

# Education as an Instrument of Change in the Formation of Social Institutions in Modern Society

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of education as an instrument of social change and the formation of new social institutions in modern society, as well as to identify the challenges and opportunities in optimizing this function. Using a qualitative approach with a library research method, this study analyzes various theoretical and empirical sources, including scientific journals, textbooks, and official policy documents. The findings show that education plays a central role in transforming mindsets, changing collective behavior, and increasing social mobility. Furthermore, education contributes significantly to the formation of adaptive social institutions, including egalitarian families, competency-based economic institutions, participatory political systems, and digital-based communities. However, disparities in access and quality of education, lack of curriculum contextualization, and one-way teaching methods remain major obstacles. Strategic opportunities such as digital technology, contextual curriculum policies, and the growing need for 21st-century competencies can be utilized to overcome these challenges. This study recommends strengthening equitable access, competency-based curriculum reform, and inclusive technology integration to ensure education truly functions as a catalyst for sustainable social structural change.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental aspect of human life, both individually and collectively. Since the beginning of civilization, education has been the primary medium for societies to maintain their existence and pass on noble values from generation to generation. Without education, a society will lose its way in shaping character, skills, and understanding of the ever-changing social reality. Therefore, education has never been merely a technical sequence of classroom learning, but rather a sustainable civilizational project. [1]

The goal of education is not only limited to providing knowledge and preventing ignorance, but also includes the formation of character, skills, and the internalization of values that support social and economic aspects [2]. Within this framework, education functions as a tool to prepare individuals to be able to live independently while contributing to society [3]. Moreover, education also provides a space for the formation of critical awareness of injustice, inequality, and various structural problems that hinder collective progress.

In the context of modern society, various aspects of life are undergoing significant changes, including the social order that regulates patterns of interaction between individuals [4]. Modernity brings with it new complexities, such as individualism, digitalization, high social mobility, and the weakening of traditional authority. Amidst these changes, old social institutions such as the patriarchal family, the rigid system of mutual cooperation, or communal hierarchies often experience shocks and lose their relevance.

These changes do not always occur naturally, but are often the result of the intervention of certain institutions, and education is the most strategic among them [5]. Unlike political or economic institutions, which are often fraught with short-term interests, education has the capacity to work systematically over the long term. It is able to shape perspectives, instill new values, and create agents of change who spread transformation throughout all levels of society.

This study is crucial because without a deep understanding of education's role as an instrument of change, efforts to establish adaptive and equitable social institutions in the global era will lack a solid foundation. Many

education policies are still oriented solely toward quantitative targets, such as school enrollment rates or exam scores, without ever questioning the extent to which education actually transforms society's social structure. [6]. In fact, strong social institutions can only be born from a deliberate and conscious educational process.

In other words, education not only produces knowledgeable individuals, but also social actors capable of influencing and transforming social institutions such as the family, politics, the economy, and digital communities [7]. A student who learns about gender equality will not only change their own behavior, but can also influence the relationship patterns within their family. When this happens on a large scale, it gives rise to more egalitarian family institutions. This is the transformative power of education that is often overlooked in public policy discourse.

Several previous studies have shown that education functions as a socialization agent that transmits cultural values and social norms to the younger generation [8]. Shalihah and Khasanah emphasized that education has an important moral function in creating social solidarity [9]. These studies provide an important foundation that education does have real transformative power.

However, this literature review also reveals that most studies still focus on the role of education in the context of changing individual or limited community behavior, without systematically examining how education shapes *new social institutions* within the complex scale of modern society. Thus, the identified gaps in this research include three things. *First*, there is no research that specifically examines the direct link between educational interventions and the emergence of new social institutions (egalitarian families, women's political participation, value-based digital communities) in modern society.

