

Theory and Models of Public Policy in Education: A Narrative Literature Review of Conceptual Foundations and Implementation in the Indonesian Context

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Abstract / Abstrak

Public policy is the principal instrument through which governments translate educational goals into practice, yet policy-process models developed in Western administrative contexts are often applied to Indonesian education without adequate attention to how they interact with decentralized governance and local bureaucratic capacity. This narrative literature review examines four classical models of the policy process, the rational, incremental, mixed-scanning, and systems approaches, together with Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework and Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy perspective, and evaluates their explanatory power against recent Indonesian education policy episodes, including the Merdeka Curriculum reform, school zoning (PPDB zonasi), the PPPK teacher-employment scheme, School Operational Assistance (BOS) fund governance, and post-pandemic digital transformation. Literature was drawn from peer-reviewed journals, national regulations, and international assessments (OECD, World Bank, UNESCO) published mainly between 2018 and 2025, selected for direct relevance to the theoretical models and policy cases under review. The analysis shows that no single model adequately explains Indonesian education policy in isolation: rational planning frequently collides with fragmented information and time pressure, while incremental and mixed-scanning logics better describe how curriculum and recruitment reforms are actually implemented; systems and advocacy-coalition perspectives, in turn, are needed to explain why decentralization has produced uneven outcomes across regions, as reflected in Indonesia's persistently high learning-poverty rate and below-average PISA 2022 performance. The review's contribution is a synthesized, context-sensitive framework linking policy-process theory to the specific implementation bottlenecks of Indonesian education interregional resource asymmetry, street-level discretion by principals and teachers, and a weak evaluation culture and it argues that policymakers should combine incremental adjustment with systematic monitoring rather than relying on any single model. Theoretical, policy, and future-research implications are offered for building more adaptive and evidence-based education governance in decentralized systems.

Keywords / Kata kunci

Education
Policy;
Policy
Process
Theory;
Policy
Implementati
on;
Decentralizat
ion;
Indonesia.

Kebijakan publik merupakan instrumen utama bagi pemerintah untuk menerjemahkan tujuan pendidikan ke dalam praktik, namun model proses kebijakan yang dikembangkan dalam konteks administrasi Barat sering diterapkan pada pendidikan Indonesia tanpa memperhatikan secara memadai interaksinya dengan tata kelola yang terdesentralisasi dan kapasitas birokrasi lokal. Kajian literatur naratif ini menelaah empat model klasik proses kebijakan, yaitu model rasional, inkremental, mixed scanning, dan sistem bersama dengan *Advocacy Coalition Framework* dari Sabatier dan perspektif birokrasi tingkat jalanan (*street-level bureaucracy*) dari Lipsky, serta menilai daya jelasnya terhadap sejumlah episode kebijakan pendidikan Indonesia terkini, termasuk reformasi Kurikulum Merdeka, sistem zonasi PPDB, kebijakan Pegawai Pemerintah dengan Perjanjian Kerja (PPPK), tata kelola dana Bantuan Operasional Sekolah (BOS), dan transformasi digital pascapandemi. Literatur dihimpun dari jurnal terakreditasi, regulasi nasional, serta asesmen internasional (OECD, Bank Dunia, UNESCO) yang terbit terutama antara tahun 2018 hingga 2025, dipilih karena relevansinya langsung dengan model teoretis dan kasus kebijakan yang dikaji. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa tidak ada satu model pun yang secara memadai mampu menjelaskan kebijakan pendidikan Indonesia secara mandiri: perencanaan rasional kerap berbenturan dengan keterbatasan informasi dan tekanan waktu, sementara logika inkremental dan mixed scanning lebih tepat menggambarkan bagaimana reformasi kurikulum dan rekrutmen guru sesungguhnya dijalankan; perspektif sistem dan koalisi advokasi diperlukan untuk menjelaskan mengapa desentralisasi menghasilkan capaian yang timpang antarwilayah, sebagaimana tercermin dari tingginya angka learning poverty dan capaian PISA 2022 Indonesia yang masih di bawah rata-rata. Kontribusi kajian ini adalah kerangka sintesis yang peka konteks, menghubungkan teori proses kebijakan dengan hambatan implementasi yang spesifik di

