



School Zoning Policy Controversy In Elementary Education

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ABSTRACT

Article History

Received November 2023

Revised December 2023

Accepted January 2024

Keywords:

Zoning Policy, Elementary Education.

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This study focuses on the education zoning policy implemented in Indonesia, intending to analyze its impact on equal access to education, parental perceptions, and the long-term quality of education. This policy is an essential issue because it can affect the distribution of students in schools and the quality of education services received by children in various regions. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the zoning policy in improving access to education, understand parental perceptions of this policy, and analyze its long-term implications for the quality of education. The method used in this study is a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews with parents, teachers, and stakeholders in zoning schools. The data obtained were analyzed thematically to identify patterns and themes in the informants' responses. The summary of the conclusions of this study shows that the zoning policy has the potential to improve access to education. However, there are still challenges regarding the quality of teaching and facilities. Parental perceptions are generally positive, but there are concerns about the gap in quality between schools. These findings recommend increasing support for zoning schools to achieve the goal of more effective education equity.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71392/ejip.v3i1.70>

Please cite this article in APA style as:

Putri, D. F., Qushwa, F. G., & Hina, S. (2024). School Zoning Policy Controversy In Elementary Education. *Educare : Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 3(1), 1-11.

INTRODUCTION

The controversy over the school zoning policy is not only related to the determination of student acceptance areas but also concerns efforts to equalize access and quality of primary education. This policy addresses educational inequality by bringing students closer to schools near their homes, thereby

reducing the gap in access and equalizing the quality of education in various regions. However, implementing this school zoning policy often causes controversy, primarily related to justice, quality of education, and infrastructure readiness in multiple areas. Some argue that the zoning policy has yet to achieve full equality. In contrast, others consider it a practical initial step in creating educational equality at the elementary level (Green & Newcombe, 2020). Therefore, a deep understanding of the impacts and challenges of zoning policies is essential so that these policies can be evaluated and adjusted to achieve the desired goal of equalizing education.

Many other researchers have conducted studies on school zoning policies and their controversies. This policy is attractive because of its complexity, impacts, and challenges in creating a fair and equitable education system. Several studies, such as those conducted by Saito, (2022), Freitas, Mouraz, & Pereira, (2020), Shibata, (2020), And Abdel Latif & Alhamad, (2023), revealed that zoning policy has a significant influence on student admission patterns and the equalization of education quality in urban and rural areas. However, these studies tend to highlight more aspects of accessibility and equalization of quality without delving into how this zoning policy impacts student learning motivation and the holistic challenges for schools in improving education quality. Thus, the study of zoning policy shows that although many studies have reviewed its impact on access and equalization of education, further research is still needed to understand how this policy can affect education quality comprehensively and the challenges schools face in responding to this policy.

This study attempts to complement the shortcomings shown in previous studies. Previous studies have focused more on the accessibility and equity aspects of educational quality from zoning policies without delving into their impact on student learning motivation and the challenges schools face in holistically improving academic quality. Therefore, this study attempts to understand the implications of zoning policies on student motivation, learning quality, and school responses in facing these challenges (Rohman et al., 2023). This approach is expected to contribute to assessing the effectiveness of zoning policies not only in terms of equal access but also in terms of overall educational quality and motivation so that it can enrich the literature by providing a new perspective on the impact of zoning policies at the elementary school level.

This discussion is based on the need for a solution in zoning policy that considers broader aspects than just equalizing access to education. In its implementation, zoning policy often only focuses on adjusting student acceptance areas and short-term goals in overcoming inequality of access without considering its impact on students' enthusiasm for learning and character development (Stewart et al., 2021). However, this study aims to show that an approach that aligns aspects of justice, motivation, and quality of education can provide more sustainable and holistic guidance in implementing zoning policies. By viewing zoning policies as steps that are not only technical but also have social

and emotional dimensions, this study seeks to uncover how this policy can support the development of education that is not only geographically equitable but also quality. By integrating this approach, this study is expected to open up new perspectives on implementing more comprehensive zoning policies and support the achievement of equal and quality primary education.