*Second*, the limitations of previous studies, which tended to use quantitative or descriptive approaches without deeply exploring the mechanisms of institutional transformation through education. *Third*, in practice, the gap in education quality between regions, the irrelevance of the curriculum to social dynamics, and resistance to value change remain real, unresolved problems that hinder the optimization of education's function as an agent of social change. These practical problems cannot be solved simply by additional budgets or teacher training, but require a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of the relationship between education and social institutions.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to: (1) explain how education becomes an instrument of social change in modern society; (2) analyze the role of education in forming new, adaptive social institutions; and (3) identify obstacles and opportunities in optimizing the function of education as a social structure changer. Thus, this study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of education policies that are more inclusive, contextual, and oriented towards the transformation of social institutions. The results of this study can also serve as a basis for further studies that wish to empirically measure the extent to which education is able to give birth to new, more just, and sustainable social institutions in the modern era.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Types and Approaches of Research

This research uses a qualitative research type with a library research approach [10]. This approach was chosen because the research aims to deeply understand the phenomenon of education as an instrument of change in the formation of social institutions in modern society through analysis of various theoretical and empirical sources that are already available. According to Hermawan, a library study is a series of activities related to the method of collecting library data, reading, recording, and processing research materials [11]. This approach allows researchers to explore concepts, theories, and previous findings without having to go directly into the field, so it is very relevant for conceptual-theoretical studies such as this research.

### 2.2 Data source

The data sources in this study consist of two categories, namely primary sources and secondary sources. Primary data sources are the main sources that serve as the main reference in the research, including textbooks and monographs that discuss the sociology of education, social change, and social institutions [12]. In addition, primary sources also include national and international scientific journal articles that are indexed and relevant to the theme of education as an agent of social change, as well as official education policy documents such as Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System and the report of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2023.

Secondary data sources serve as supporting sources that complement primary data, including seminar proceedings or scientific conferences, previous research reports that have thematic relevance, scientific opinion articles, and online publications from trusted institutions, as well as other related documents that are relevant to the research focus [13]. Thus, the combination of primary and secondary sources is expected to provide a solid and comprehensive foundation for the overall analysis in this study.

### 2.3 Data collection technique

The data collection technique used in this research is documentation [14]. Documentation is a method of collecting data by tracing, identifying, and collecting various written documents, both printed and electronic, that are relevant to the research topic. The data collection steps are as follows:

- **Preliminary search: Conducting** keyword searches such as "education and social change", "modern society social institutions", "education as an agent of change", "social institutions and education", and "modern society and social change" through academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ, and the Garuda Portal.
- **Source selection:** Selecting sources that have high relevance to the research focus based on the following criteria: (a) published in the last 10 years (2014-2024), (b) written by authors who have credibility in their field, (c) have a clear methodology, and (d) substance that directly discusses the role of education in social change or the formation of institutions.
- **Collection and organization:** Downloading, saving, and classifying selected sources into thematic categories, for example: (a) educational concepts, (b) theories of social change, (c) social institutions, (d) case studies of education as an agent of change, and (e) challenges and opportunities.

#### 2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study used a content analysis method *combined* with a thematic *analysis approach*. According to Rosyada, content analysis is a systematic technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text data [15]. The analysis steps carried out are as follows:

##### 2.4.1 Data reduction

Researchers thoroughly read all collected sources, then select and sort the sections most relevant to the research focus. Irrelevant or supplementary sections are discarded. This process produces a core data set ready for further analysis.

##### 2.4.2 Categorization

Researchers group core data into pre - *defined thematic categories* based on research objectives, namely:

- Category A: The influence of education on changes in social values and norms.
- Category B: Formation of new social institutions through educational institutions.
- Category C: Challenges and opportunities for education in driving social change.

In addition, researchers also open up the possibility of new categories ( *emerging categories* ) being discovered during the analysis process.

##### 2.4.3 Interpretation and synthesis (interpretation & synthesis)

Researchers interpreted each category by comparing *and* integrating *findings* from various sources. Interpretations were conducted critically, taking into account the context, underlying assumptions, and strengths and weaknesses of each source. Synthesis was conducted to build a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the role of education in shaping social institutions.

##### 2.4.4 Conclusion drawing

Based on the interpretation and synthesis results, the researcher draws conclusions that address the research objectives. The conclusions are arranged hierarchically from the most general to the most specific findings, and are supplemented with theoretical and practical recommendations.