Kebijakan
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Proses Kebijakan;
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Kebijakan;
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Indonesia.

pendidikan Indonesia, asimetri sumber daya antarwilayah, diskresi aktor tingkat jalanan seperti kepala sekolah dan guru, serta lemahnya budaya evaluasi dan berargumentasi bahwa pembuat kebijakan perlu memadukan penyesuaian inkremental dengan pemantauan yang sistematis, alih-alih bergantung pada satu model saja. Implikasi teoretis, kebijakan, dan penelitian lanjutan disajikan untuk mendukung tata kelola pendidikan yang lebih adaptif dan berbasis bukti dalam sistem yang terdesentralisasi.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a key pillar of national development, and in the context of globalization and rapid technological change, education systems are expected to produce a competitive and adaptive workforce. Public policy is the principal instrument through which governments attempt to align education systems with these demands, yet the gap between policy intention and classroom reality remains wide in Indonesia. According to the World Bank's most recent Learning Poverty assessment, more than half of Indonesian children at late-primary age are still not proficient in reading, a rate well above the average for both the East Asia and Pacific region and upper-middle-income countries generally (World Bank, 2024). Consistent with this, the OECD's 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment found that more than three in four fifteen-year-old Indonesian students did not meet minimum proficiency levels in mathematics and reading (OECD, 2024). These figures illustrate that unequal access, uneven education quality across regions, and weak policy implementation are not merely anecdotal concerns but persistent, measurable features of the Indonesian education system. This demonstrates that education policy requires not only sound planning but also effective, contextually grounded implementation, and that a rigorous account of how policy is formulated, adopted, and carried out is needed to understand why intended outcomes are so often not achieved.

Public policy scholarship offers several foundational lenses for understanding how such decisions are made. Easton (1965) conceptualized policy as an output of a political system that converts societal demands and support into authoritative decisions, a systems view that highlights the

interdependence between society, government institutions, and policy outcomes. Simon (1947) proposed a rational model in which decision-makers are assumed to identify goals, generate alternatives, and select the option that maximizes expected value, though he later acknowledged that real decision-makers operate under "bounded rationality" rather than perfect information. Reacting to the unrealistic demands of the rational model, Lindblom (1959) argued that policymakers in practice proceed through successive limited comparisons with existing policy, a process he termed incrementalism, or "muddling through." Etzioni (1967) then proposed mixed scanning as a middle path, combining broad, low-detail scanning of the overall policy environment with focused, detailed analysis of specific issues that require it. These four models remain the reference points against which most subsequent policy-process research, including work on education policy, continues to be measured.

Beyond these classical models, later scholarship has emphasized that policy outcomes are also shaped by coalitions of actors who compete over problem definitions and preferred solutions, and by the discretion exercised by officials who deliver services directly to the public. Sabatier (1988) developed the Advocacy Coalition Framework to explain how policy change over a decade or more emerges from competition among coalitions organized around shared beliefs, operating within a given policy subsystem. Lipsky (1980) drew attention to "street-level bureaucrats" teachers, school principals, and frontline civil servants whose everyday discretionary decisions in practice determine what a policy actually becomes, often diverging considerably from its formal design. Within the Indonesian literature, several studies have

examined education policy through a decentralization lens, showing that the devolution of authority to provinces and districts has produced uneven resource allocation and inconsistent outcomes across the country (Nuridin, 2021). A recent systematic review synthesizing findings from twenty-five peer-reviewed studies published between 2014 and 2024 similarly concluded that, alongside real achievements such as rising enrollment and reduced illiteracy, Indonesian education policy continues to be undermined by unequal resource distribution, uneven quality across regions, and limited technological integration (Widiastuti, 2025). Most of this literature, however, examines a single reform or a single theoretical lens in isolation, rarely placing competing policy-process theories in direct dialogue with one another or testing them against several concurrent policy episodes at once.

