



Assessing the Implementation of the Free Education Policy in Selayar Islands Regency

Darnianty Asis^{1*}, Suprianto², Muh. Ersyad Indra Praja³, Muhammad Luthfi Siraj⁴

^{1,2,3} Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis Maritim Balik Diwa

⁴ Universitas Negeri Makassar

Corresponding author's email: darnianty@itbm.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The implementation of free education policies has become an important strategy for improving equitable access to education and reducing financial barriers for students and their families. However, the effectiveness of policy implementation depends on the commitment of implementing institutions and their compliance with established regulations. This study aimed to assess the implementation of the Free Education Policy in Selayar Islands Regency by examining the implementation of four categories of educational charges prohibited under the regional regulation, namely school development contributions, student worksheet (LKS) fees, photograph fees, and diploma writing fees. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed using SMP Negeri 1 Bontosikuyu as the research site. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis and were analyzed using the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Edward III's policy implementation framework, consisting of communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure, was adopted as the analytical framework. The findings indicate that the policy has generally been implemented effectively. School development contributions, student worksheet fees, and diploma writing fees were not imposed on students, demonstrating compliance with the regional regulation. However, photograph fees remained partially implemented because of differing interpretations regarding funding responsibilities. The study concludes that organizational commitment and adequate resources have contributed positively to policy implementation, whereas communication remains the principal challenge to implementing policies consistently. These findings contribute to the literature on education policy implementation by providing empirical evidence from local government institutions and offer practical recommendations for strengthening policy communication, transparency, and accountability in free education programs.

Keywords: accountability; education; implementation; policy; transparency

INTRODUCTION

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a strategic instrument for promoting social welfare, economic development, and sustainable national progress. Internationally, the right to education is affirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reinforced through Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which emphasizes inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all (UNESCO, 2024). In Indonesia, Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution guarantees every citizen's right to education and obliges the government to establish a national education system that promotes intellectual development and social justice (Republic of Indonesia, 1945). Furthermore, Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System requires both central and regional governments to guarantee adequate educational funding and equal access to compulsory education (Republic of Indonesia, 2003). These constitutional and legal commitments demonstrate that education is not merely a public service but a strategic investment for sustainable human development (UNESCO, 2024).

To improve educational accessibility, the Indonesian government has implemented several financing policies aimed at reducing economic barriers to schooling. One of the most significant initiatives is the Free Education Policy, which seeks to eliminate direct educational costs for students while expanding access to compulsory education, particularly among disadvantaged communities. According to UNESCO (2025), equitable education financing remains one of the primary determinants of educational participation because financial constraints continue to limit access to quality education in many developing countries. Likewise, education financing should not only increase educational participation but also strengthen accountability and equity in resource allocation (Ndabananiye et al., 2025).

In South Sulawesi Province, the implementation of free education was initially introduced through provincial regulations and subsequently adopted by district governments, including Selayar Islands Regency. The regional government formalized this policy through Regional Regulation Number 3 of 2011, which prohibits schools from collecting unauthorized fees from students or parents for educational services financed through public funds.



The regulation explicitly prohibits charges related to school development contributions, student worksheets (LKS), diploma writing fees, and other operational costs. This policy reflects the local government's commitment to improving educational equity while strengthening transparency and accountability in school financial management (Republic of Indonesia, 2011).

Although free education policies have been widely implemented, successful policy implementation remains more challenging than policy formulation. Anderson (2015) argues that public policies achieve their objectives only when they are effectively translated into administrative actions. Similarly, Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) emphasize that implementation outcomes depend on administrative capacity, institutional commitment, and policy design. One of the most influential implementation frameworks was proposed by Edward III, who identifies communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure as the four critical determinants of successful policy implementation (Agustino, 2012). Numerous studies continue to employ this framework because it provides a comprehensive explanation of why similar policies often produce different outcomes across institutions and regions.

Recent studies have demonstrated that education policy implementation is frequently constrained by institutional and managerial challenges. A systematic review by researchers in the *International Journal of Educational Development* concluded that implementation fidelity is strongly influenced by administrative capacity, technical assistance, and institutional coordination rather than policy design alone (World Bank influence on policy implementation in education, 2025). Likewise, UNESCO highlights that evidence-based implementation remains limited in many education systems because communication between policymakers and implementing institutions is often inadequate, reducing policy effectiveness and accountability (UNESCO, 2025).