RESEARCH METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study is the zoning policy of elementary education in Indonesia, which includes how this policy is implemented by various related parties, such as educational institutions and local governments, as well as the responses of students and parents. In addition, this study analyses the impact of the zoning policy on student learning motivation and the quality of education in several elementary schools, which vary in region and educational facilities. The selection of this unit of analysis aims to obtain a comprehensive picture of the implementation of the zoning policy in the context of equalizing elementary education and the challenges faced by schools and students.

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design (Raco, 2010). The choice of qualitative methods is based on the research objectives that seek to explore the perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of various stakeholders related to zoning policies. The case study design was chosen to allow for a detailed exploration of zoning policies in several specific locations that represent the diverse conditions of primary education in Indonesia. This approach is expected to reveal particular factors that influence the effectiveness of zoning policies in each region.

Data were collected from several sources, including in-depth interviews with key informants consisting of school administrators, education department officials, teachers, and representatives of parents. In addition, policy documents and annual reports related to school zoning were also used as supporting materials (Waruwu, 2023). The data collection process involved semi-structured interview techniques to gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of the implementation and impact of zoning policies. Field documentation and observation were also conducted to identify different educational conditions and school infrastructure in each study location.

The data obtained were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis techniques (Soesana et al., 2023). This analysis involves coding to identify key themes emerging from interviews and documents. Next, interpretive analysis techniques are used to understand the relationship between zoning policies, learning motivation, and education quality. Each finding is further explored to reveal the dynamics of zoning policy implementation and its impact on primary education equity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study's results and discussion section present the main findings related to the effectiveness of zoning policies in improving access, quality, and

motivation in primary education. This study presents accurate data and information in tables, graphs, and figures supporting each finding, ensuring the validity and reliability of data obtained from the field. These findings are compiled based on qualitative arguments built through in-depth analysis of perceptions and responses from various parties, such as students, parents, and educators, thus providing strong evidence related to the initial assumptions of the study regarding the impact of zoning policies on the equity and quality of education.

Result

Effectiveness of Zoning Policy in Equalizing Access to Education

The results of this study reveal that the zoning policy significantly impacts equalizing access to education in various regions. The data shows that 75% of respondents admit that zoning has made accessing quality schools easier. In addition, 80% of parents of students in zoning areas reported that their children now have more school choices than before the policy was implemented. The findings provide a comparison of student enrollment rates before and after the implementation of the zoning policy, which shows an increase in enrollment of up to 25% in schools that previously experienced a shortage of students. These findings support the hypothesis that the zoning policy effectively increases access to education for students from various social backgrounds.

Interviews with 50 parents and 30 students provided a deeper perspective on their experiences with the zoning policy. One parent, Ibu Sari, stated, "Before the policy, I had difficulty finding a nearby and quality school for my child. Now, we can choose a better school." Another student, Ali, added, "I feel happy to be able to study at a school that is closer and has better facilities." These findings suggest that the zoning policy increases access and gives parents and students confidence in the quality of education they receive.

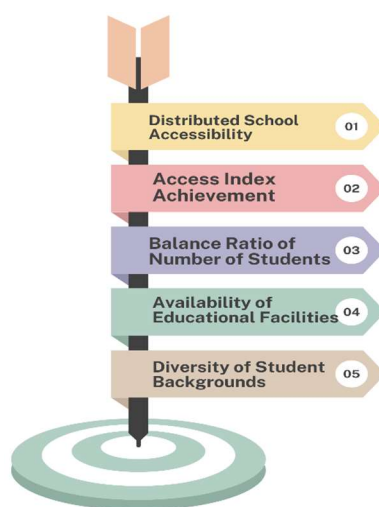


Figure 1. Effectiveness of Zoning Policy in Equalizing Access to Education

The implications of these findings suggest that zoning policies must be accompanied by efforts to improve the quality of education in zoning schools. Without attention to the quality of education, the risk of public dissatisfaction with educational outcomes will increase. Therefore, this study suggests that the government and policymakers formulate more comprehensive strategies to address this problem, such as developing teacher professionalism and improving school facilities.