#### 2.5 Data Validity (Trustworthiness)

To ensure the validity of data in qualitative research based on literature studies, this study applies four criteria adapted from Kamaruddin [16], namely:

**Table 1. Techniques Data Validity**

Criteria	Techniques Applied
Credibility	Using a variety of sources (books, journals, official documents) and triangulating sources, namely comparing findings from one source with another to ensure consistency.
Transferability ( <i>Transferability</i> )	Compile a thick and detailed description <i>of</i> the context and research findings, so that readers can assess the extent to which the research results can be applied to other contexts.
Dependability ( <i>Dependability</i> )	Conduct an audit of the entire research process, from data collection to conclusion drawing. Methodological steps are systematically documented.
Confirmability	Ensure that research findings are truly derived from the data, not from the researcher's subjectivity. All references and citations are listed transparently in the bibliography.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 How Education Becomes an Instrument of Social Change in Modern Society

A thorough literature analysis demonstrates that education functions as an instrument of social change through three key interrelated findings. These findings not only strengthen education's position as an agent of transformation but also demonstrate that its impact extends beyond the classroom to all aspects of modern society. Each finding will be systematically described below.

First, education plays a strategic role in transforming society's mindset from a traditional orientation to a more modern and rational one. A systematic educational process encourages individuals to internalize new values such as



rationality, openness to change, equal rights, and a high level of social responsibility. This occurs because a progressively designed curriculum not only conveys facts but also trains critical and analytical thinking. Several literature sources indicate that societies with high levels of educational participation tend to be more receptive to innovative and adaptive ideas to current developments. Thus, education functions as a catalyst that shifts the collective mindset from blind adherence to tradition to rational considerations based on evidence and universal values.

Second, education makes a real contribution to changing collective social behavior in various communities. Several analyzed case studies found that environmental, citizenship, and digital literacy-based education programs were able to produce positive behavioral changes in students [20]. These changes include, for example, the habit of managing waste independently, actively participating in social activities, and using digital technology for productive purposes rather than just for consumption. More importantly, these new behaviors do not stop at individuals, but spread to their immediate social environment through imitation processes and informal discussions. As a result, education creates a multiplier effect *where* schools or educational institutions function as centers of change that mobilize the wider community.

Third, education has been shown to increase an individual's capacity for social mobility, both vertically and horizontally. The analyzed literature consistently shows that access to quality education is positively correlated with an increase in an individual's technical and non-technical competencies [21]. Competencies acquired through education then open up broader and better job opportunities, which in turn improve the individual's socio-economic status. Furthermore, education also trains the ability to adapt to the ever-changing demands of modern society, such as flexibility in work, the ability to learn throughout life, and openness to cross-cultural collaboration. Thus, education is not only a tool to escape structural poverty, but also a path for individuals to participate in reshaping a more just and dynamic social structure.

Based on these three findings, it can be concluded that education serves more than just a medium for transferring knowledge from teacher to student. Furthermore, education is a fundamental mechanism for changing social values, transforming collective behavior, and improving individuals' social standing within society. This conclusion confirms that investment in the education sector is essentially a long-term investment in creating a more adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable modern social order.

### **3.2 How Education Shapes New Adaptive Social Institutions**

The research results show that education has a significant and multi-layered contribution to the formation of new social institutions in modern society. The educational process not only changes individuals personally, but also collectively reshapes the rules of the game, the structure of relationships, and the institutions that regulate communal life [22]. The following findings describe in detail how education works to form various more adaptive social institutions.

The first finding shows fundamental changes in the family institution, which has long been known as the most traditional and resistant to change. Education, especially through materials on gender equality, human rights, and interpersonal communication, encourages the formation of a more egalitarian pattern of family relationships compared to the previous patriarchal model [23]. This change is clearly visible in three main aspects, namely the division of gender roles that no longer locks women solely to domestic matters, the decision-making process that involves all family members democratically, and access to education for women and girls that is now equal to that of men. For example, girls who receive an education in leadership tend to be encouraged by their families to continue their studies to a higher level, something that rarely occurs in societies with low levels of education. Thus, education is slowly but surely transforming the family institution from a rigidly hierarchical one to a more equal, open unit that supports the development of all its members.

