et al., 2026), and alternative technical solutions precisely because of this recognized limitation (Kurniawan, 2025). This study's findings reinforce that argument: the near-doubling of the 2026 target was not accompanied by detailed allocation figures for 3T regions, and because its underlying population base was never reconciled with the reported 77%/23% national coverage ratio, it is not possible to determine whether this target is proportionally adequate relative to the actual national shortfall, aligning with literature concerns that aggregate national targets may obscure, rather than resolve, long-identified spatial disparities. Not all evidence points toward this pessimistic reading, however. Setiaji et al. (n.d.) applied a difference-in-differences analysis to BPS panel data spanning 2019–2024. They found that the Palapa Ring Phase III infrastructure project produced a measurable 4.2% increase in educational technology access within treated regions. This finding suggests that connectivity investment can yield a detectable and independently verifiable narrowing of the divide, given a sufficiently rigorous evaluation design. The divergence between that result and the present study's inconclusive assessment is better explained by differences in evidence type than by contradictory realities on the ground. Setiaji et al. (n.d.) analyzed longitudinal secondary data with an explicit before-and-after comparison. The present study, by contrast, relied on a single discursive account in which the informant supplied no equivalent baseline. Read together, the two studies suggest that the limitation lies less in whether connectivity gains can be verified. It lies instead in whether official policy communication chooses to report them in a verifiable form.

The informant's use of an "equitable access" framing also aligns with global policy discourse. The Giga initiative, coordinated by ITU and UNICEF, explicitly positions school connectivity as basic infrastructure equivalent to clean water and electricity, and OECD emphasizes that legitimate digitalization policy must be framed around equity rather than mere technical modernization. In this respect, the present findings extend that literature by showing that this global rhetorical framework has also been adopted within Indonesia's domestic policy communication, using an almost identical linguistic register. At the same time, however, presenting platform usage figures without historical comparative data confirms the very critique raised. Education digitalization policy tends to be evaluated through input indicators rather than outcome indicators or usage quality (van de Werfhorst et al., 2022). This absence of a comparative baseline is not an inevitable feature of platform-based education programs, however. (Hidayati et al., 2024) evaluated teacher-competency gains from the Merdeka Mengajar Platform through a pretest-posttest design with a control group. Their study reported a substantial and quantified improvement in teacher outcomes, demonstrating that rigorous, baseline-referenced evaluation of Indonesia's digital education platforms is methodologically feasible. The informant's usage figures for Ruang Murid and Ruang Sekolah were not presented in comparable terms. This gap therefore appears attributable to the communicative context of an official interview, rather than to any inherent difficulty in measuring platform impact. These findings therefore neither fully confirm nor fully contradict the existing literature. Rather, they demonstrate that a single policy can simultaneously employ progressive equity rhetoric while remaining bound to the input-based evaluation logic long criticized in the literature.

Unlike Technology Acceptance Model-based literature, which empirically tests individual determinants of platform-use intention (Başaran & Hussein, 2023; Batucan et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2022), the data in this study cannot support testing such adoption mechanisms, given their descriptive nature at the level of macro policy discourse. This gap underscores one of the deficiencies identified in the introduction. The technology-adoption literature and the macro policy-discourse literature have developed relatively independently (Imaduddin & Firdaus, 2025), making it difficult to assess whether the policy-level targets and claims analyzed here genuinely correlate with technology adoption experiences among teachers and students.

Drawing on the policy communication literature, the equity framing likely functions as a rhetorical legitimization strategy intended to build public support for a substantial target increase (Nordin, 2014), a pattern consistent with how global initiatives such as Giga communicate their connectivity agenda. Similarly, the presentation of platform usage figures without a baseline may reflect a broader tendency in policy reporting to emphasize achievement and public visibility, rather than a deliberate attempt to mislead the public. Both interpretations remain theoretically plausible given patterns observed in comparable literature. However, they require additional data before they can be confirmed as actual underlying mechanisms.