This is the research gap this review addresses: rather than treating rational, incremental, mixed-scanning, systems, advocacy-coalition, and street-level bureaucracy perspectives as competing or mutually exclusive accounts, this article treats them as complementary lenses whose relative explanatory strength varies across the stage and setting of a given reform. It brings these six frameworks into direct dialogue with one another and tests their fit against several Indonesian education reforms that are unfolding concurrently: the Merdeka Curriculum, school zoning (PPDB zonasi), the PPPK teacher-employment scheme, School Operational Assistance (BOS) fund governance, and post-pandemic digital transformation rather than a single case examined through a single theory, as is common in the existing literature.

The novelty of this review therefore lies in synthesizing classical policy-process theory with contemporary coalition- and discretion-based perspectives into a single, context-sensitive framework for Indonesian education policy, rather than examining any one theory or reform in isolation.

Digital technology has also become a significant force in Indonesian education policy, both as an opportunity and as a source of new inequality. The Merdeka Curriculum reform, for instance, has been described by the OECD as an attempt to build foundational competencies and twenty-first-century skills through more flexible, technology-enabled and formative approaches to teaching and

assessment (OECD, 2024). Empirical studies of its rollout, however, report that many schools continue to face inadequate resources and infrastructure, insufficient teacher training and support, and an increased workload for teachers tasked with implementing the new curriculum (Marthana Yusa et al., 2023). Without policies that are adaptive and sensitive to these disparities, the use of technology in learning risks widening rather than narrowing the educational gap, particularly in regions with limited digital infrastructure.

Global demands for education quality are also intensifying, driven by international benchmarking exercises such as PISA and by the Sustainable Development Goals, which press governments to continuously revise policy in pursuit of national competitiveness. This creates a persistent tension between the pursuit of internationally validated standards and the need to formulate policy contextually, in a manner that accounts for Indonesia's wide regional disparities in infrastructure, teacher distribution, and local governance capacity.

Based on this discussion, the objective of this review is to critically synthesize classical and contemporary public policy theories and models: rational, incremental, mixed scanning, systems, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, and street-level bureaucracy; and to examine their explanatory power for the formulation and implementation of education policy in Indonesia, using recent reforms as illustrative cases. The review is intended to provide both a theoretically coherent account of the education policy process and a practically grounded reference for policymakers, school leaders, and researchers seeking to design more effective, adaptive, and sustainable education policy in a decentralized system.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative narrative literature review design, appropriate for synthesizing and critically integrating theoretical and empirical work drawn from a heterogeneous body of literature rather than for producing an effect-size estimate from a homogeneous set of studies. A narrative rather than a systematic review was chosen because the research question requires bringing multiple, conceptually distinct policy-process theories into dialogue with several concurrent Indonesian policy reforms, a synthesis task for which flexible, theory-driven selection is better suited than protocol-

driven exhaustive retrieval; this choice is stated explicitly here as a methodological limitation to be revisited below. Literature was retrieved primarily through Google Scholar, Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital), and the Scopus and DOAJ indexes, using combinations of the keywords “education policy,” “public policy theory,” “policy implementation,” “Indonesia,” and the names of the specific reforms under review (Merdeka Curriculum, PPDB zonasi, PPPK, BOS). The search was restricted mainly to peer-reviewed journal articles and official reports published between 2015 and 2025, supplemented by foundational theoretical works published earlier where these remain the primary reference point in the field (Easton, 1965; Simon, 1947; Lindblom, 1959; Etzioni, 1967; Sabatier, 1988; Lipsky, 1980). Sources were included if they directly addressed one or more of the six policy-process frameworks under review, or if they empirically examined the formulation, adoption, or implementation of an Indonesian education policy; sources were excluded if they fell outside the field of public or education policy, lacked identifiable peer review, or duplicated findings already captured by a more recent or more directly relevant source. Data analysis then proceeded through thematic content analysis, encompassing data reduction, categorization by theoretical framework and by policy case, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. Through these stages, recurring patterns, points of theoretical convergence and divergence, and gaps in the existing literature were identified in a systematic and traceable manner, allowing education policy to be understood from several complementary theoretical perspectives at once.