The second finding is clearly visible in the transformation of economic institutions, where education plays a key role in creating a competent and innovative modern workforce [24]. Through a curriculum that emphasizes the development of both technical skills (hard skills) and non-technical abilities (soft skills), such as critical thinking and collaboration, education produces graduates who are ready to face a technology- and innovation-based economy [25]. A culture of innovation begins to grow when educational institutions encourage students to become not only job seekers, but also job creators through entrepreneurial learning and real-life projects. This is demonstrated by the emergence of new, more flexible work orientations, such as freelancers, digital entrepreneurs, and remote workers, all of whom rely on skills acquired through formal and non-formal educational pathways. As a result, the modern economic institutions that are being formed are no longer rigid with a 9-to-5 work model in a physical office, but are more dynamic, project-based, and highly value competence above all else.

A third, equally important finding is the emergence of digital-based social institutions previously unknown in traditional societies. Extensively analyzed literature shows that increasing digital literacy through education has given rise to various forms of online learning communities, such as WhatsApp discussion groups, online classes via Zoom or Google Meet, and scientific forums on social media. These virtual discussion spaces not only function as places to share information, but have also developed into new social institutions with their own norms, rules, and leadership hierarchies. This technology-based social interaction model enables the formation of solidarity and collective work without being bound by geographical boundaries, thus giving birth to what can be called a "borderless community." Education, in this context, acts as a catalyst that equips individuals with the ability to access, sort, and produce digital



information responsibly, which then becomes the foundation for the establishment of healthy and productive digital institutions.

In addition to the three main findings above, research also reveals that education contributes significantly to strengthening participation in the political institutions of modern society [27]. Through systematic civic education, individuals gain increased awareness of the meaning of democracy, citizens' rights, and the obligation to participate in the political process [28]. Education also trains the ability to critically analyze public policy, so that society is not easily mobilized in a populist manner but is able to make political decisions based on adequate information. Public participation that arises from a good educational process is not limited to elections alone, but extends to involvement in village deliberations, participatory budget oversight, and policy advocacy through civil society organizations. Thus, education indirectly forms a more mature political institution, where power is no longer exercised in an authoritarian manner but through participatory public accountability mechanisms.

Taken together, these five findings convincingly demonstrate that education does not simply follow social change but is actually a key driver in the creation of new, more adaptive social institutions. Family, economic, digital, and political institutions formed through the educational process share common characteristics: they are more flexible in responding to change, more inclusive in embracing diversity, and more future-oriented than rigid traditional institutions. The implications of these findings are crucial for education policymakers, as curricula and learning methods need to be deliberately designed to continuously strengthen education's transformative capacity for all types of social institutions. In conclusion, quality education is the primary foundation for creating a modern society that is not only economically prosperous but also structurally sound in its social, political, and human relations.

### **3.3 Obstacles and Opportunities for Optimizing Education as a Social Structure Changer**

A careful analysis of the literature shows that although education has great potential as an agent of social change, optimizing its role still faces a number of significant structural and cultural barriers. These barriers are not merely technical in nature, but involve systemic inequalities, a mismatch between the curriculum and social realities, and pedagogical practices that do not optimally empower students [29]. Without a thorough understanding of these barriers, efforts to strengthen the transformative function of education will struggle to achieve the desired results. Therefore, this sub-chapter will outline three main barriers in sequence, followed by three strategic opportunities that can be utilized to overcome them.

The first and most fundamental obstacle is the inequality in access to education between regions, which remains a major challenge for almost all developing countries, including Indonesia [30]. The analyzed literature consistently shows a striking difference in infrastructure quality between urban and remote areas, where schools in large cities tend to have decent buildings, laboratories, and fast internet access, while schools in remote areas often lack even classrooms [31]. This condition is exacerbated by the uneven distribution of teaching staff, so that highly qualified teachers are more concentrated in urban areas, while remote areas lack teachers, let alone teachers who are competent in their fields [32]. Learning facilities such as the latest textbooks, teaching aids, and access to digital learning resources are also very limited in underdeveloped areas, which in turn widens the gap in graduate quality between urban and rural schools [29]. As a result, this inequality creates a vicious circle where areas that most need education as a means of social mobility actually get the worst access, making the unequal social structure even more difficult to change.