Empirical studies conducted in Indonesia have also identified similar implementation challenges. Puspitonigrum (2009) reported that delays in government fund disbursement forced schools to seek temporary financial resources before operational assistance became available. Widyanto (2010) further found that limited policy dissemination reduced public understanding of free education programs, creating misconceptions among parents regarding school fees. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of free education policies depends not only on regulatory compliance but also on communication, institutional resources, and organizational commitment during implementation.

Despite these valuable contributions, previous studies have primarily focused on financial management, budget allocation, or community perceptions of free education programs. Relatively little attention has been given to evaluating policy implementation from the perspective of prohibited educational charges stipulated in local regulations. Furthermore, few studies have comprehensively examined how communication, organizational resources, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structure interact to influence policy implementation within local education institutions. This limitation reveals an important research gap, particularly in the context of district-level education governance in Indonesia.

Therefore, this study aims to assess the implementation of the Free Education Policy in Selayar Islands Regency by examining four categories of educational charges explicitly prohibited under the regional regulation, namely school development contributions, student worksheet (LKS) fees, photograph fees, and diploma writing fees. Guided by Edward III's implementation framework, this study evaluates how communication, resources, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structure influence policy implementation. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on education policy implementation while providing practical recommendations for improving transparency, accountability, and equitable educational service delivery at the local government level.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to assess the implementation of the Free Education Policy in Selayar Islands Regency, with SMP Negeri 1 Bontosikuyu serving as the research site. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of policy implementation within its natural setting and facilitates the exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and institutional practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study focused on evaluating the implementation of the regional free education policy by examining four categories of educational charges explicitly prohibited under the regional regulation, namely school development contributions, student worksheet (LKS) fees, photograph fees, and diploma writing fees. These indicators were analyzed using Edward III's policy implementation framework, which emphasizes communication, resources, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structure as the principal determinants of implementation effectiveness (Edward III, 1980; Agustino, 2012).

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with school stakeholders directly involved in implementing the free education policy, while



secondary data consisted of policy documents, school administrative records, and other official documents related to the program. Data collection employed interviews and document analysis to enable data triangulation and improve research credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, credibility was established through source triangulation and member checking. The collected data were analyzed following the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2020), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, allowing themes and interpretations to emerge systematically throughout the analytical process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the Free Education Policy in Selayar Islands Regency was assessed based on four categories of educational charges explicitly prohibited under the regional regulation, namely school development contributions, student worksheet (LKS) fees, photograph fees, and diploma writing fees. These components were analyzed using Edward III's policy implementation framework, which emphasizes communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure as the primary determinants of policy implementation success (Edward III, 1980; Agustino, 2012). Overall, the findings indicate that the policy has generally been implemented effectively, although differences remain across individual implementation components. These differences demonstrate that successful policy implementation depends not only on regulatory compliance but also on institutional communication, resource availability, and implementer commitment (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Hill & Hupe, 2022).

School Development Contributions

The findings indicate that no school development contributions were requested from parents during student admission or throughout the implementation of the Free Education Policy at SMP Negeri 1 Bontosikuyu. Interviews with parents and school representatives consistently confirmed that the school did not collect development fees, reflecting compliance with the regional regulation prohibiting such charges. Furthermore, supervision conducted by the school committee strengthened institutional accountability and minimized opportunities for unauthorized financial contributions. These findings suggest that the policy objective of eliminating development fees has been successfully implemented within the study site.

From the perspective of Edward III's implementation model, the absence of development charges reflects strong implementer disposition and adequate organizational resources, although policy communication remains relatively limited. Most parents were aware that no development fees were collected; however, many were unfamiliar with the legal provisions underlying the policy. This finding suggests that implementation success may occur despite limited public understanding when implementers demonstrate strong commitment to policy objectives. Nevertheless, Edward III (1980) argues that communication remains an essential determinant because clear policy dissemination strengthens compliance and reduces potential misunderstandings among stakeholders.