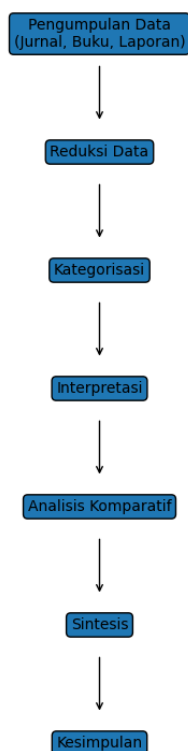
To strengthen the credibility of the review, source selection prioritized reputable, indexed journals, official government regulations, and reports from authoritative institutions such as the OECD, the World Bank, and UNESCO, and cross-checked recurring empirical claims (for example, on curriculum implementation or zoning outcomes) against more than one independent source where available. This step does not substitute for the inter-rater reliability procedures of a formal systematic review, but it provides a reasonable basis for confidence in the recurring findings reported below. The analysis then proceeded from identifying key concepts in each source, to grouping data into the four thematic

categories used to organize the Results and Discussion section, to interpreting how each theoretical framework helps explain the empirical pattern observed in a given policy case.

A comparative analysis approach was also applied across the six theoretical frameworks and across the five Indonesian policy cases, to identify where the frameworks converge, where they diverge, and where a given case is better explained by one framework than another. This comparative step is intended to reduce the risk of forcing a single theoretical narrative onto the evidence, and instead to let the fit between theory and case emerge from the comparison itself.

The approach used in this study therefore addresses both theoretical and empirical dimensions, examining how education policy is implemented within Indonesia’s specific social, political, economic, and administrative context, since policy outcomes cannot meaningfully be separated from the environment in which a policy is carried out. A limitation of this narrative approach, acknowledged here rather than concealed, is that it does not report a PRISMA-style flow of records identified, screened, and included, and its source selection is therefore theory-driven rather than fully protocol-driven; readers seeking a quantitatively bounded systematic review should treat the present synthesis as a complementary, conceptually oriented companion to such work rather than a substitute for it. Within this scope, the study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically, supporting the development of more effective, adaptive, and evidence-based education policy in Indonesia.

Research Flow Chart



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Public Policy and Education Concept

Consistent with Easton's (1965) systems view, the literature reviewed here treats public policy as an authoritative output of the political system a series of strategic decisions through which government responds to societal demands. In education, this output performs at least three functions that recur across the literature: it serves as an operational guideline for how education is delivered, as a mechanism intended to equalize access across social groups and regions, and as an instrument for raising the overall quality of education. In Indonesia these three functions are formally distributed across an elaborate decentralized structure, in which the central Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology sets national standards and curricula, provincial and district governments manage most public schools, and school-level actors retain considerable discretion over daily implementation (Nurdin, 2021). This distribution of authority means that the same national policy can generate markedly different results depending on the administrative and resource capacity of the implementing region, a pattern that recurs throughout the case evidence examined below.

2. Public Policy Theory

Comparing the six frameworks reviewed here confirms that no single theory dominates across every stage of the policy process. The rational, incremental, and mixed-scanning models are primarily models of decision-making they describe how a policy choice is arrived at whereas systems theory, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, and street-level bureaucracy theory are better suited to explaining why a policy, once adopted, is implemented unevenly across settings. Selecting among them is therefore less a matter of choosing the single "correct" theory than of matching the framework to the stage of the policy cycle and the empirical question at hand: formulation is illuminated most by the rational-incremental-mixed-scanning family, while implementation and its variability across regions are illuminated more by systems, coalition, and discretion-based accounts. Integrating these perspectives, rather than treating them as rivals, produces a more complete explanation of why Indonesian education policy so often succeeds in formulation but falters in delivery.

A. Rational Model

Simon's (1947) rational model assumes that decision-makers can identify clear objectives, generate a full set of alternatives, and select the option that maximizes expected value based on complete information. The design of the Merdeka Curriculum reflects this ideal in its ambition: a nationally coordinated reform intended to raise foundational competencies through evidence-informed, formative assessment practices (OECD, 2024). In practice, however, the model's core assumption of complete information rarely holds. Studies of the curriculum's rollout report that many schools lack the resources, infrastructure, and teacher training needed to implement it as designed, and

that teachers face a substantially heavier workload as a result (Marthana Yusa et al., 2023). This gap between the rational ideal embedded in policy design and the bounded rationality of implementers on the ground illustrates the model's central limitation: it describes how policy ought to be decided in principle, but offers little guidance on how to manage the information and resource constraints that determine whether the decision can be carried out as intended.