The second obstacle is the curriculum's relevance, which is still not fully contextualized to the social changes occurring in modern society. Several sources analyzed indicate that the learning materials taught in schools are still dominated by a focus solely on academic achievement, such as memorizing formulas, facts unrelated to everyday life, and standardized tests that measure memory rather than thinking. [33]. Such a curriculum rarely equips students with the adaptive skills that are so needed in an era of rapid change, such as the ability to read situations, cognitive flexibility, and resilience in the face of failure. Furthermore, the development of critical thinking skills and the ability to solve complex social problems, such as poverty, polarization, or environmental damage, is barely touched on in routine learning because it is not considered to be "tested" in national assessments. The mismatch between what is taught in schools and what is needed by modern society often means that graduates experience "reality shock" when they enter the world of work or social life. Thus, a non-contextual curriculum becomes a major stumbling block for education to function as an instrument for real social structural change.

The third obstacle is the learning method that still tends to be one-way, where the teacher acts as the sole source of knowledge while students are positioned as passive recipients. This learning pattern, known as the "banking model of education," is considered to severely limit the development of active participation and critical awareness in students, because they are never trained to question, challenge, or reconstruct the knowledge received [34]. In classes like this, in-depth discussions, open debates, and collaborative projects that require solving real problems almost never occur. As a result, students grow into individuals who are accustomed to receiving information dogmatically rather than becoming independent learners who are able to seek, evaluate, and create new knowledge. The one-way method also fails to build social empathy and the ability to work in diverse teams, because interaction in the classroom is very limited and structured hierarchically. In fact, a modern, democratic, and participatory society desperately needs citizens who are critical, brave enough to voice their opinions, and able to work together across differences, something that cannot be developed by authoritarian and centralistic teaching methods.



On the other hand, this research also identified a number of strategic opportunities that can be exploited to overcome these obstacles. These opportunities arise from technological developments, policy changes, and the dynamic needs of contemporary society.

The first opportunity is the development of digital technology that opens up broader and more equitable access to learning than ever before. Through online learning platforms, students, even in remote areas, can access quality materials from the best teachers and renowned universities around the world without having to leave their hometowns [26]. Open educational resources such as learning videos, interactive articles, simulations, and digital libraries provide opportunities for anyone to learn at their own pace and interests. Flexible learning models such as blended learning (a combination of face-to-face and online) and flipped classrooms (where material is studied at home while assignments are completed in class) also allow teachers to play more of a facilitator role than the sole source of knowledge [33]. While technology is not an instant solution to all educational problems, its wise and planned use can significantly reduce inequality in access while opening up space for more interactive and participatory learning methods.

The second opportunity is the emergence of educational policies that explicitly aim to strengthen contextual and participatory learning, as seen in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Indonesia [35]. This type of policy provides teachers and schools with greater latitude to design learning that is appropriate to the local context, student needs, and the social challenges faced by local communities. With greater curriculum autonomy, schools are no longer fixated on memorization targets alone, but can instead integrate projects to strengthen the Pancasila student profile that require real-world problem solving and cross-disciplinary collaboration [36]. Policies that encourage participatory learning also provide opportunities for students to be actively involved in determining learning topics, evaluation methods, and the forms of concrete actions they undertake in response to social issues in their environment. Thus, the right policy direction can provide a legal umbrella and legitimacy for transformative educational practices that were previously difficult to implement due to regulatory limitations.

The third opportunity is the growing societal demand for 21st-century competencies, which indirectly creates strong momentum for educational reforms that are more relevant to contemporary social change. Today's workplace and social life demand more than just diplomas and high grades for individuals to possess critical thinking skills, creativity, collaboration, effective communication, and digital and data literacy. Pressure from industry, the business world, and civil society on educational institutions to produce truly employable and adaptive graduates is growing. The collective awareness that the old education system is no longer adequate to meet the challenges of the times has driven various reform initiatives, both from within the education system itself and from external sources, such as alternative training programs, skills bootcamps, and independent learning communities. Therefore, rather than being seen as a threat, the growing need for 21st-century competencies should be welcomed as an opportunity to fundamentally change the way we educate future generations.