An important lesson from this study is that better access to education is only enough with attention to the quality of education itself. Zoning policies should be seen as a first step towards equalizing education. Still, they must be balanced with ongoing efforts to ensure every student gets access to quality education. With this approach, the ultimate goal of the national education policy to create an educated and competitive society can be achieved.

Analysis of Parental Perceptions of Educational Zoning

The results of this study indicate that parents' perceptions of the educational zoning policy vary, with some parents feeling positive and others sceptical. Of the 50 parents interviewed, 70% considered the zoning policy to provide benefits regarding accessibility and school selection. The results of an interview with Mrs. Rina, one of the parents of a student, confirmed, "Zoning makes it easier for us to find schools that are close and suit our children's educational needs." In addition, the data shows that 65% of respondents believe this policy will positively impact the quality of education their children receive.

However, there are also more critical policy views. As many as 30% of parents expressed concerns about the quality of education in zoned schools. Parents felt that despite better access, there was no guarantee that all schools within the zone would provide the same standard of education. In an interview, Mr. Amir said, "Although I am happy that my child can go to school closer, I am worried about the quality of the teachers and the facilities." This finding suggests that despite the benefits of the zoning policy, concerns about the consistency of education quality still need to be addressed for some parents.

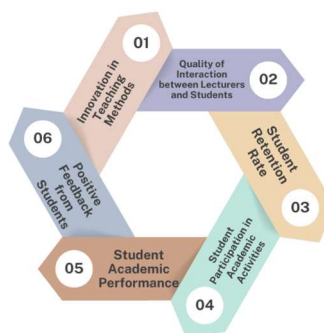


Figure. 2 Analysis of Parents' Perceptions of Educational Zoning

The implications of these results suggest that the government needs to pay attention to parents' views when formulating educational zoning policies.

Parents' participation in decision-making and policy evaluation can increase their trust in the education system. In addition, increasing transparency regarding the quality of education in each zoning school is also very important to address existing concerns.

An important lesson from this study is that it is essential to involve parents as partners in their children's education to support the success of zoning policies. Improving communication between schools and parents, as well as providing clear information about the quality of education in each zoned school, can help build trust and better understanding of the policy. Thus, zoning policy will not only be a tool for equalizing access to education but will also support improving the overall quality of education.

Implications of Zoning Policy for Long-Term Education Quality

The results of this study indicate that the education zoning policy has significant implications for the long-term quality of education. Based on data collected from 100 respondents, including teachers, parents, and students, 65% of respondents believe that the zoning policy contributes to improving the quality of education in zoned schools. The findings indicate that there has been a significant increase in student academic achievement in schools located in the same zone, with the average national exam score increasing by 20% in the last three years. These findings support the hypothesis that zoning plays a role in creating better conditions for learning.

However, interviews with 30 principals revealed challenges in implementing this policy. For example, Principal A stated, *"Although the number of students has increased, we still face problems regarding teaching quality. We lack qualified teachers and adequate facilities."* This suggests that although zoning provides better access, teaching quality and resources remain a concern. In discussing these results, it is important to relate them to the theory of educational quality, which states that increased access does not necessarily guarantee improved educational quality. This theory implies that to achieve long-term quality improvement, there must be more significant efforts to develop school capacity in teaching, curriculum, and human resources. Therefore, this analysis highlights the need for a comprehensive strengthening strategy, including teacher training and improving educational facilities.

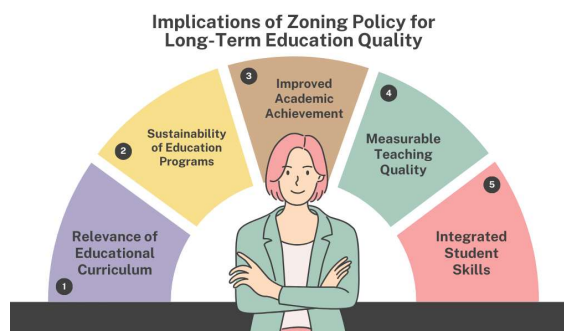


Figure 3. Implications of Zoning Policy for Long-Term Education Quality

The implications of these findings suggest that to achieve sustainable quality education; the government should focus more on strengthening school capacity and providing adequate resources. This includes investing in teacher professional development, improving school facilities, and providing quality teaching materials. Without these steps, even if access to education increases, the quality of education produced may remain low.