B. Incremental Model

Lindblom's (1959) incremental model, by contrast, describes policy change as proceeding through successive, limited adjustments to existing arrangements rather than through wholesale redesign. The staged rollout of the PPPK (Pegawai Pemerintah dengan Perjanjian Kerja) teacher-employment scheme illustrates this pattern well: rather than replacing the civil-service teacher system outright, the government introduced a parallel, contract-based employment track governed by successive regulations that were revised and layered onto one another as implementation problems emerged, including disputes over pension entitlement, job security, and regional recruitment quotas. This gradualism made the reform politically more manageable and easier to adjust in response to feedback, but it also reproduced some of the inequities of the system it was meant to improve; teacher-recruitment studies note that the policy has, in some districts, displaced experienced honorary teachers who no longer qualify under the new criteria, generating perceptions of structural unfairness even as it formalized the status of others. This illustrates incrementalism's characteristic trade-off: its gradualism reduces disruption

and political risk, but can also allow underlying structural problems to persist largely unaddressed.

C. Mixed Scanning

Etzioni's (1967) mixed-scanning model combines broad, low-detail scanning of the overall policy environment with focused, high-detail analysis of specific decisions that warrant it, offering a middle path between the rational and incremental extremes. The school zoning policy for new student admissions (PPDB zonasi) fits this pattern: at the national level, the Ministry has periodically issued broad regulatory frameworks setting overall principles for zoning, such as Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 1 of 2021, while provincial and district governments conduct more detailed, locally scanned adjustments such as Ponorogo District Regulation No. 26 of 2022 and Malang City Regulation No. 5 of 2021 to fit local demographic and infrastructural conditions (Hermawan & Hakim, 2024; Musadad & Purwanta, 2023). This layered approach allows the policy to remain broadly consistent nationally while staying locally adaptable, and some evaluations suggest it has helped reduce certain forms of access inequality; other assessments, however, note that the policy has also generated new disputes over school quality and geographic boundaries, showing that mixed scanning improves flexibility but does not by itself resolve the underlying resource disparities between regions.

D. Systems Theory

Systems theory views policy as an output generated by the complex interaction of environmental factors political, social, and economic that continuously influence one

another (Easton, 1965). In this view, policy is not a self-contained decision but part of a dynamic system in which a change in one component can affect others. This approach enables a more thorough analysis of the process from formulation to implementation, since it accounts for the external variables that help shape the direction a policy takes. In education, systems theory is particularly useful for understanding how School Operational Assistance (BOS) fund governance functions: BOS allocations are determined nationally but disbursed and managed through provincial and district education offices, so the system's output at any given school depends jointly on national funding formulas, regional administrative capacity, and school-level financial management practices. Reports on BOS-linked teacher compensation illustrate this chain in practice: honorary-teacher salaries drawn from BOS funds have been found to vary roughly twentyfold across schools, from about 100,000 to 1,500,000 IDR per month, depending on each school's BOS allocation and local management practices (RISE Programme, 2022), a disparity that reflects weaknesses in disbursement consistency, reporting standards, and oversight capacity at the district level, illustrating how a single national policy can generate very different outcomes depending on where in the system it is implemented. This confirms that systems theory is especially relevant for analyzing the complexity of education policy, which cannot be separated from the continually evolving environment surrounding it.

3. Education Policy Model

Synthesizing the case evidence above, Indonesian education policy can be understood as operating across three interdependent levels: macro (national regulation and curriculum design, such as the Merdeka Curriculum framework and PPPK employment law), meso (provincial and district administration, such as the local zoning and BOS disbursement regulations discussed above), and micro (school-level implementation by principals and teachers). These levels are not independent; a well-designed macro-level policy can still fail if meso-level administrative capacity is weak or if micro-level actors lack the resources or training to carry it out, and conversely, capable meso- and micro-level actors can partially compensate for gaps in macro-level design. The recurring finding across the cases reviewed here is that Indonesian education reforms tend to be relatively well specified at the macro level but experience the greatest slippage at the meso and micro levels, where interregional disparities in administrative capacity and resources are most pronounced. Good coordination and consistent implementation across all three levels is therefore necessary to realize a policy's intended goals, rather than treating strong national design as sufficient on its own.

