

# Strengthening Public Trust through Zoning Policies in Student Admissions

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## Abstract:

This study evaluates the implementation of zoning policies in new student admissions (PPDB), especially its role in strengthening public trust in education policies. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis was carried out through three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and verification, which refers to the Miles and Huberman approach. The study results indicate that the zoning policy has succeeded in increasing educational accessibility, especially for students from low socio-economic groups, with a more equitable distribution. However, technical challenges, such as limited technological literacy in the community and the need for more effective socialization, are still significant obstacles. Assistance posts in schools have proven to be an effective solution in increasing public understanding of this policy. Adjusting the zone radius based on school capacity is a strategic step to overcome the imbalance in the number of applicants. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of a multi-channel communication approach, strengthening community technological literacy, transparency in the implementation of education policies, and resources as considerations.

**Keywords:** *Zoning Policy, New Student Admissions, Education Equity, Technology Literacy*

## Abstrak:

Penelitian ini berfokus pada evaluasi implementasi kebijakan zonasi dalam penerimaan peserta didik baru (PPDB), khususnya perannya dalam memperkuat kepercayaan publik terhadap kebijakan pendidikan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tiga tahap utama, yaitu reduksi data, penyajian data, dan verifikasi, yang mengacu pada pendekatan Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan zonasi berhasil meningkatkan aksesibilitas pendidikan, khususnya bagi siswa dari kelompok sosial-ekonomi rendah, dengan distribusi yang lebih merata. Namun, tantangan teknis, seperti keterbatasan literasi teknologi masyarakat dan kebutuhan sosialisasi yang lebih efektif, masih menjadi hambatan utama. Keberadaan posko bantuan di sekolah terbukti menjadi solusi efektif dalam meningkatkan pemahaman masyarakat terhadap kebijakan ini, sementara penyesuaian radius zona berdasarkan kapasitas sekolah menjadi langkah strategis untuk mengatasi ketidakseimbangan jumlah pendaftar. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pendekatan komunikasi multikanal, penguatan literasi teknologi masyarakat, dan transparansi dalam implementasi kebijakan pendidikan, serta sumber daya sebagai pertimbangan.

**Kata Kunci:** *Kebijakan Zonasi, Penerimaan Siswa Baru, Keadilan Pendidikan, Literasi Teknologi*

## INTRODUCTION

Disparities and inequitable access to education remain significant social problems in Indonesia (Marley et al., 2021; Naji et al., 2021). Although education has been considered a fundamental right for every citizen, unequal education facilities and services create inequality, especially between urban and rural areas (Lyu et al., 2021; Miao et al., 2021; Zeng, 2021). The zoning policy introduced by the government in 2017 through the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation aims to address these inequalities by bringing access to education closer to local communities.

However, in its implementation, this policy often faces technical and social challenges (Bellei & Munoz, 2023; Mabrouki et al., 2021; Rosyada & Sundari, 2021), such as the lack of community understanding of new procedures, limited technological literacy, and school capacity management. This shows how the zoning policy, despite its good intentions, needs a more adaptive implementation mechanism to address the community's local needs.

From a literature perspective, various studies have shown that zoning policies can improve education equity. A study by Frutuoso et al. (2021) found that zoning-based policies can improve the access of students from low economic groups to quality schools. Zoning policies can reduce pressure on favourite schools and create a fairer and more equitable distribution of students (Castro et al., 2024; Whittemore, 2021). Al-Najjar et al. (2022) also showed that this policy could reduce pressure on favourite schools, thus creating a more balanced distribution of students. The effectiveness of zoning policies in improving educational equity is highly dependent on supporting infrastructure, such as public transportation and school capacity, in certain areas (Musaddiq et al., 2022; Østergaard et al., 2022). Michalec and Hafferty (2023) emphasized the importance of local support, such as aid posts and direct socialization, to ensure the success of zoning policies. Combining zoning policies and improving school quality evenly is more effective in achieving educational equity than relying on zoning alone (Erdelić et al., 2021; Yi et al., 2022). Thus, while this policy has great potential, its implementation often requires adjustments to the local context to address community needs effectively.

