

Assessing Equity and Equality in the Indonesia School Zoning Policy

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Abstract

Indonesia has implemented the school zoning policy since 2017, yet classic debates arise almost every study year. This study explores concerns about achieving the primary objective of the policy in terms of equity and equality. Library research of current issues from related articles, mass media broadcasts, and news was conducted to identify and sort them regarding equity and equality. Practices and experiences from other countries are also screened as a comparison and consideration for alternative actions that may be applicable. The address of residence and certain schools are full of registrants, which, in contrast, other schools lack, and not all children, especially those in need due to economic reasons, can go to public schools, are among the public issues reported in each study year. Despite the enthusiasts of this zoning system, complaints are also found, especially regarding equality and equity. In the area with many public schools available, there will be no problem. However, not all regions have a similar situation in accommodating prospective students. This finding on public issues related to the zoning system is intended to improve the policy implementation of yearly student registration in Indonesia.

Keywords: equity, equality, school zoning policy, Indonesia

1. Introduction

The education system in Indonesia is governed by various regulations based on the 1945 Constitution (UUD 1945) and Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System. These regulations emphasize the right of every citizen to receive quality education, a responsibility borne by the government. One of the policies implemented to support equitable education is the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 1 of 2021 concerning New Student Admissions (PPDB), an improvement of previous policies such as No. 17 of 2017, No. 51 of 2018, and No. 44 of 2019. A mechanism stipulated in this regulation is the zoning system for elementary and secondary education (kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school, and high school/vocational school). At the regional level, this regulation is followed up by local governments through regional regulations. In Article 13, paragraph 1 of Regulation No. 1 of 2021, the zoning pathway is set at a minimum of 70% for elementary schools and 50% for junior high schools/high schools/vocational schools, respectively. In the previous regulation, the zoning requirement was 90% in 2017 and 80% in 2018 for all primary and secondary education levels. These percentage changes were reported as a follow-up to the evaluation of implementation at the regional government level, where various mechanisms were inconsistent with the regulations (1). These changes were also made to provide more opportunities for students outside the zone, including those with limited access to their preferred schools. These adjustments are expected to create more equitable access to education for all.

The zoning policy, implemented in Indonesia in 2017, is also applied in other countries. The United States first introduced a zoning policy in Kansas, which at the time was dealing with issues of racial segregation. Japan restricts school selection by assigning schools to prospective students (so it is not the students who choose the schools) and rotates teachers between schools to ensure the quality of education. Conversely, the United Kingdom uses a different approach by allowing prospective students to choose their schools freely, with schools being prohibited from rejecting students until the enrollment limit is reached (2). It is understood that the zoning policy is oriented

towards achieving both equality and equity. Equality ensures everyone has the same opportunity to access education, regardless of social, economic, or geographical background. Equity emphasizes equal access to education by ensuring that each individual receives the necessary support according to their needs, providing them with the same opportunities to succeed, even if different assistance is required. In the context of the zoning policy, equality means that all students can attend the school closest to them, and equity emphasizes that students from disadvantaged backgrounds or remote areas need special attention to overcome the access barriers they may face. The zoning policy is expected to help address these inequalities by providing more equitable access. This policy allows students to attend schools closest to their homes, which is expected to increase fairness and equity in the distribution of educational services. The zoning policy must be based on two fundamental principles of educational equity: justice, which ensures that personal and social factors do not hinder students from reaching their academic potential, and inclusion, which guarantees that all students receive a minimum standard of education regardless of their background or location (3). The zoning system policy supports children from underprivileged families, eliminates discrimination and injustice, and improves the equitable distribution of school quantity and quality (2).

The implementation of this policy demonstrates the achievement of its intended goals. For example, the application of the zoning system in Yogyakarta City shows that more than 78% of the students accepted are from the nearest zones, indicating success in expanding educational access for students from lower economic backgrounds and helping to reduce transportation costs for students living near schools (4). However, despite efforts to follow up on evaluation results through policy changes, the implementation of the zoning policy still needs improvement. The controversy surrounding the implementation of the zoning system was a prominent headline in various local and national media from 2017 to 2019. Reports highlighted numerous public protests against the zoning system. For example, in Yogyakarta, parents filed complaints with members of the DIY Regional House of Representatives (DPRD DIY), the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia (Ombudsman RI), and the Regional Ombudsman Institution (LOD), arguing that the zoning system discriminated against students' right to attend school (5). A similar incident occurred in Malang, where the DPRD protested to the Ministry of Education and Culture following public complaints that many students could not enroll in nearby schools despite living within the designated zone (6). As a new system, zoning has encountered numerous implementation challenges due to a lack of school readiness, issues with the number and quality of available schools for prospective students, and confusion in policy interpretation by local governments and school administrators (7).