4. Policy Implementation

The implementation phase emerges from this review as the most consistently critical stage of the policy cycle, since it is here that formulated plans are tested against on-the-ground realities. Implementation involves multiple actors with distinct roles and interests: the central government as policy designer, provincial and district offices as intermediaries, schools as direct implementers, and the community as recipients and Lipsky's (1980) concept of street-level bureaucracy is particularly useful here: teachers and principals routinely exercise discretion in how they interpret and apply national

policy, whether in deciding how strictly to enforce zoning boundaries, how to allocate BOS funds within a school's specific constraints, or how to adapt Merdeka Curriculum materials to their students' actual readiness. This discretion is not, in itself, an implementation failure; rather, it is an inherent feature of any policy delivered through frontline actors, and it becomes a problem for policy success mainly when it is exercised under conditions of weak coordination, limited resources, or inadequate training. The cases reviewed here consistently identify these same obstacles: weak inter-institutional coordination, resource constraints, resistance to change among implementers, and infrastructure gaps as the primary drivers of the gap between policy design and policy outcomes. A mature implementation strategy therefore needs to plan explicitly for street-level discretion, rather than assuming that a well-designed national policy will be applied uniformly once it reaches the school level.

5. Critical Analysis of Education Policy
Sabatier's (1988) Advocacy Coalition Framework adds a further dimension often missing from the rational-incremental-mixed-scanning-systems family: it highlights that education policy in Indonesia is also shaped by competing coalitions of actors with divergent beliefs about what counts as a fair or effective policy. Debates over PPPK teacher recruitment illustrate this well; recent critical analyses argue that recruitment criteria framed as merit-based can, in practice, disadvantage long-serving honorary teachers who do not meet newer formal qualifications (Pitriyani et al., 2025), generating competing narratives between advocates of standardized, competency-based recruitment and advocates of protecting incumbent teachers' welfare and service records. Viewed through the ACF lens, resolving such disputes requires not only better implementation capacity but also

sustained policy-oriented learning between coalitions over time. Taken together, the synthesis of the cases examined here confirms that no single model can be applied universally: rational and mixed-scanning logics best describe formulation, incrementalism best describes phased rollout, systems theory best explains cross-regional variation, and coalition and street-level discretion best explain persistent implementation conflict. An effective policy approach in this context needs to be flexible and evidence-based, drawing on multiple theoretical lenses simultaneously rather than treating any one as sufficient.

A. The Role of Educational Leadership

Leadership plays a significant role in determining implementation success precisely because principals and teachers function as the street-level bureaucrats identified above: they are the actors who translate national policy into concrete classroom practice, and their capacity, discretion, and disposition toward a given reform substantially shape its outcome at the school level. Visionary, communicative, and adaptive school leadership is repeatedly identified in the literature as a differentiating factor between schools that adapt reforms such as the Merdeka Curriculum successfully and those that struggle with the same policy under similar resource constraints. Policy evaluation is an equally important, and equally underdeveloped, component of the cycle: assessing the extent to which a policy achieves its objectives should provide the evidentiary basis for its refinement, yet a recurring finding across the literature synthesized here, including systematic reviews spanning a decade of Indonesian education policy research, is that evaluation is often conducted inconsistently

and is not systematically fed back into policy redesign (Widiastuti, 2025). Strengthening a systematic, sustained evaluation culture is therefore essential if Indonesian education policy is to move from a pattern of frequent reform toward a pattern of cumulative, evidence-based improvement.

6. Synthesis of Research Results

Drawing the analysis together, this review synthesizes three main findings. First, education policy in Indonesia has a complex, multidimensional character shaped by political, social, economic, and administrative factors operating simultaneously across macro, meso, and micro levels; no single theoretical model captures this complexity in full, but the six frameworks reviewed here are complementary rather than competing when applied to different stages and levels of the policy process. Second, across the five policy cases examined the Merdeka Curriculum, PPPK teacher recruitment, school zoning, BOS fund governance, and digital transformation the pattern that recurs most consistently is that Indonesian policy tends to be reasonably well specified at the point of national design but experiences its greatest slippage where street-level discretion meets uneven regional capacity, a finding best explained by combining systems theory, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, and street-level bureaucracy theory. Third, policy implementation, rather than formulation, is the stage that most consistently determines whether intended outcomes are achieved, which means that effective coordination between actors, clarity of roles, and adequate resource support at the meso and micro levels deserve at least as much policy attention as the design of the policy itself.