This study aims to evaluate the implementation of the zoning policy in the admission of new students (PPDB), especially in strengthening public trust in education policy. This research seeks to answer the central question: How can this policy increase public trust in the education system? By attempting to obtain answers to these questions, this research is expected to provide deeper insights into the social dynamics that arise in the implementation of the zoning policy, as well as how this policy can be adjusted to be more transparent and fair in order to rebuild public trust.

This research assumes that the success of the zoning policy relies heavily on transparency in implementation, inclusive communication approaches and technical support to the community. The zoning system at SMAN 4 Makassar is assumed to have positively impacted equal access to education. However,

challenges such as low technological literacy and lack of adequate socialization can be the main obstacles to implementing this policy. The provisional answer from this research is that the existence of aid posts, adjustment of zone radius based on capacity, and multichannel communication approach play a key role in increasing community trust in the zoning policy. With high transparency and an inclusive approach, this policy can effectively improve inequality in access to education while strengthening legitimacy and public trust in national education policy.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted at SMAN 4 Makassar, focusing on implementing a zoning policy for the admission of new students (PPDB). The unit of analysis of this research is implementing the zoning policy that involves students, parents, and the school and how the policy contributes to strengthening public trust. The research design used is qualitative with a case study approach (Agazu et al., 2022). This approach was chosen to deeply explore the implementation of the zoning policy in a particular context and provide detailed insights into how the policy is interpreted and accepted by the community. Case studies allow researchers to focus on one specific location with unique social and geographical dynamics so that the research results can provide a contextual and rich understanding of the implementation of zoning policies.

The sources of information in this research involve various stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in implementing the zoning policy. The primary informants included the school principal, the PPDB committee, parents, and students who accept new learners. The school principal provided strategic insights about the zoning policy and its implementation steps. The PPDB committee provided information on the technical implementation of the policy, including the selection process and the management of the aid post. Parents shared their experiences during the registration process, including the obstacles faced related to technological literacy. Meanwhile, students provided perspectives on how they see the impact of the zoning policy on access to education. The interviewees were selected purposively to ensure the diversity of perspectives and the relevance of the data obtained.

Data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with school principals, PPDB organizers, parents, and students to comprehensively understand their experiences and views on the zoning policy. Observations were conducted at the location of the aid post to record the interactions between the committee and the community, as well as the technical processes that took place during PPDB—documentation involved collecting official data such as admission statistics, school policies, and annual reports. Coding was used to label the data sources to maintain the interviewees' privacy, as shown in Table 1.

This coding ensures the confidentiality of the interviewees' identities while allowing the researcher to systematically trace the data sources (Miller et al., 2023). The interview, observation and documentation techniques used in this research complement each other to provide an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the zoning policy.

**Table 1. Coding of Interviewees for Data Collection**

Coding	Source	Role
I_KS_2024	Principal	Provide strategic insights into zoning policies.
I_PP_2024	PPDB Committee	Explain technical implementation and policy socialization.
I_OT_2024	Parents of Students (OT)	Express their experience in the enrollment process.
I_SS_2024	Student (SS)	Provides insight into the impact of zoning on students.

The data analysis of this study was conducted through three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and verification based on the Miles and Huberman approach (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). Information from interviews, observations, and documentation was filtered in the data reduction stage to find the main patterns in implementing zoning policies at SMAN 4 Makassar. The results of data reduction are presented in narrative form and interpretation tables. Furthermore, the verification stage was carried out by comparing findings from various data sources to ensure consistency and validity of information. With this approach, the study is expected to explore a deeper understanding of the dynamics of zoning policies and the factors that support or hinder their implementation.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### Implementation of Zoning System in Strengthening Public Trust

Direct observation at SMAN 4 Makassar shows that the zoning system in the admission of new students (PPDB) is well implemented by government policy. Prospective students within the zone's radius get priority access to the regulations. This reflects the appropriate implementation of the policy and shows the school's commitment to creating a fair and transparent system, which is important for building public trust in the policy. The online registration process through an integrated system also supports transparency in selection, although there are challenges related to public understanding of this system.