Problems with implementing the school zoning policy have also occurred in other countries. For instance, in South Africa, the zoning system has been criticized for using Afrikaans, which is seen as exclusive and a barrier for non-Afrikaans-speaking students to attend certain schools (8). In Nigeria, it has been reported that high-achieving students cannot enroll in their preferred schools because the quota has been filled by students from nearby areas, even though they may have lower academic performance (9). A study in the United States shows that when parents are asked to choose three schools within the same district, they tend to select schools that are generally less diverse regarding race and economics (10). This article explores issues related to equity and equality in implementing the zoning policy in Indonesia, lessons learned from other countries, and recommendations for follow-up actions to achieve the noble goal of education for all.

2. Method

This study employs a library research method, an approach used to gather data by identifying various relevant literature on the educational zoning system and issues related to equity and equality. Library research collects data from multiple written sources, such as books, journals, and documents (11). This view aligns with the emphasis on using reference books and previous studies to build a solid

theoretical foundation (12). In this context, gathering articles from national and international journals concentrating on equality and equity in the educational zoning system is the first step in the library research process. This literature search was conducted using the following keywords: "equity," "equality," and "school zoning system." Finding and categorizing pertinent reading materials is one of the most critical phases of library research (13). After the literature has been collected, it is sorted according to specific standards, like the year of publication and the topic's pertinence, especially regarding equity and equality in zoning systems across different nations.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Issues on Equity and Equality

3.1.1. Favorite vs. Non-Favorite Schools

It is undeniable that only some schools today offer the same quality of education, even within the same region, and when comparing urban and rural areas. Favorable schools are often recognized for having better educational quality regarding facilities, teacher quality, or academic achievements. These schools tend to attract more interest from students and parents, resulting in a much higher demand for admission than their available capacity. Some parties argue that this policy reduces competitiveness among students, as they no longer choose schools based on their academic performance. This phenomenon creates a significant disparity in educational quality between elite and less-preferred schools, potentially leading to social and economic inequalities. Many parents express dissatisfaction when their children, despite having good academic scores, cannot enroll in their desired schools solely because their residence is outside the favored school zone. The government designs the school-zoning policy in Indonesia as an instrument to address the disparity in educational quality across regions and schools. The policy is expected to diminish the distinction between "favorite and non-favorite" schools, allowing every student an equal opportunity to access quality education regardless of the school's status. However, in practice, various studies indicate that the implementation of this policy has not been fully effective in achieving its intended goals.

Although theoretically, this policy aims to eliminate such distinctions, many non-favored schools still struggle to attract students with strong academic capabilities, which ultimately affects the quality of education at these schools (14). Despite adhering to the zoning regulations, non-favorite schools still need to improve quality due to insufficient government support, particularly in providing adequate facilities and resources (15). Many schools in Indonesia still have moderately to severely damaged classrooms and lack proper school toilets (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Classroom Condition by Education Level in 2023 (in %)

Education Level	Good Condition	Lightly Damaged	Severely Damaged	Total
Primary School	46,56	44,74	8,70	100
Junior High	56,17	38,26	5,57	100
Senior High	66,29	29,45	4,26	100
Vocational	69,12	28,97	1,91	100

Sources: BPS Statistik Pendidikan, 2023 (16)

Table 2: Toilet for Students by Education Level in 2023 (in %)

Education Level	Separated	General Use	Not Provided	Total
Primary School	62,03	19,91	18,06	100

Junior High	75,47	11,50	13,03	100
Senior High	78,36	11,54	10,10	100
Vocational	74,18	12,87	12,95	100

Sources: BPS Statistik Pendidikan, 2023 (16)

Other study findings also reinforce the observation that the zoning policy has not altered the dominant position of favored schools, both before and after the policy's implementation (17). Desired elite or favorite schools are often out of reach for parents because they are in different zones. As a result, parents are forced to enroll their children in the nearest available school, which may be lower quality. This perception is based on past experiences, as these favored schools are well-known and consistently receive high numbers of applicants. In other words, many parents compete to get their children into these preferred schools, assuming they can provide a more enriching experience than non-favorite schools. However, the zoning system has also received positive responses from parents who live near these favored schools, as it increases their chances of admission. Favorite schools are a significant draw for parents who seek quality education for their children. Yet, with this zoning system, parents must also be prepared for rejection if many children from the surrounding area apply to the same school (18). Favorite schools remain the primary choice for parents and students seeking quality education, while non-favorite schools still face stigma and challenges in improving their educational standards. This indicates that, although the zoning policy strives to create equitable access to education, more significant efforts are needed to ensure that all schools, whether favorite or non-favorite, achieve equal educational quality.