The present findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that successful education policy implementation requires both institutional commitment and effective oversight (Anderson, 2015; UNESCO, 2024). Similar evidence reported by Widyanto (2010) indicates that inadequate policy socialization frequently creates uncertainty among parents regarding educational charges. In contrast, the findings of this study demonstrate that although policy communication requires improvement, effective supervision by school committees and administrative commitment have successfully prevented unauthorized school development contributions. This finding contributes to the literature by demonstrating that local institutional governance plays an important role in translating education policies into effective administrative practice.

Student Worksheet (LKS) Fees

The findings further reveal that Student Worksheet (LKS) fees were not collected from students because learning materials were financed through the Free Education Policy. Both school administrators and parents confirmed that LKS constituted part of instructional resources supported by government educational funding. Consequently, students were able to access learning materials without additional financial obligations, indicating compliance with the objectives of the regional regulation.

The implementation of this component reflects two important dimensions of Edward III's framework, namely resources and disposition. Adequate financial resources enabled schools to provide instructional materials without transferring costs to students, while the positive disposition of school administrators ensured consistent adherence to policy requirements. According to Edward III (1980), policy implementation becomes more effective when implementers possess sufficient resources and demonstrate commitment to achieving policy objectives.



The findings therefore indicate that institutional compliance has been supported by both administrative capacity and organizational commitment.

These results support previous studies emphasizing that adequate educational financing significantly improves policy implementation and educational equity (UNESCO, 2025; Ndabananiye *et al.*, 2025). Similarly, Anderson (2015) argues that public policy achieves its objectives when implementing organizations possess sufficient financial and administrative capacity to translate policy directives into operational activities. The findings therefore reinforce the argument that sustainable government funding remains essential for maintaining equitable educational access while preventing schools from imposing additional learning costs on students.

Photograph Fees

Unlike the previous indicators, the implementation of regulations concerning photograph fees demonstrated partial inconsistency. Interviews indicated that parents occasionally contributed to photograph expenses associated with graduation activities, although school administrators argued that such expenses were not included within the scope of educational operational funding. Consequently, differing interpretations emerged regarding whether photograph fees constituted prohibited educational charges under the regional regulation.

This finding illustrates weaknesses in both communication and implementer disposition. Edward III (1980) emphasizes that ambiguous policy communication frequently results in inconsistent implementation because implementers and target groups interpret regulations differently. The absence of comprehensive policy dissemination appears to have contributed to uncertainty among parents regarding the legitimacy of photograph fees. Furthermore, inconsistent implementation suggests that administrative commitment was not fully aligned with policy objectives, despite overall compliance with other components of the Free Education Policy.

Comparable implementation challenges have been reported in previous education policy studies, where inconsistent policy interpretation frequently reduced implementation effectiveness (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Hill & Hupe, 2022). UNESCO (2025) similarly emphasizes that policy implementation requires continuous communication and stakeholder engagement to avoid differing interpretations among implementing agencies. The present findings therefore demonstrate that regulatory clarity alone is insufficient; continuous policy socialization remains necessary to ensure consistent implementation across educational institutions.

Diploma Writing Fees

The findings indicate that no diploma writing fees were collected from students at SMP Negeri 1 Bontosikuyu. Both parents and school administrators confirmed that diploma preparation and issuance were completed without imposing additional financial obligations. These findings suggest that schools have successfully complied with the regional regulation concerning diploma-related expenses and have ensured equal access to graduation documentation for all students.

Within Edward III's implementation framework, this result primarily reflects positive implementer disposition, whereby school administrators consistently complied with policy requirements despite limited communication regarding the specific legal provisions. Although parents were generally unaware of the regulatory basis prohibiting diploma writing fees, the absence of such charges indicates that implementers maintained strong institutional commitment to policy compliance. This finding demonstrates that positive organizational attitudes toward public policy can substantially improve implementation outcomes even when policy awareness among beneficiaries remains relatively limited.

The findings corroborate previous research emphasizing that organizational commitment represents a critical determinant of policy implementation success (Anderson, 2015; Hill & Hupe, 2022). Likewise, recent studies on education governance highlight that transparent financial management strengthens public trust and institutional accountability while reducing opportunities for unauthorized educational charges (UNESCO, 2024). Consequently, eliminating diploma writing fees contributes not only to policy compliance but also to improving public confidence in the implementation of free education programs.

