

## Evaluating the Effectiveness of Zoning-Based Student Admission Policy: A Qualitative Study of Junior High Schools

**Fadli Firdaus**

Department of Mechatronic, Politeknik Negeri Batam, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

As a national policy, we introduced the zoning system to ensure equitable access to education and reduce the concentration of students in "favorite" schools. Despite efficient communication and sufficient administrative procedures, structural and social variables impede the policy's success. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of implementing the New Student Admission or PPDB zoning policy at public junior high schools. The research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the implementation process, focusing on four key variables based on Edward III's policy implementation model: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. This research was conducted at public junior high schools in Sukabumi City, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving education officials, school administrators, local policymakers, and community representatives. Triangulation techniques were employed to validate the findings. The results show that Sukabumi has implemented the PPDB zoning policy in accordance with regulatory guidelines, yet several challenges persist. The uneven distribution of public schools across districts has created disparities in access, with some areas experiencing oversubscription and others lacking adequate school options. Additionally, limited digital literacy among parents and unequal school facilities have affected public acceptance of the policy. Despite effective communication efforts and adequate administrative procedures, the success of the policy is hindered by structural and social factors. In conclusion, the effectiveness of the zoning-based admission policy in Sukabumi depends not only on regulatory compliance but also on regional capacity and community support.

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### *Corresponding Author:*

Fadli Firdaus,

Department of Mechatronic, Politeknik Negeri Batam, Indonesia

Email: [fadlifirdaus@polibatam.ac.id](mailto:fadlifirdaus@polibatam.ac.id)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a basic right for every citizen, guaranteed by the Constitution (Tan et al., 2018; Black, 2021). However, in practice, the gap in the quality of education between one region and another is still a serious problem in Indonesia (Rafsanjani & Rozaq, 2024; Antoni et al., 2025). Data from the Central Statistics Agency shows that the gross participation rate for junior high school students in Indonesia has reached 92%,

but the distribution of equal access to education has not been fully achieved, especially in urban and suburban areas. The government is attempting to address this issue by implementing the zoning system policy for New Student Admissions, or PPDB (Ardi et al., 2023). This system aims to eliminate the stigma of "favorite schools" and strengthen the role of schools in the immediate environment. In addition, the zoning system has a positive impact on access to education, although it still causes resistance from some people (Werdiningsih, 2020).

In general, the PPDB zoning system policy is regulated in Permendikbud No. 51 of 2018, which requires public schools to accept the majority of students from the immediate environment (Yuliani, 2021; Tan et al., 2024). This aims to equalize the quality of education and the efficiency of family operational costs. However, the challenges in implementing this policy are still significant, including problems related to the uneven distribution of schools and resistance to change. The success of zoning is greatly influenced by the readiness of facilities and infrastructure and public perception of fairness in access to education (Jailani et al., 2024). On the other hand, it emphasizes that transparency, policy socialization, and local government commitment are important factors for success (Sulistiani et al., 2020).

Specifically, the implementation of the PPDB zoning system in Sukabumi City shows its complexity (Reirenza et al., 2023). This city has 16 public junior high schools spread across 7 sub-districts, but not all areas have equal access to public schools. Such an arrangement creates an imbalance in capacity and raises concerns about the fairness of the policy. Initial findings from the Sukabumi City Education Office in the 2019/2020 academic year showed rejection from some people who felt discriminated against because they were not accepted at the school of their choice even though they had high academic achievements. On the other hand, the zoning policy has actually contributed to reducing inequality due to the labeling of favorite schools, although it has not been able to fully overcome inequality in terms of quality between schools (Mareta et al., 2021; Rabbani et al., 2023; Ariska et al., 2024). In this context, the importance of policy communication is highlighted, especially in terms of socializing the objectives of the zoning system to the community. Clarity of information is key so that target groups understand the direction of the policy. Community participation, as well as the involvement of implementers and actors outside government institutions, are also important elements in supporting the success of policy implementation (Susiwati et al., 2021; Chavula et al., 2022; sager & Gofen, 2022).