The established aid posts played a key role in increasing public trust in the zoning policy. These posts not only provide solutions to technical problems experienced by prospective students and parents, such as difficulties in the online registration process, but also provide a deeper understanding of the online-based registration flow. The existence of the post shows that even though an online system is implemented, a direct approach is still needed to ensure that the community feels well served. Transparency in the process at SMAN 4 Makassar is reflected in a post that anyone can access and provides direct explanations without discrimination. Figure 1 shows the interaction between the school committee and the community in the aid post setting. This activity confirms that although an online system has been implemented, a direct approach is still needed to support the effectiveness of the zoning policy.



**Figure 1. Online Registration Assistance Post at SMAN 4 Makassar**

This observation shows that implementing the zoning system is going well and is important in reducing educational inequality. Although there were some challenges in the public's understanding of the online procedures, the helpdesk proved to be an effective solution in overcoming technical obstacles while strengthening public trust in the policy. The zoning system flexibly adjusts the zone radius based on school capacity. This helps ensure a more equitable distribution of students, especially those from lower-middle socio-economic groups. With transparency in every stage of implementation and the hands-on approach provided by the post, this policy has great potential to increase education accessibility and improve public trust in Indonesia's education system.

### **Personalized Communication Approach to Community Trust**

The zoning policy was socialized through various communication channels, such as social media, WhatsApp, billboards, and direct meetings. Based on interviews with parents and the PPDB committee, most people understand the main objective of this policy, which is equal access to education. However, the technical implementation was the main challenge, especially in online registration. Many parents expressed difficulties understanding the online procedures, mainly due to limited technological literacy and lack of access to the internet. This led to some communities feeling less involved and less confident in participating in the online system. The nuances of public trust emerged when the school established a helpdesk, effectively solving the public understanding gap.

This aid post helps parents and students with the online administration process and provides a more in-depth explanation of the zoning policy. With direct communication between the community and the committee, many parents feel more comfortable and trust the zoning system. Public trust was strengthened through the school's approach, where the community felt actively involved in understanding the policy. Although social media and online channels have been widely used, the personal approach through the post proved to be a more effective way of addressing the community's needs.

The results of interviews with parents showed that "I found it quite difficult with this online registration process because I was not used to such a system.



However, through the post, the school helped us so that everything became clearer and easier to understand” (I\_ST\_2024). A PPDB committee member and officer stated, “We have tried various socialization methods, including WhatsApp and social media, but parents still prefer to come directly to the post to get in-depth explanations. They feel more confident and comfortable with direct communication like this” (I\_AG\_2024). One student also revealed, “This process is quite good, but my parents were confused before getting an explanation from the committee at school. After the explanation, they felt calmer and trusted the process” (I\_RT\_2024). The following Table 2 summarizes the themes, subthemes and relevant findings:

