

Implementation of Indonesian National Education Policy to Enhance Equitable Access and Educational Quality: A Pesantren Education Perspective

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Abstract

The implementation of national education policies within Indonesia's plural education system faces significant challenges due to the diverse institutional characteristics of its educational institutions. This study aims to analyze the implementation of national education policies in improving equitable access and educational quality through the perspective of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) as an analytical lens. The research employed a qualitative policy analysis approach using document analysis of national education regulations, government policy documents, official reports, and relevant scholarly publications. Data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis using Edwards III's policy implementation model, which emphasizes four key variables: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. The findings indicate that these four variables remain relevant for explaining policy implementation. However, within the context of pesantren, policy implementation is also influenced by institutional characteristics, the leadership of kiai, distinctive funding mechanisms, coordination between the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and innovation diffusion in the policy adoption process. These findings suggest that national education policy implementation in pesantren cannot be understood using the same approach applied to formal schools. This study contributes conceptually by extending Edwards III's implementation model through the integration of pesantren institutional characteristics and innovation diffusion mechanisms as contextual factors influencing policy implementation within Indonesia's plural national education system. The findings are expected to inform the development of more adaptive education policies that accommodate institutional diversity.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a strategic instrument for national development, playing a vital role in improving the quality of human resources while strengthening national competitiveness (Zamsiswaya & Wilis, 2026). In recent years, the Indonesian government has continuously implemented educational reforms through various



national education policies, including the Merdeka Curriculum, the transformation of the New Student Admission System (PPDB), the Teacher Mobilization Program (Program Guru Penggerak), the digitalization of learning, and the Indonesia Smart Program (Program Indonesia Pintar/PIP). These policies are intended to improve the quality of learning while expanding equitable access to education in accordance with the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Sulistiawati, Juliani D., Yuspiani, & Musdalifah, 2024). Nevertheless, various evaluation findings indicate that the success of educational policies is determined not only by the quality of policy formulation but also by the effectiveness of their implementation at the institutional level. This condition suggests that the implementation of national education policies has not always been able to accommodate the diverse characteristics of educational institutions in Indonesia, which differ in terms of institutional backgrounds, organizational cultures, and resource capacities (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023; Edwards, 1980).

The challenges of policy implementation become even more complex because Indonesia's national education system is inherently pluralistic. In addition to public schools and madrasahs, the national education system also encompasses *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), which possess distinctive characteristics in governance, curriculum, organizational culture, and leadership patterns (Atik Likai Tanjua et al., 2025; Hermina, 2026). The position of *pesantren* was further strengthened following the enactment of Law Number 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, which formally recognizes *pesantren* as an integral component of the national education system (Mustofa, 2020; Panut, Giyoto, & Rohmadi, 2021). However, such recognition does not diminish the distinctive identity of *pesantren* as educational institutions grounded in Islamic values and institutional autonomy. Therefore, the implementation of national education policies within *pesantren* requires a contextualized approach to ensure that policy objectives are achieved without compromising their institutional identity and unique characteristics.

Previous studies have examined the implementation of national education policies in Indonesia, particularly regarding the Merdeka Curriculum, the New Student Admission System (PPDB), the Teacher Mobilization Program, and the Indonesia Smart Program (PIP). Nugroho (2026) found that successful policy implementation is influenced by the readiness of human resources, policy communication, leadership, infrastructure support, and organizational capacity to manage change (Nugroho & Ratnasari, 2026). Meanwhile, research conducted within *pesantren* has primarily focused on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum or the integration of the national curriculum with the *pesantren* curriculum. These studies demonstrate efforts to adapt to national policies while highlighting challenges related to curriculum synchronization, educator preparedness, and limited institutional resources (Samudera, 2023).

Although research on educational policy implementation has continued to expand, most studies remain focused on evaluating specific policy programs or use formal schools as the primary unit of analysis. Studies concerning *pesantren* generally position them as objects of policy implementation rather than as analytical perspectives for understanding how national education policies operate within Indonesia's pluralistic education system. Consequently, there remains limited research explaining how the

distinctive governance, organizational culture, leadership, and curriculum of *pesantren* influence the comprehensive implementation of national education policies.

Based on the review of previous studies, significant research gaps remain in the field of national education policy implementation. Existing studies have contributed to understanding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, PPDB, the Teacher Mobilization Program, and the Indonesia Smart Program; however, relatively few have comprehensively examined national education policy implementation through the perspective of *pesantren* education. Since receiving formal recognition under Law Number 18 of 2019, *pesantren* have become an official component of Indonesia's national education system while continuing to preserve their distinctive institutional characteristics, governance structures, organizational cultures, and curricula that differ from those of formal schools. These differences may influence the effectiveness of national education policy implementation and therefore require a more contextual analysis of policy implementation within the *pesantren* environment.