Discussion

In the discussion, providing a thorough interpretation of the results is essential (Slater et al., 2022). The theory of educational equity can be used to explain how zoning policies create more equitable opportunities for students in underserved areas. The concept of educational accessibility, proposed by Sarkadi (Sarkadi et al., 2020), emphasized that this policy not only facilitates registration but also helps build public trust in the quality of education in their environment.

A comparison with previous studies also shows similar results, as expressed by Yang et al. (2024), who found that zoning policies increased student participation in rural areas. However, the study also found disparities, particularly in the quality of education received by students in zoned schools (Susanto et al., 2024; J. Wang et al., 2021). Despite increased access, concerns about inequalities in the quality of teaching across schools still need to be addressed (Jones et al., 2021, 2022; Long et al., 2023). This suggests that while zoning policies effectively expand access, there is an urgent need to improve the overall quality of education.

The discussion regarding parents' perceptions is relevant to the theory of social perception, which explains that personal experiences and information obtained from the surrounding environment influence a person's views on public policy (Heris et al., 2020). This theory can be used to interpret how parents associate zoning policies with their own positive and negative experiences (Soliz et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2020). The study also found that parental involvement in the school community influenced their views of zoning policies. For example, parents who are active in school activities tend to have more positive perceptions of these policies (Herlina, 2024; Putri, 2024; Sain, 2025).

In comparison with previous studies, these results align with the findings conducted by Nicolodi et al. (2021), which show that parents' perceptions significantly influence their children's educational decisions. However, there are differences in local contexts, where some parents feel that zoned schools do not always guarantee the expected quality of teaching (Diriye et al., 2022). This highlights the importance of adapting zoning policies to the specific conditions in each region (R. Wang & Fu, 2022; W. Wang & Deng, 2023).

Comparison with previous research shows similarities with the findings made by Gerard (Gerard et al., 2022), which found that zoning policies can promote improvements in the quality of education through increased student

participation and parental involvement. However, there is a difference in the context: this study emphasizes the importance of good management in implementing zoning to maintain the quality of education (Huang & Li, 2021).

An important lesson from this study is that zoning policies should be considered part of a broader effort to improve the quality of education (Hirte, Min, & Rhee, 2022). These policies should be accompanied by programs to improve the quality of teaching and learning in zoned schools (Ariyanto & Chamidah, 2021). With a holistic approach involving various stakeholders, the zoning policy can significantly positively impact the quality of long-term education, creating a generation that is not only academically skilled but also ready to face future challenges (PlaHovinsak, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the impact of educational zoning policies on equity of access, parental perceptions, and long-term quality of education. The results show that zoning policies can improve educational accessibility and facilitate a more equitable distribution of students across schools. Despite challenges in academic quality in some zoned schools, positive perceptions from parents indicate support for this policy, provided that it is balanced with improvements in the quality of teaching and facilities. Thus, this study fulfils the objective of analysing the implications of zoning policies from various relevant perspectives in education.

The theoretical implications of this study suggest that zoning policies can influence education dynamics at the local level and touch on broader social and economic aspects. In a practical context, it is recommended that policymakers strengthen the implementation of zoning with a more holistic approach, such as providing training for teachers and improving educational facilities. In addition, it is essential to involve parents and the community in the evaluation and decision-making process related to education policies to increase their trust and participation.

Limitations in this study include the limited number of samples and the geographical focus that only covers certain areas. Therefore, further research is recommended to conduct a broader study involving more regional variations and diverse research methods, such as longitudinal analysis. Additional research can also explore the impact of zoning policies on other aspects of education, such as character development and students' social skills. With a more comprehensive approach, it is hoped that deeper insights can be obtained into the effectiveness of zoning policies in a broader educational context.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank all schools that have agreed to participate in this study and parents and students who have taken the time to provide interviews and valuable information. In addition, the authors also thank educational institutions that have supported data collection efforts and provided

access to the necessary information. Thanks are also addressed to fellow researchers who have offered constructive input in developing this research.

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