Although several studies have discussed zoning policies, there is still a gap in understanding the effectiveness of their implementation from the perspective of implementers and the local community (Safitri & Istiyono, 2022; Darmawan et al., 2024; Chaniago et al., 2024). Previous studies have focused on the impact of zoning on student achievement or perceptions, but few have examined how implementation variables such as communication, resources, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structure affect the success of the policy (Susiwati et al., 2021). The study by Ishak et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of evaluating policy implementation from the

perspective of the local bureaucracy to obtain a complete picture and more adaptive policies.

The implementation of public policy, according to Edward III's theory, is influenced by four main variables: communication, resources, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structure (Sumarsyah et al., 2020). These variables serve as the primary analytical framework for measuring the effectiveness of the implementation of the PPDB zoning system policy in Sukabumi City. This study seeks to explore the extent to which the policy has been implemented in accordance with existing regulations, identify supporting and inhibiting factors, and assess its impact on educational equity at the junior high school level.

This research has academic and practical urgency. Academically, this research contributes to enriching the literature on public policy, especially in the field of education, by emphasizing the analysis of the implementation of policies based on regional zones. Practically, the results of this study can serve as input for local governments to formulate strategies for implementing more effective, adaptive, and inclusive education policies.

Thus, this study not only fills the gap in the study of the effectiveness of the implementation of zoning policies in middle-class areas such as Sukabumi City but also becomes the initial foothold for evaluating evidence-based policies in the education sector. It is hoped that the results of this study can contribute to the improvement of PPDB policies in the future and become a reference for other regions that have similar challenges in equalizing access and quality of education.

## 2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, which aims to describe and analyze in depth the implementation process of the New Student Admissions or PPDB policy based on the zoning system in Sukabumi City. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore experiences, perceptions, and social dynamics that cannot be explained by numbers alone and is very suitable for evaluating public policies in a local context (Ishak et al., 2022).

This research was conducted in the Sukabumi City Regional Government area, West Java Province, as a location that has implemented a zoning system policy since 2019. This city is a strategic location because it has various regional characteristics, an uneven number of public schools in each sub-district, and complex issues of educational accessibility. The focus of the research is to explore the implementation of the PPDB zoning policy at the state junior high school level in the city.

The subjects in this study were determined through purposive sampling techniques, namely the deliberate selection of informants based on their direct involvement in the process of formulating and implementing zoning policies. The main informants consisted of the head of the Sukabumi City Education and Culture Office, members of the DPRD Education Commission, the mayor of Sukabumi, the Education Council, and several junior high school principals representing areas with even and uneven school

distribution. A total of ten informants were interviewed in depth. This selection refers to the principle of sufficient information (information-rich cases) in qualitative studies (Heryana, 2020).

The research variables are not measured with numbers but are based on four key areas of policy implementation theory by George Edward III: communication, resources, the attitudes of those carrying out the policy, and the bureaucratic structure. We use these four dimensions as analytical tools to assess the effectiveness and constraints of zoning policy implementation in Sukabumi City.

We collected data using three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured guidelines to provide flexibility in extracting information from key informants. We conducted observations at the Education Office and several state schools, which served as pilot projects for the implementation of zoning. Documentation includes a review of regional regulations, minutes, internal office documents, and notes on the results of PPDB coordination meetings. To confirm the data was accurate, we compared the results from interviews, observations, and documents to confirm that the information matched up (Saadah et al., 2022).