3.1.2. *Issues on Address of Residence*

Schools in several regions, especially in remote areas, have limited facilities and a shortage of qualified teachers, which undermines the concept of equality in education. Schools still considered "favorite" remain the primary target, leading to fierce competition and practices such as "false addresses." Students in remote areas often need help accessing schools, especially when the nearest school is far away or needs more adequate quality. The zoning policy in New Student Admissions (PPDB), implemented at the beginning of each school year, gives priority admission to students who live near certain schools, aiming to facilitate access and distribute students more evenly. However, false addresses have been discovered to gain admission to desired schools.

Various methods related to false addresses are employed to meet the zoning requirements, such as temporarily moving to areas near favored schools. Some parents use the addresses of family or friends by including the child's name in their family card, even though the child does not live with them. Additionally, there have been reports of falsified or manipulated domicile documents, such as family cards or residency certificates. This is sometimes facilitated by local RT/RW officials, who are authorized to issue residency certificates even though the individuals do not live in the area. In some regions, there have even been reports of agents or paid services that manage the address change on family cards to ensure children meet the zoning requirements for favored schools. These cases result in students who genuinely live near favored schools being denied places because out-of-zone students have taken the quota using false addresses.

Violations in its application have also marred the implementation of the zoning system. According to existing regulations, the distance between a student's residence and the school is determined based on the distance from the neighborhood unit (RW) listed on the student's Family Card (7). This has raised concerns among the public due to the potential for fraud.

Indeed, cases have been reported where students' names were added to the Family Card of relatives living closer to the desired school, and there have even been instances of seat sales by specific individuals. For example, the Federation of Indonesian Teachers' Unions (FSGI) found a case where a Cibinong, Bogor student used their relative's address in Kramat Jati, East Jakarta, to gain school admission in that area (19). In West Java in 2023, 4,791 cases of fake documents were discovered, resulting in school enrollment cancellations as a corrective measure (20). Meanwhile, the latest case in 2024 in Jakarta involved data falsification in school admissions (PPDB), where a single-family card listed ten children born in the same year (21).

The use of false addresses in the school zoning policy presents a significant challenge for the government in ensuring equitable access to education. Although the zoning policy is designed to reduce inequality, such misuse undermines the primary goals of the policy. Parents play an active role in their children's education by participating in school activities and supporting the learning process at home. Society also views education as an investment in the future, thus providing significant moral and material support for the development of the education system. Concerning equity and equality in the school-zoning system, parental support requires time and education to be entirely accepted by the community. Parents' moral dilemma—between providing the best education for their children or adhering to social justice values—highlights their role in reducing inequality while ensuring their children's right to quality education (22). Therefore, stricter supervision and law enforcement, along with improvements in the quality of schools across all zones, are essential to minimize instances of address manipulation and ensure fair educational equity.

3.1.3. Support for Vulnerable Group

Many students from low-income families live in areas with poor-quality schools, preventing them from receiving an education equal to that of students in more affluent areas. The school zoning policy aims to equalize access to education for all children, including vulnerable groups. These vulnerable groups include children from low-income families, children with disabilities, children from remote areas, and those who experience discrimination or other social difficulties. Through the zoning system, the government seeks to reduce educational disparities caused by economic, social, or geographical differences. The inclusive school program aligns with this policy because vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities, can enroll in schools with inclusive programs or facilities without competing in a rigorous academic selection process. A flexible zoning policy for students with disabilities can prioritize access to schools with exceptional support, such as trained educators or disability-friendly infrastructure. In some areas, zoning has successfully created a more balanced distribution of students among schools, reducing overcrowding in certain schools. Improving the number of qualified teachers, facilities, and resources across all schools, especially in underdeveloped areas, is crucial to ensuring equality in the quality of education. However, the zoning policy in some regions has yet to be fully optimized due to a lack of facilities and infrastructure in several schools, limited human resources, quota restrictions, and external pressures (23).