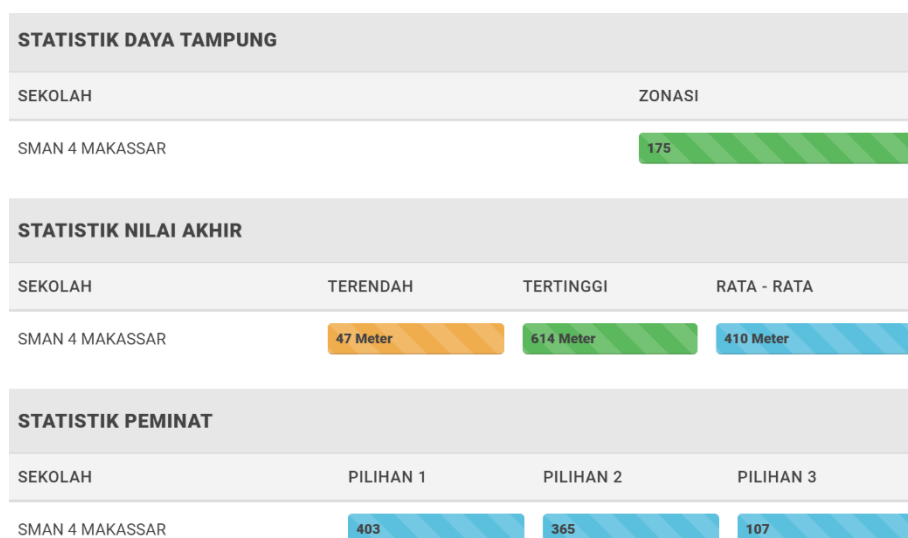
**Table 2. Thematic Analysis of the Impact of Zoning Policy Socialization**

Main Theme	Subtheme	Finding Data	Interpretation
Effectiveness of Socialization	Socialization Media	Socialization was conducted through social media, WhatsApp, billboards and in-person meetings. However, the effectiveness of online media is limited to parents with low literacy.	Online socialization is not effective enough to reach people with low technological literacy, so a direct approach is still needed.
Obstacles to Understanding Procedures	Low Tech Literacy	Many parents have difficulty understanding the online system. They prefer to come directly to the aid post to get an explanation.	Low technological literacy is a major challenge in the implementation of the online registration system, even though the system has been designed for transparency and efficiency.

Table 2 shows that an inclusive and personalized communication approach is essential to improve public understanding of the zoning policy. While online channels have been used extensively, a direct approach through aid posts has proven to be more effective in addressing gaps in understanding. Transparency and community involvement in socialisation can strengthen public trust in the zoning policy. By paying special attention to communities with limited technological literacy, SMAN 4 Makassar ensures broader engagement and creates a sense of trust that the policy is being implemented fairly and inclusively.

### **Adjustment of Quota and Radius Zoning to Maintain Public**

Statistical data on new student admissions at SMAN 4 Makassar in the 2020/2021 school year shows that the capacity through the zoning route reaches 175 students. Based on data on the distance of student residences, the final scores received ranged from 47 meters to 614 meters, with an average of 410 meters. The number of choice applicants 1 reached 403 students, far exceeding the capacity, so some students were transferred to the next school choice. This data illustrates how zone radius adjustment is important in managing student distribution. Figure 3 shows the transparency of admission data, which is the basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the zoning system.



**Figure 2. PPDB of Prospective Students and Parents at SMAN 4 Makassar**

Figure 2 illustrates the student enrollment process based on distance, school capacity, and number of applicants. This reflects the transparency applied in the zoning system, where all student admission and allocation data are published online. This transparency provides a sense of security to the community and increases public trust in education policies run by schools.

Adjusting the zone radius at SMAN 4 Makassar shows that the zoning policy is implemented flexibly and transparently to respond to the dynamics of the number of applicants yearly. The publication of enrollment data is clear evidence that the school runs this policy with the principle of openness. This transparency is a significant factor in building and maintaining public trust because people can see that the admission process is carried out fairly and accountable. By providing flexible solutions to the imbalance of capacity and community needs, this policy has successfully reduced inequality in access to education in the region.

## Discussion

The results of this study provide important implications for strengthening educational accessibility and public trust through the implementation of zoning policies. The first sub-finding, Implementation of Zoning System in Strengthening Public Trust, shows that the approach taken by SMAN 4 Makassar succeeded in creating a sense of justice and transparency among the community. By setting a zone radius and an integrated online system, the school ensures that students from low socio-economic groups get equal access to quality education. However, the existence of the aid post is the most decisive element in overcoming technical obstacles, such as low technological literacy. This result implies that transparency and a hands-on approach, despite the online system, are essential to ensure that the community feels involved in the policy. This reinforces the idea that inclusively implemented policies can improve education inequality at the local level while strengthening public trust in national education policies.