## 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Education as an Instrument of Social Change in Modern Society

The findings of this study convincingly demonstrate that education functions as an instrument of social change through three main mechanisms: transformation of societal mindsets, changes in collective behavior, and increased individual social mobility. These three mechanisms do not operate in isolation, but rather are interconnected and reinforce each other in a continuous cycle of transformation. These findings strongly support Émile Durkheim's view that since the late 19th century, education has been a crucial moral institution in transmitting social values and norms to maintain social order amidst changing times. Durkheim saw that without education, society would lose the moral glue that unites individuals who are increasingly differentiated in the modern division of labor. In the context of contemporary society, the function of education is developing dynamically, not only limited to the reproduction of old values passed down from generation to generation, but also encompasses the formation of new values such as democracy, gender equality, digital literacy, and environmental responsibility previously unknown in traditional societies.

The results of this study are also in line with findings that found that education plays a role as a socialization agent that actively shapes students' social awareness through various learning processes, both inside and outside the classroom [37]. However, this study significantly expands on previous findings by showing that the impact of education does not stop at individual change alone, but rather contributes to collective behavioral changes that are much broader in scope. Environment-based education programs, for example, not only change the way a student thinks about waste, but also change the habits of the entire family and the surrounding neighborhood through the real practices demonstrated by the student. Similarly, with citizenship education and digital literacy, changes that begin in school have been shown to be able to spread to the larger social community through the process of innovation diffusion and daily social interactions [28]. Thus, schools and other educational institutions function as centers of change whose impacts extend beyond the physical boundaries of the institution.

By integrating the three main findings above, the first research question can be answered explicitly and firmly: education is an instrument of social change because it has the systematic capacity to internalize new values into both individual and collective consciousness. This capacity is not possessed equally by other institutions, such as politics or economics, which are often trapped in short-term interests and electoral pragmatism. Education works over a long



period of time, shaping the perspectives of generations, so that the changes are fundamental and sustainable. Furthermore, education also shapes new social behaviors and increases society's ability to adapt to the ever-changing demands of modernity. This conclusion confirms that investment in education is not a short-term expense, but rather a fundamental investment in creating a more adaptive, inclusive, and equitable social order.

#### **4.2 The Role of Education in the Formation of New Social Institutions**

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that education has a very significant contribution to the formation of new social institutions, particularly in four main areas: family institutions, economic institutions, political institutions, and digital communities, which are increasingly dominating the social landscape of modern society. This contribution does not occur accidentally or automatically, but rather is the result of a deliberate process through curriculum, teaching methods, and school culture that actively instills new values while demonstrating alternative social practices. Each social institution undergoes transformation with its own characteristics and dynamics, but all lead to the same direction: the creation of a social structure that is more egalitarian, participatory, and responsive to changing times. The following description will discuss in depth each of the findings regarding these four institutions.

In terms of family institutions, this study found that education drives fundamental changes from previously hierarchical and patriarchal relationship patterns to more egalitarian and democratic ones. This finding strongly supports the theory of modernization, which states that increasing levels of education in a society are positively correlated with the transformation of family values, particularly in aspects of gender relations, the division of domestic roles, and family decision-making mechanisms. Education raises individuals' awareness, especially women's, of equal rights and human dignity, so that they no longer take their subordinate positions within the family structure for granted. As a result, domestic relationship patterns that previously tended to be authoritarian and centralized around the father or husband begin to shift toward a model of equal partnership between husband and wife, as well as between parents and children. This is clearly evident in various case studies where families with higher levels of education tend to distribute household chores more equitably, involve children in family discussions, and provide equal access to education for boys and girls. Thus, education is slowly but surely transforming the family institution from a reproductive-patriarchal institution to a transformative-egalitarian one.