We tested the data validity using the member validation technique, which involves asking informants for clarification and confirmation of information after conducting the interview. We also conducted discussions with colleagues to gather alternative interpretations of the data and to prevent any potential interpretive bias. We analyzed the collected data using interactive techniques from Miles and Huberman, which encompass three main steps: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Kalpokaite & Radivojevic, 2019). We carry out data reduction by sorting data relevant to the research focus. We present the data as a thematic narrative, grounded in the dimensions of policy implementation. Conclusions are drawn repeatedly to verify the consistency of patterns and relationships between themes.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Results**

The study's results show that the New Student Admissions (PPDB) zoning system policy in Sukabumi City has been implemented according to national rules, specifically Permendikbud Number 51 of 2018, as outlined in the Sukabumi Mayor Regulation from 2019. This policy divides the quota for accepting junior high school students into three categories: 90% for the zoning pathway, 5% for the achievement pathway, and 5% for the parent transfer pathway. All junior high schools in Sukabumi City have uniformly implemented this mechanism.

However, this implementation faces several challenges. Field data shows that the distribution of junior high schools in Sukabumi City is not even. Of the seven sub-districts, only a few have two or more public schools, while other sub-districts have one or even no public junior high schools at all. This condition affects the capacity and

access of students in the zoning system. The following presents the number of public middle schools and capacity per subdistrict in Sukabumi City in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Number of Public Middle Schools and Capacity per Sub-district in Sukabumi City

Subdistrict	Number of Public Middle Schools	Capacity (students)
Cikole	3	576
Warudoyong	2	384
Citamiang	3	576
Baros	1	192
Gunungpuyuh	1	192
Cibeureum	1	192
Lembursitu	2	384

The uneven distribution of capacity creates an imbalance of opportunities for prospective students. Some areas experience excess demand, while others are unable to absorb prospective students from within their zone. This triggers the transfer of registration to school zones in other subdistricts, which ultimately results in congestion in several schools that are considered superior.

In addition, the results of observations on the technical implementation of the PPDB zoning system show that the Sukabumi City Education Office has formed a special committee at the office and school levels. This committee is tasked with carrying out file verification, determining zoning based on addresses, and facilitating the use of the online PPDB system. We collaborate with TELKOM to facilitate the online system's operation, simplifying registration and enhancing the transparency of the selection process.

The results of interviews with school principals and the implementing committee show that the online system contributes positively to administrative efficiency, but several technical obstacles are still found, such as uneven internet access among parents of students and the limitations of school operators in managing the application. Schools with a high number of applicants also face a greater burden of document verification than schools with low capacity.

In terms of facilities and infrastructure, most of the public junior high schools in Sukabumi City have adequate basic infrastructure to support the implementation of zoning. However, the disparity in the quality of facilities between schools is still an issue that affects public interest. Several schools, often referred to as "favorites" due to their location, facilities, or reputation, previously experienced an excess of applicants, while suburban schools struggled to meet their enrollment quotas.

Other results show that the socialization of the policy has been carried out in stages by the Education Office for elementary school principals and the community through online media and direct meetings. However, some people still do not fully understand the zoning system, especially in terms of zone boundaries, online registration mechanisms, and non-academic assessment criteria. Several parents expressed confusion over the placement of their children, who were administratively in the zone but not accepted at the nearest school.

The final findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the zoning PPDB in Sukabumi City has been quite effective regarding technical and system efficiency; however, it has not fully achieved equal access to education due to the unbalanced distribution of schools and varying public perceptions of school quality. We will further analyze this information in the discussion section.

## **Discussion**

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the implementation of the New Student Admissions (PPDB) zoning system policy in Sukabumi City based on four dimensions: communication, resources, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structure. The implementation of the New Student Admissions (PPDB) zoning system policy in Sukabumi City shows results that are generally in line with the basic concept of public policy and the theoretical framework of George Edward III. This policy is designed to realize fairness in access to education, minimize discrimination based on social and academic status, and eliminate the dichotomy between favorite and non-favorite schools (Putra & Khaidir, 2019; Hala et al., 2024). Based on the results of the study, the implementation of this policy has gone quite well in terms of administrative planning and technological support but faces serious challenges in terms of resource distribution, community response, and geographic inequality.