IMPLICATION

Theoretical Implications

This study offers a theoretical contribution that is specific and modest in scope. First, it extends the capability approach into national-level policy discourse analysis. It demonstrates that this framework can distinguish policy claims oriented purely toward resource provision from claims that genuinely reflect students' capability to use resources meaningfully. Second, the study operationalizes the tripartite claim distinction introduced in the Conceptual Framework into a transferable analytic tool for similar policy-discourse inquiries. This distinction represents a measured methodological-conceptual contribution rather than a claim to major new theory, given that it derives from a single case.

Practical Implications

For platform administrators such as Ruang Murid and Rapor Pendidikan, these findings carry a direct implication. Usage reports should routinely include year-on-year trend data. This step is technically realistic, since such historical data likely already exists internally within the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, and it would allow claims of program uptake to be assessed more credibly. For journalists and education policy researchers, the implication is methodological rather than technical. Descriptive-factual statements should be explicitly separated from aspirational-normative statements when reporting official interviews, as demonstrated in this study's results section.

Policy Implications

For policymakers and government institutions responsible for education digitalization, these findings carry a clear implication. Publishing school connectivity achievements should include region-specific data for 3T areas (Hidayat, 2025). This practice would let the public and researchers monitor directly whether target increases genuinely reduce the spatial disparities emphasized in the literature (Farhatin, 2025; Sanusi et al., 2023). Reconciling population baselines would further strengthen such claims, particularly the unexplained relationship between the 8,265-to-16,557 target figures and the reported 77%/23% national coverage ratio. Doing so would let government agencies demonstrate that quantitative targets are proportionate to the actual national shortfall, rather than a narrower or separately defined metric. This need for reconciliation is reinforced by the magnitude of the reported target increase itself. The target rose from 8,265 to 16,557 educational units within a single year, an increase of nearly 100% that is uncommon in national-scale education infrastructure programs. The informant did not explain how this figure was determined. Possible explanations include name-by-address mapping of unconnected schools, a redefinition of achievement criteria, or political considerations tied to the implementation deadline of Presidential Instruction No. 7 of 2025. This unresolved basis illustrates why connectivity and platform-usage claims require independent verification rather than acceptance at face value.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to describe the achievements and targets for school connectivity in Indonesia during the 2025-2026 period, to identify the accompanying policy framework, and to critically evaluate the extent to which claims of digitalization success rest on comparative evidence. The findings showed that the informant framed the target increase, from 8,265 to 16,557 educational units, as part of an equity agenda echoing global policy rhetoric such as Giga. However, the platform usage data still relied on input indicators without a comparative baseline. This pattern confirms Proposition 1 regarding the tendency toward input-based policy reporting, and it reinforces Proposition 2, which suggests that the 3T regional gap remains a structural challenge not yet fully reflected in national quantitative targets. The main contribution of this study lies in applying policy discourse analysis to an official statement as the object of inquiry itself, rather than merely as background for quantitative surveys of students or teachers, which dominate the digital divide literature. By positioning the capability approach as an analytical lens at the level of macro policy discourse, rather than at the level of individual learning outcomes as commonly applied, this study fills the gap identified in the introduction. Furthermore, it offers a conceptual distinction among three claim types: verified descriptive claims, unverified descriptive claims, and normative aspirational claims. This distinction can extend to other studies of digital education policy communication.

Theoretically, these findings demonstrate that frameworks for evaluating education digitalization policy need to move beyond input indicators. Practically, the findings will encourage greater transparency in region-specific 3T data and more consistent reporting of platform usage trends over time. This study's reliance on a single data source and unverified oral estimates, however, opens two clear avenues for future research. First, subsequent studies could triangulate these claims with data from Dapodik, Indonesia's basic education data system, or Statistics Indonesia (BPS). Second, future research could track the realization of the 16,557-school target by the end of 2026, providing an empirical test of the aspirational claims identified here.

Ultimately, how a country communicates progress in education digitalization reflects more than public relations. It mirrors that country's commitment to policy accountability itself. As long as connectivity achievements and platform-user counts continue to serve as evidence of success without independently verifiable data, digital equity in Indonesian education will remain a convincing promise on paper. Students in the regions that need it most may not yet fully experience that promise.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried out entirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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