

Policy Implementation in the Education Sector: A Case Study of Free Tuition Policy in South Tangerang City

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji implementasi kebijakan Program Pendidikan Gratis di Kota Tangerang Selatan, dengan fokus pada bagaimana tujuan kebijakan diterjemahkan ke dalam praktik di tingkat sekolah dan pemerintah daerah. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peran aktor utama, komunikasi kebijakan, sumber daya, dan dukungan kelembagaan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun kebijakan tersebut secara umum diterima dengan baik oleh masyarakat, tantangan tetap ada dalam kecukupan anggaran, otonomi sekolah, dan kejelasan pedoman operasional. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang dinamika implementasi kebijakan pendidikan di perkotaan Indonesia.

Kunci Kunci: kebijakan pendidikan, implementasi kebijakan, Tangerang Selatan, sekolah negeri, program pendidikan gratis.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of the free tuition policy (Program Pendidikan Gratis) in South Tangerang City, focusing on how policy objectives are translated into practice at the school and local government levels. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research explores the roles of key actors, policy communication, resources, and institutional support. Findings indicate that while the policy is generally well-received by the community, challenges remain in budget adequacy, school autonomy, and clarity of operational guidelines. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of education policy implementation dynamics in urban Indonesia.

Kunci Kunci : education policy; policy implementation; South Tangerang; public schools; tuition-free program.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right and a critical driver of social development. In Indonesia, local governments play a key role in ensuring access to quality education, particularly through the implementation of region-specific policies aligned with national

goals. One such policy is the **Free Tuition Program (Pendidikan Gratis)** adopted by many cities to reduce the financial burden on families and increase school enrollment.

South Tangerang City (*Kota Tangerang Selatan*) is a fast-growing urban area in Banten Province with

increasing demands for public services, including education. Since 2018, the local government has implemented a free tuition policy for students in public elementary and junior high schools (*SD dan SMP negeri*), supported by the regional education budget and central government transfers. The policy aims to eliminate all forms of tuition fees and reduce the indirect costs of education.

However, the implementation of this policy raises several questions. Are schools sufficiently funded to maintain operational quality without tuition income? Do principals, teachers, and parents understand the scope and limits of the policy? How are decisions communicated and monitored? These questions reflect broader concerns about the gap between policy design and implementation, which is common in public administration. Theoretically, this research is guided by George C. Edward III's Policy Implementation Model, which identifies four critical factors in implementation: communication, resources, disposition (attitude of implementers), and bureaucratic structure. Applying this framework to the education context in South Tangerang allows for a structured analysis of policy outcomes and bottlenecks.

This study seeks to analyze how the free tuition policy is implemented at the school level in South Tangerang City, identify factors that support or hinder its success, and offer recommendations to improve implementation effectiveness. The

findings are expected to contribute to both academic discourse and practical improvements in public education governance

2. METHOD

This study employs a **qualitative case study approach** to analyze the implementation of the free tuition policy in South Tangerang City. This approach is appropriate to explore in-depth perspectives, contextual factors, and the interaction among policy actors in real-world settings. **Data collection** was carried out through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and field observations conducted between January and November 2021. A total of **10 informants** were selected purposively, including:

- Officials from the South Tangerang Education Office (*Dinas Pendidikan*)
- School principals from selected public elementary and junior high schools
- Teachers and school treasurers
- Parents' representatives and school committee members

Documents reviewed included the mayoral regulation on the free tuition policy, budget allocation reports, school activity plans (*RKAS*), and monitoring reports from the Education Office. Observations were conducted during school coordination meetings and administrative processes related to the tuition policy. The study focused on three public schools in different sub-districts (*kecamatan*) to capture variation in implementation. These schools were selected based on size, location, and previous involvement in education innovation programs.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Coding categories were developed based on Edward III's model: communication, resources, disposition, and structure. Patterns and discrepancies were identified through triangulation across data sources.

Ethical procedures included informed consent, confidentiality assurances, and voluntary participation. No sensitive personal data were recorded or published. This methodological framework enables a holistic understanding of how a top-down policy is interpreted, adapted, and implemented in school-level governance in an urban Indonesian context.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Communication of Policy Objectives

The study found that while the objectives of the free tuition policy are clearly articulated at the government level, communication between the Education Office and school administrators often lacks clarity. Circulars and technical instructions are not always accompanied by training or dialogue, leading to varied interpretations at the school level. Some school principals were unsure whether certain operational costs could still be supported through parental contributions.

3.2 Resource Adequacy and Financial Support

Although regional budgets have increased to support free tuition, several

schools report constraints in funding essential activities such as school maintenance, extracurricular programs, and learning materials. The removal of tuition fees has not always been matched with full compensation through government grants, especially in larger schools.

3.3 Disposition of Implementing Actors

Most school principals and teachers support the goals of the tuition-free policy, recognizing its role in improving equity. However, there is variation in how enthusiastically the policy is implemented. Schools with strong leadership and prior experience with transparent budgeting are more likely to comply fully. In contrast, others exhibit passive resistance due to perceived loss of financial autonomy. Theoretically, this research is guided by **George C. Edward III's Policy Implementation Model**, which identifies four critical factors in implementation: communication, resources, disposition (attitude of implementers), and bureaucratic structure. Applying this framework to the education context in South Tangerang allows for a structured analysis of policy outcomes and bottlenecks.

3.4 Bureaucratic Structure and Supervision

The policy implementation is supported by formal procedures and documentation requirements, such as reporting through the RKAS system. However, supervision is often limited to document review without in-depth field validation. This has led to compliance in form but not always in substance. The education office lacks sufficient

staff to monitor the policy in more than 200 public schools across the city

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3.5 Community Perception and Participation

Parents generally appreciate the financial relief provided by the policy but remain confused about what is included in “free” education. Some expect that all school-related costs will be covered, while others continue to contribute informally. Transparency meetings between schools and parents were found to be irregular, undermining trust and clarity. These findings illustrate that while the tuition-free policy has expanded access and improved perceptions of educational equity, its implementation is uneven and subject to local interpretation. Improving communication channels, aligning budgets with needs, and enhancing monitoring are essential for sustaining the policy’s impact.

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the free tuition policy in South Tangerang City represents a significant step toward improving equitable access to education. The study finds that while the policy has been welcomed by most stakeholders and succeeded in reducing financial barriers, its operationalization

still faces several challenges. These include insufficient communication between government and schools, inconsistent funding adequacy, varying commitment from school leaders, and limited oversight capacity.

To ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of this policy, the study recommends strengthening inter-level communication, providing clearer technical guidelines, enhancing the role of school committees in budget transparency, and allocating adequate monitoring resources. It is also important to align funding with school-specific needs to avoid unintended dependence on informal contributions.

The case of South Tangerang reflects broader issues in policy implementation in Indonesia—particularly the gap between well-intended policy design and the realities of decentralized, resource-constrained delivery. Enhancing the capacity of local actors and institutionalizing participatory monitoring mechanisms may help bridge this gap. Future research could investigate the long-term impact of free tuition policies on student outcomes and explore comparative implementation models in other urban areas.

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