7. Research Implications

Theoretically, this review contributes a synthesized framework that positions rational, incremental, mixed-scanning, systems, advocacy-

coalition, and street-level bureaucracy theories as complementary rather than competing accounts, each with a specific comparative advantage depending on the stage of the policy cycle and the level of governance under examination; this reframing responds directly to the gap identified in the Introduction, where prior Indonesian studies have tended to apply a single framework to a single case. Practically, the review offers policymakers a rationale for pairing incremental, politically manageable reform design with stronger systematic monitoring and evaluation at the meso and micro levels, since the evidence reviewed here indicates that Indonesian education reforms are rarely undermined by poor national-level design alone, but rather by the interaction between that design and highly uneven regional implementation capacity. For school leaders and teachers, the review underscores that their discretionary decisions are not a peripheral implementation detail but a central determinant of whether a policy succeeds, implying a need for greater investment in principal and teacher preparation specifically for the judgment calls that reforms like the Merdeka Curriculum, PPPK recruitment, and BOS management require of them in practice.

CONCLUSION

This review set out to critically synthesize classical and contemporary public policy theories and to examine their explanatory power for education policy formulation and implementation in Indonesia. The evidence assembled here directly answers that objective: education policy is a complex, dynamic, multidimensional process that cannot be adequately understood through any single theoretical lens, but the six frameworks reviewed rational, incremental, mixed scanning, systems, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, and street-level bureaucracy become jointly sufficient when matched to the appropriate stage and level of the policy process. Public policy in education is, at its core, a series of strategic decisions shaped by political, social, economic, and cultural

conditions, and its analysis therefore requires a multidisciplinary, flexible, and contextual approach attentive to the specific administrative realities of a decentralized system such as Indonesia's.

Theoretically, this review contributes a synthesis in which the rational, incremental, and mixed-scanning models are shown to be primarily useful for understanding policy formulation, while systems theory, the Advocacy Coalition Framework, and street-level bureaucracy theory are primarily useful for understanding why implementation outcomes vary so markedly across Indonesia's regions. Conceptually, this reframes the long-standing debate over which policy model is "correct" into a question of which model is appropriate for which stage and level of analysis, a contribution that future studies of Indonesian education policy can build on rather than repeating single-theory, single-case designs.

Practically, the review confirms across all five cases examined that implementation, not formulation, is the stage most consistently determining policy success in Indonesian education; even well-designed national policies falter without adequate coordination, resources, and street-level capacity at the provincial, district, and school levels. This has a direct policy implication: investment in implementation capacity training for principals and teachers, administrative capacity at the district level, and clearer channels for reporting implementation problems back to national policymakers deserves at least the same priority as the design of new reforms themselves.

This review is not without limitations. As a narrative rather than a systematic literature review, it does not report a PRISMA-style protocol with quantified search, screening, and inclusion figures, and its conclusions are therefore best read as a theoretically grounded synthesis rather than as a statistically representative summary of the field. It also draws primarily on secondary literature and publicly available policy documents rather than original fieldwork, meaning it cannot independently verify the extent of implementation gaps beyond what the reviewed studies report. Future research would benefit from systematic reviews that quantify the prevalence of the implementation patterns identified here, from comparative

case studies across provinces with differing administrative capacity, and from longitudinal work tracking how advocacy coalitions around reforms such as PPPK recruitment evolve as policy-oriented learning accumulates over time.

Overall, this review confirms that the success of Indonesian education policy depends on the synergy between contextually appropriate formulation, adequately resourced implementation, and a sustained culture of evaluation, rather than on the choice of any single policy model. An evidence-based, theoretically pluralistic, and collaborative approach to policy design and delivery offers the clearest path toward education policies that translate their intended goals into measurable improvements in learning outcomes across all of Indonesia's regions.

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