Overall Policy Implementation

Overall, the findings indicate that the Free Education Policy has been implemented effectively at SMP Negeri 1 Bontosikuyu. Three of the four prohibited educational charges—school development contributions, student worksheet (LKS) fees, and diploma writing fees—were implemented in accordance with the regional regulation, whereas photograph fees remained partially inconsistent because of differing interpretations regarding funding responsibilities. These findings demonstrate that policy implementation has generally achieved its intended objectives, although improvements in communication and policy dissemination remain necessary.

The study further confirms the relevance of Edward III's implementation framework, demonstrating that communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic oversight jointly influence implementation effectiveness. Among these dimensions, implementer disposition and organizational resources emerged as the strongest



supporting factors, whereas communication represented the principal implementation challenge. These findings support previous studies arguing that policy implementation is a dynamic administrative process requiring institutional commitment, effective governance, and continuous stakeholder communication (Edward III, 1980; Anderson, 2015; Hill & Hupe, 2022).

Finally, this study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence regarding the implementation of free education policy within a district-level educational institution in Indonesia. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasized funding mechanisms or community perceptions, this research evaluates implementation based on specific prohibited educational charges stipulated in local regulations. Consequently, the findings enrich existing knowledge on local education governance and provide practical recommendations for strengthening policy communication, improving transparency, and ensuring more consistent implementation of free education policies across educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the implementation of the Free Education Policy in Selayar Islands Regency by examining four categories of educational charges prohibited under the regional regulation. The findings demonstrate that the policy has generally been implemented effectively at SMP Negeri 1 Bontosikuyu. School development contributions, student worksheet (LKS) fees, and diploma writing fees were not charged to students, indicating that the school has complied with the policy objectives. Nevertheless, the implementation of regulations concerning photograph fees remains inconsistent because of differing interpretations regarding whether such expenses are included within the scope of free education financing.

The findings further reveal that the effectiveness of policy implementation is strongly influenced by the four dimensions proposed by Edward III. Organizational commitment and adequate educational resources supported successful implementation, while communication emerged as the principal challenge because many parents were unfamiliar with the regulatory provisions governing prohibited educational charges. This finding suggests that policy implementation requires not only regulatory compliance but also effective dissemination of policy information to all stakeholders.

The study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence regarding the implementation of free education policies within the context of district-level educational institutions in Indonesia. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasized funding mechanisms or public perceptions, this research evaluated policy implementation through specific prohibited educational charges regulated by local government. Future studies are recommended to involve multiple schools and districts and to incorporate mixed-method approaches in order to generate broader evidence regarding the effectiveness of free education policies and their contribution to educational equity and public accountability.

REFERENCES

- Agustino, L. (2012). *Dasar-dasar kebijakan publik*. Alfabeta.
- Anderson, J. E. (2015). *Public policymaking: An introduction* (8th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Edward III, G. C. (1980). *Implementing public policy*. Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Hill, M., & Hupe, P. (2022). *Implementing public policy: An introduction to the study of operational governance* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Mazmanian, D. A., & Sabatier, P. A. (1983). *Implementation and public policy*. Scott, Foresman and Company.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.



- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ndabananiye, J. C., Ndayambaje, I., & Uwizeyimana, D. E. (2025). Financing equitable education: Challenges and policy implications for developing countries. *International Journal of Educational Development*.
- Republic of Indonesia. (1945). *The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia*.
- Republic of Indonesia. (2003). *Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System*.
- Republic of Indonesia. (2011). *Regional Regulation of Selayar Islands Regency Number 3 of 2011 concerning Free Education*.
- UNESCO. (2024). *Global education monitoring report 2024: Leadership in education*. UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO. (2025). *Education finance watch 2025*. UNESCO Publishing.
- Widyanto, M. T. (2010). *Implementasi kebijakan pendidikan gratis di SDN Percobaan 1 Malang dan SMP Terbuka 05 Malang* (Undergraduate thesis). Universitas Negeri Malang.