Edward III's theory posits that four variables influence the effectiveness of policy implementation: communication, resources, disposition (attitude of implementers), and bureaucratic structure (Hala et al., 2024; Triyunistira et al., 2025). The findings of this study confirm that policy communication has been carried out through various socialization channels, both online and offline, but has not been able to reach all levels of society optimally. This results in some parents not fully understanding the zone boundaries and online registration mechanisms. This finding is consistent with research by Susiwati et al. (2021), which shows that the success of policy implementation is highly dependent on clear, open, and participatory communication.

In terms of resources, it was found that the online PPDB system and the formation of a committee team had provided administrative efficiency, but the imbalance in capacity between schools and limited internet access for the community were still obstacles. This is in line with the findings of Jailani et al. (2024), which emphasized that limited infrastructure and imbalance in resources are common challenges in implementing technology-based education policies in the regions.

Meanwhile, in terms of disposition, policy implementers at the school level showed a commitment to implementing zoning. They support the principles of the policy and carry out their duties with integrity but face additional burdens, especially in the verification and mediation process for parents. This finding strengthens the results of research by Sulistiani et al. (2020), which states that policy implementers who have an adaptive attitude and understand the essence of the policy tend to be able to implement it more effectively.

Sukabumi City has organized its bureaucratic structure through clear regulations and SOPs. However, the practice of coordination between education units and units still

varies, especially in terms of supervision and dispute resolution. This conclusion is in line with the findings of [Ishak et al. \(2022\)](#), which state that an effective bureaucratic structure needs to be complemented by strengthening managerial capacity at the operational level.

The findings of this study support and expand the results of previous studies, such as [Werdingasih \(2020\)](#), which both show that the zoning system has the potential to realize educational equality, but its effectiveness is greatly influenced by regional readiness and community participation. This study also confirms the results of [Jailani et al. \(2024\)](#), which state that the challenges of implementation lie in public perception of school quality and limited choices due to zoning.

In Sukabumi City, interview results showed that some people still feel that this policy is detrimental, especially in areas that only have one public junior high school. Geographical conditions and the availability of schools in the surrounding environment continue to influence public acceptance of the policy.

Theoretically, this study strengthens the position of Edward III's theory as a relevant tool for analyzing policy implementation in the context of education in Indonesia. The four main variables in this theory are proven to be able to explain the factors that influence the success and obstacles to the implementation of zoning policies at the regional level. In addition, this study contributes to the education policy literature by highlighting the importance of integration between digital systems and the socio-cultural readiness of the community in the context of policy implementation.

From a practical perspective, these findings imply the need to review the distribution of public schools in urban areas such as Sukabumi City. Equalizing access to education is not enough by simply regulating student admission pathways but must also be followed by the development and distribution of educational units evenly. Additionally, it is very important to increase the capacity of the PPDB committee, train school operators, and strengthen community digital literacy to support the sustainable success of the zoning system.

Furthermore, local governments should be given flexibility in determining the proportion of zoning according to geographical conditions, infrastructure, and population density in their areas. This step can reduce community resistance and increase trust in education policies. This research points out the need for local policy adjustments to ensure fairer access and better alignment with the zoning system's equity goals in developing education.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, we can say that the PPDB zoning system policy has been followed according to the rules, but its success is still affected by uneven public school distribution among sub-districts, differences in access to technology, and public opinions that don't fully back the policy. The four dimensions in Edward III's implementation theory as a whole show that the success of the policy is not only determined by administrative compliance but also by local capacity and social acceptance of the policy itself.



As a suggestion, the implications of this study emphasize that the implementation of zoning policies needs to be adjusted to the geographical, social, and infrastructure conditions of the region. We should permit local governments flexibility in determining the proportion of zoning to better meet the needs of the local community. On the other hand, it is important to strengthen institutional capacity through increased technical training, inclusive system digitalization, and massive socialization so that the community better understands and supports the principles of justice carried by the zoning policy.

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