Some regions have also implemented the zoning policy by allocating special quotas for vulnerable groups, such as children from low-income families, orphans, or children who have experienced violence or neglect. With these quotas, they can still gain access to quality schools. In addition to the regular zoning pathway, some regions have developed specific affirmative action pathways for vulnerable groups. This pathway allows children from poor families, children facing social difficulties, or those with other barriers to be admitted to favored or high-quality schools without meeting the usual academic or geographical zoning criteria. An

example of this is the affirmative action pathway by the Jakarta City Government, which allocates admission quotas for students from families with a Kartu Indonesia Pintar (KIP) or children in certain social conditions. National survey results indicate that school dropout rates increase at higher education levels: elementary/equivalent: 0.11%, junior high/equivalent: 0.98%, and senior high/equivalent: 1.03%. Meanwhile, there is a notable disparity based on urban and rural classification, with dropout rates significantly higher in rural areas than in urban areas (see Table 3).

Table 3: School Dropout Rates in Urban and Rural Areas (in %)

Education Level	Urban	Rural
Primary School	0,05	0,19
Junior High	0,78	1,25
Senior High	1,17	0,94

Sources: BPS: Statistik Pendidikan, 2023 (16)

Thus, the school zoning policy has great potential to support vulnerable groups by ensuring a fairer and more inclusive distribution of access to education. By prioritizing students based on their residence, providing affirmative action pathways, and improving the quality of schools across all zones, this policy can help address various forms of social and geographical inequality in education. The provision of quotas for vulnerable groups should be maintained or even expanded to ensure that they continue to have access to quality schools, even if they may not meet the distance-based zoning criteria. Support programs such as scholarships, education cost subsidies, and psychosocial support for students from vulnerable groups should also be part of the zoning policy to ensure they are admitted and can thrive and succeed in school.

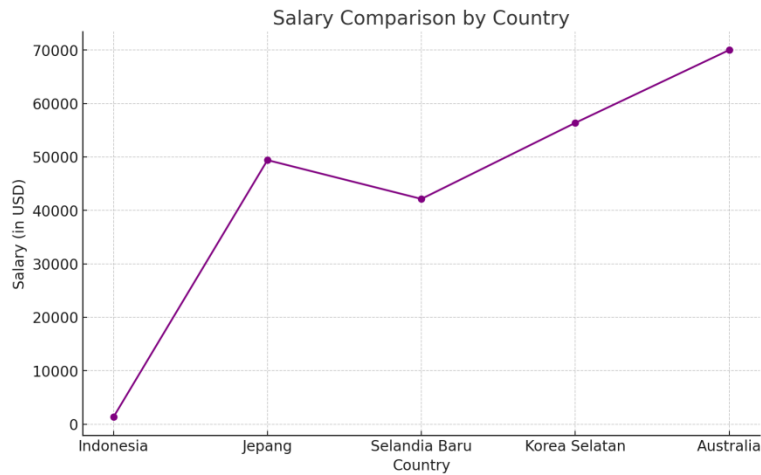
3.2. Alternatives for Optimizing the Policy

3.2.1. Continuation and Improvement

The sustainability of the school zoning policy is a crucial issue in the effort to create a more equitable and fair education system in the long term. Amid the ongoing debates, including the tension that arises every new academic year during the student admission process, this policy is still viewed as an alternative option to minimize educational disparities and ensure that every student has equal access to quality education. From the various issues related to the zoning system policy in Indonesia, there are valuable lessons to be learned from the experiences of developed countries in improving the quality of education and distributing access more evenly across society.

An analysis of several studies reveals several significant factors that support educational advancement in developed countries. First, there is a strong focus on creating a curriculum relevant to the demands of the evolving world, concentrating on mastering academic content and emphasizing critical thinking, creativity, effective communication, and collaboration skills (24). This approach ensures that students are prepared to face an increasingly dynamic and complex world. Second, teacher quality is a crucial factor. In developed countries, the teacher selection process is highly rigorous, and teachers receive comprehensive training to ensure high competency (25). Additionally, competitive salaries and high social status motivate teachers to deliver the highest quality of education (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Comparison of Teacher Salaries in Indonesia with Other Countries



Sources: Compilation from various resources, 2024

Technology also plays a significant role in advancing education. Using both hardware and software technology has transformed learning methods and expanded access to educational resources (26). Technologies such as interactive whiteboards and online learning applications have proven effective in enhancing the quality of classroom instruction. A student-centered approach to learning is also a hallmark of education in developed countries. Students are encouraged to actively engage in the learning process, with opportunities to explore their interests and talents. This creates a dynamic learning environment and fosters student independence and intrinsic motivation (27). However, the effectiveness of this policy depends greatly on proper implementation, including monitoring for misuse and providing additional support to vulnerable groups so that they not only gain access to schools but also succeed in the learning process.