In economic institutions, this study demonstrates that education produces a workforce that is far more adaptable to a technology- and innovation-based economy than those who rely solely on work experience without adequate formal education. These findings fully support Theodore Shultz's perspective and human capital theory, which views education as a long-term investment to increase individual productivity while simultaneously driving macroeconomic and socioeconomic development. However, this study significantly expands on this theory by demonstrating that the impact of education on economic institutions extends beyond simply increasing individual productivity and income. Furthermore, education also plays a role in shaping a new work culture that is more flexible, innovative, and competency-based than the old, rigid, hierarchical, and seniority-based work culture. For example, graduates of modern education tend to be more open to remote work, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and lifelong learning—all essential characteristics of a 21st-century economy. Therefore, investing in education is an investment in transforming the entire economic structure of society toward a more dynamic and sustainable model.

The findings regarding the emergence of online learning communities and digital social interactions also represent a significant extension of classical educational studies, which have focused on formal institutions such as schools and universities. This research demonstrates that education not only shapes formal institutions like schools, families, and training institutions, but also actively generates new, technology-based social institutions that are not bound by geographical boundaries. Online learning communities, for example, have their own leadership structures, interaction rules, conflict resolution mechanisms, and reward-punishment systems that closely resemble conventional social institutions. Virtual discussion spaces such as Reddit forums, Facebook groups, or Discord servers have become not only venues for information exchange but have also evolved into social institutions with strong norms, values, and collective identities. This demonstrates the extraordinary expansion of education's function in today's increasingly digitalized society, where learning is no longer bound by classroom walls and fixed schedules. Thus, education in the digital age has transcended its traditional role and entered the realm of shaping entirely new social institutions.

By integrating all the above findings, the second research question can be answered comprehensively: education shapes new social institutions through three main pathways: internalizing new values into individual and collective consciousness, enhancing technical and non-technical competencies required by modern social structures, and adapting to the inevitable developments in technology and globalization. These three pathways work simultaneously and reinforce each other, creating a far greater transformative effect than if only one pathway were optimized. Furthermore, this research shows that the formation of new social institutions through education is not an instant process, but rather requires a long time and consistent policy implementation. However, once a new institution is formed, it will have high resilience because it is supported by a collective consciousness that has been well internalized through the educational process.

#### **4.3 Obstacles and Opportunities for Optimizing Education as a Social Structure Changer**

This study found that optimizing education as an agent of social change still faces a number of significant structural barriers, including disparities in access across regions, uneven educational quality, a curriculum that lacks



contextualization with current social dynamics, and learning methods that are still dominated by a one-way, authoritarian approach. These barriers are not isolated but interconnected within a complex system, so that efforts to address one barrier without addressing the others are likely to result in significant change. These findings support various previous studies on educational disparities in Indonesia, which consistently show that the quality of education is unequal both geographically (between Java and outside Java, between urban and rural areas) and socioeconomically (between rich and poor). These structural barriers demonstrate that while education has very strong transformative potential theoretically, its implementation in practice remains severely limited by factors beyond the control of schools alone, such as regional budgets, teacher distribution, and local government political priorities.

Furthermore, a curriculum that is too focused solely on academic achievement demonstrates a fundamental mismatch between the current education system and the real needs of a rapidly changing modern society. This finding explicitly challenges the conventional educational approach, which for decades has focused solely on quantitative indicators such as national exam scores, graduation rates, and average years of schooling. This research demonstrates that education's role as a true agent of social change requires strengthening critical competencies such as analytical thinking, creativity in solving new problems, the ability to collaborate across cultures, and effective communication skills across various media. These competencies, often referred to as 21st-century competencies, have been largely overlooked in an education system still obsessed with memorization and standardized testing. As a result, many school graduates possess high academic scores but are completely unprepared for the complexities of the real world, severely limiting education's potential to transform social structures.