The correlation of the first sub-finding with previous research underscores the importance of fairness and transparency in education policy implementation. Marley et al. (2021) state that zoning-based education policies can increase community participation if implemented fairly and openly. Transparency through an online system that allows people to monitor the enrollment process is one important element that creates trust (Bierbaum & Sunderman, 2021; Muyassaroh et al., 2021; Taylor & Frankenberg, 2021). However, this study also adds a new dimension not discussed in previous studies, namely the importance of a personalized approach through aid posts. This confirms the findings of Yılık & Kondakçı (2024) that direct support to people with limited access to technology is key to the success of technology-based policies. Thus, this correlation shows that the success of zoning policies is not only determined by procedural transparency but also by the existence of direct support mechanisms that can address community needs inclusively.

The inclusive and personalized communication approach provides important implications that inclusive communication through various online and offline channels is key to improving public understanding of the zoning policy. Socialization through social media and WhatsApp helps reach people with access to technology, while aid posts are a solution for people with low technological literacy. The multichannel approach improves access to information and strengthens people's trust in the policy (Galvis & Carvajal, 2022; Hidayat et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2022). This finding implies that personal and face-to-face communication still plays an important role in building relationships between communities and educational institutions, especially in the context of technology-based education policies.

The correlation of the second sub-finding with previous studies confirms that a personalized communication approach is one of the main elements in the success of education policies. Berke et al. (2021) emphasize that policy communication must be tailored to the capabilities of local communities, especially when the policy involves the use of technology. Help posts prove that a personal approach can bridge the gap in people's understanding of the online system (Gura et al., 2023; Razmjoo et al., 2021; Ugwu et al., 2024). In addition, this finding is relevant to the study of Kiss et al. (2022), which emphasizes that community-based communication is more effective in creating a sense of community engagement and participation. However, this study makes an additional contribution by showing how a combination of online and face-to-face communication can strengthen people's trust, mainly when the two methods are used complementarily to address different needs in the community.

Adjustment of Quotas and Zoning Radius to Maintain Public Trust shows that flexibility in adjusting the zone radius is a practical strategic step in distributing students evenly. Student enrollment data shows that this policy is implemented by considering the dynamics of the number of applicants each year, thus reflecting the principle of fairness. The open publication of applicant data and selection results through an online system proves that schools implement this



policy with full transparency (Cohodes et al., 2023; Honey & Carrasco, 2023). This finding implies that policy flexibility, accompanied by transparency in its implementation, is an important element in building public trust in education policy, especially in the context of zoning, which is often seen as controversial in society.

The correlation of the third sub-finding with previous research confirms the importance of transparency and flexibility in education policy management. Campos and Kearns (2024) show that flexibility in education policy can help overcome the challenges of student distribution in areas with limited school capacity. The annual adjustment of the zone radius based on enrolment data shows that the policy is responsive to local needs (Cai et al., 2022). In addition, transparency in the publication of selection data supports the findings of Hillman (2023), which states that transparency in education policy increases people's trust in the government and educational institutions. This study strengthens this correlation by adding the dimension of the importance of online data publication to build public trust in the fairness of the admission process. Thus, the zoning policy at SMAN 4 Makassar supports education equity and shows that flexibility and transparency are key elements in maintaining public trust in education policy at the local level.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the zoning system significantly enhances educational accessibility, particularly for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, by promoting fairer student distribution through transparent admission data management, flexible zone adjustments, and support posts. These factors contribute to strengthening public trust in the education system. Combining online and face-to-face interactions, a multichannel communication approach was crucial in addressing the technological literacy gap and increasing community engagement. The study emphasizes that transparency, flexibility, and inclusive communication are essential for creating equitable and trusted education policies. However, the study's limitation to a single location calls for further research in diverse settings to enhance the generalizability of these findings.

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