3.2.2. Sustainable Monitoring and Evaluation

In a case study in Surabaya East Java, the zoning policy has yet to be effective due to the limited number of schools capable of accommodating students and the uneven distribution of students. Inequality in educational infrastructure is one of the main obstacles preventing the zoning policy from being consistently implemented across all regions (28). Disparities in school facilities remain a vital issue that must be addressed to improve the effectiveness of this policy (23). However, to ensure the sustainability of the zoning policy, continuous evaluation and various strategic improvements are necessary to maintain its relevance and effectiveness in the future. Similar findings are also being discussed, such as where the zoning policy was effectively implemented based on the number of students distributed according to existing regulations (29). However, in other regions, various factors still hinder implementation, including infrastructure readiness, inter-agency coordination, and more effective communication between schools, the education office, and parents. Policy dissemination is critical to establishing good coordination, although there are still gaps in implementation in several areas (30).

The government must continue to invest in improving the quality of schools in terms of infrastructure, human resources (teachers and staff), and facilities, particularly in schools that have long been considered non-prestigious, to eliminate quality disparities between schools. Improving human resources through teacher training and competency development in all schools, whether in urban or remote areas, must be planned evenly and sustainably to ensure the same educational standards across all regions. Monitoring and verification of the authenticity of domicile documents need to be maximized. The digitization of the population system, integrated with the school registration system, can help ensure that the data provided by parents is accurate and not manipulated. Moreover, sanctions for policy violators should be enforced to ensure transparency and build public trust in the policy's implementation.

The policy goals and objectives must be adapted to align with the specific conditions of the location where the system is implemented (31). If discrepancies arise in the future, the government should identify various actions as alternative solutions. Therefore, the government must conduct a preliminary assessment of needs and prepare accordingly to ensure smooth implementation, as every policy directly impacts many people's lives. Caution, sensitivity, and a high degree of empathy are essential for policymakers when formulating public policy (32).

The sustainability of the school zoning policy requires close collaboration between the central government, local governments, schools, and the community. All parties must share the same commitment to implementing this policy effectively. Local governments are crucial in determining school zones and monitoring policy implementation. Community involvement is also essential to maintaining transparency and accountability. Transparent access to information regarding the admission process, zoning criteria, and its impact on educational access will encourage community participation and support in ensuring the policy's sustainability. On the other hand, the role of technology must also be considered, particularly in terms of online registration processes, data verification, and monitoring the distribution of students in each zone. Implementing a digital school registration system integrated with population data can help prevent fraud, such as using false addresses.

The sustainability of the school zoning policy relies heavily on improving the quality of education across all schools, equalizing infrastructure, enforcing strict monitoring, and conducting regular evaluations. Technology, community involvement, integration with affirmative programs, and support for vulnerable groups are vital to ensuring this policy remains relevant and practical. With joint efforts from the government, schools, and the community, zoning can continue to be essential in creating inclusive and equitable education for all children. To ensure its sustainability, the school zoning policy must be regularly evaluated, planned, and maintained while remaining flexible to adapt to changing dynamics. For example, student populations may fluctuate yearly, meaning zone boundaries must be assessed and adjusted according to demographic or infrastructure changes. Studies on the impact of the zoning policy on educational access and learning quality should also be considered as part of continuous monitoring and evaluation efforts.

4. Conclusion

Education for all, regardless of various backgrounds, is the aspiration of every nation, and efforts to achieve it are carried out through public policies. The school zoning policy embodies this ideal by emphasizing the aspects of equality and equity. This complex effort requires all related parties' awareness, involvement, and commitment. Situations and conditions will vary between regions and countries, so public policies must continuously be evaluated and adjusted accordingly. This is one of the key recommendations presented in this study. This paper is limited to mapping the

aspects of equity and equality in some areas of Indonesia, which are geographically and socio-economically diverse. Further research is needed to continuously improve and adapt to dynamic conditions, particularly in identifying each region's implementation barriers and drivers, which can then be integrated into national policy references.

5. Conflict of Interest

We, the authors, declare that we have no conflict of interest related to the writing or publication of this article.

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