On the other hand, this study also identifies a number of strategic opportunities that can be utilized to overcome the aforementioned obstacles, most prominently the unprecedented development of digital technology in human history. Digital technology opens up access to learning that is far broader and more democratic than any previous era, through online learning platforms (such as Ruangguru, Coursera, edX), open educational resources that are freely accessible to anyone, and flexible learning models that allow students to learn at their own pace and style. These opportunities are not only relevant for urban areas with good internet connections but, with the right policy support, can also reach remote areas that have traditionally been left behind in access to quality education. These findings expand on previous studies that tend to view technology merely as a supplementary learning tool. This research shows that technology is fundamentally shaping a new social space for the educational process itself. In other words, technology is no longer just a "tool" but has become the "environment" in which education takes place, thus having the capacity to fundamentally change how, when, and where learning occurs.

By combining the analysis of obstacles and opportunities above, the third research question can be answered firmly. Optimizing education as a social structural changer requires three main strategies that must be implemented simultaneously: equal access to quality education across all regions without exception, contextual curriculum reform oriented toward 21st-century competencies, and inclusive technology integration that does not widen existing gaps. These three strategies cannot be implemented partially or half-heartedly, because they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Equal access without curriculum reform will only produce a large number of graduates who are not ready to work, while curriculum reform without technology integration will only progress slowly and not reach those who need it most. Therefore, strong political commitment, adequate budget allocation, and cross-sectoral collaboration between the government, the private sector, and civil society are needed to realize the vision of education as a true agent of social structural change.

#### **4.4 Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Theoretically, this research makes a significant contribution to the development of the sociology of education by supporting and expanding classical theories on education as an agent of socialization and social change. While Durkheim's thinking has previously emphasized education's role in reproducing social solidarity through the transmission of shared values, this research demonstrates that in the context of modern, complex, and digitalized societies, education's function has expanded far beyond social reproduction to the creation of entirely new social institutions. Education is no longer understood merely as an institution that preserves the status quo through the transmission of old values, but also as a disruptive mechanism that actively dismantles unjust social structures and builds new ones on a more egalitarian foundation. This expansion of the theoretical framework is crucial because the world of education today faces unprecedented challenges, such as technological disruption, the climate crisis, political polarization, and the massive transformation of the world of work, all of which cannot be adequately explained by theories of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In practical terms, the results of this study clearly emphasize the need for more inclusive, adaptive, and contextual education policies, not merely as rhetorical slogans, but as operational guidelines that are truly translated into budgets, programs, and appropriate success indicators. Education reform, which has often stopped at changing the curriculum structure on paper, needs to be directed more concretely at strengthening 21st-century competencies, namely critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and digital and data literacy. Equalizing the quality of education cannot be postponed any longer, because every day, children in disadvantaged areas miss out on a golden opportunity to change their destiny through education, simply because their schools lack competent teachers or adequate internet access. Finally, the integration of technology into learning must be carried out intelligently and inclusively, not only by providing hardware but also by building the capacity of teachers and students to use technology critically, ethically,

and productively. Only with such a holistic, integrated, and equitable approach can education truly fulfill its role as a catalyst for change in social institutions in modern society, moving towards a more sustainable and equitable order for all levels of society without exception.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that education serves as a primary instrument of social change and institutional formation in modern society. Through the transformation of mindsets, collective behavioral changes, and increased social mobility, education effectively internalizes new values such as gender equality, rationality, digital literacy, and democratic participation. These changes demonstrate that education is not merely a knowledge transfer mechanism but a fundamental driver of structural transformation.

Specifically, education contributes significantly to the formation of four adaptive social institutions: (1) more egalitarian and democratic family structures, (2) competency-based and innovative economic institutions, (3) participatory and critical political institutions, and (4) digital communities that transcend geographical boundaries with their own norms and hierarchies. However, three major obstacles remain: disparities in access and quality across regions, curricula that lack contextual relevance to social dynamics, and one-way teaching methods that fail to empower students critically.

Strategic opportunities such as digital technology development, contextual curriculum policies like Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka, and the growing demand for 21st-century competencies can overcome these barriers. Therefore, optimizing education as an agent of structural change requires a holistic strategy including equitable access, competency-based curriculum reform, and inclusive technology integration. Investing in education is ultimately a long-term investment in creating a more just, inclusive, and sustainable modern social order.

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