Against this background, this study employs *pesantren* as an analytical lens to examine the implementation of national education policies within Indonesia's pluralistic education system. Unlike previous studies, which generally focused on evaluating individual policy programs or positioned *pesantren* merely as objects of policy implementation, this study views the governance system, curriculum, organizational culture, and leadership characteristics of *pesantren* as analytical perspectives for understanding how national education policies are implemented across diverse institutional contexts. Using Edwards III's Policy Implementation Model, this study aims to analyze the implementation of Indonesia's national education policies in promoting equitable access to and improving the quality of education from the perspective of *pesantren* education. The findings are expected to contribute conceptually to the advancement of educational policy implementation studies while providing a foundation for developing policies that are more adaptive to the diversity of educational institutions in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a library research design with a qualitative policy analysis approach. The design was chosen to examine the implementation of Indonesia's national education policies within the country's pluralistic education system through the perspective of *pesantren* education. Rather than positioning *pesantren* as case study objects, this study used them as an analytical lens for understanding how national education policies are implemented in institutions characterized by distinctive governance systems, curricula, organizational cultures, and leadership structures that differ from those of formal schools (Azhari, 2026; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The analysis was framed by George C. Edwards III's Policy Implementation Model, which emphasizes four key dimensions, namely communication, resources, implementers' disposition, and bureaucratic structure. This model was selected because it offers a comprehensive framework for explaining the factors that influence successful policy implementation, while the interpretation of each dimension was contextualized according to the institutional characteristics of *pesantren* identified in the literature (Edwards, 1980).

Data were collected through documentation techniques, relying exclusively on secondary sources relevant to national education policy and *pesantren* education. The documents comprised national legislation, government policy documents, official

institutional reports, statistical publications, and scholarly articles published in accredited national journals and reputable international journals. Source selection was guided by three criteria, namely topical relevance to national education policy implementation, credibility of the issuing institution or publication, and currency of the material, so that the collected documents adequately represented the regulatory and scholarly landscape of the subject under study. The types and functions of these data sources are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Types and Functions of Data Sources

No.	Type of Document	Examples	Function in the Analysis
1	National legislation	Law No. 20 of 2003; Law No. 18 of 2019	Establishing the legal basis and formal position of pesantren
2	Government policy documents	Merdeka Curriculum, PPDB, PIP, Program Guru Penggerak	Identifying the substance and objectives of national education policies
3	Official reports and statistics	Ministry and OECD reports	Providing the empirical and contextual basis for implementation
4	Scholarly articles	Accredited national and reputable international journals	Supplying the theoretical framework and prior findings

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, carried out through several sequential stages. First, the documents were identified and examined to assess their relevance and credibility. Second, the content was coded thematically in accordance with the four dimensions of the Edwards III model. Third, the coded data were categorized to reveal patterns of national education policy implementation from the perspective of pesantren education. Fourth, the categorized findings were interpreted and synthesized to construct a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Krippendorff, 2019). To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was conducted by comparing policy documents, official reports, and scholarly publications, while an audit trail was maintained to preserve the transparency and dependability of the analytical process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The overall flow of the analysis is illustrated in Figure 1.

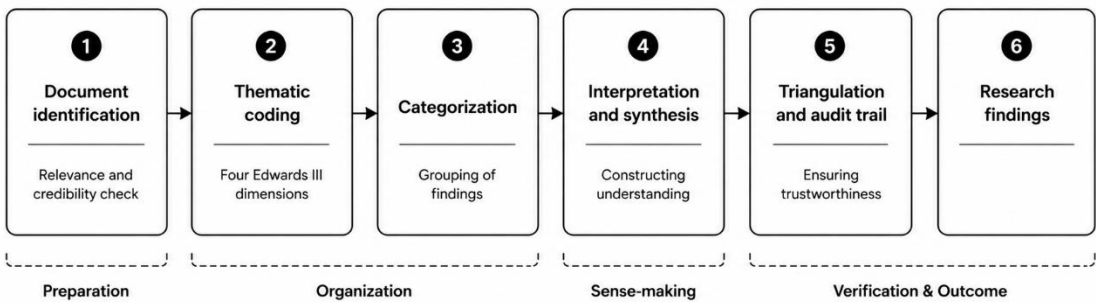


Figure 1. Flow of the Qualitative Content Analysis Process

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Implementation of National Education Policy in a Pluralistic Education System: A *Pesantren* Education Perspective

The analysis of policy documents, government regulations, official reports, and scholarly publications indicates that the implementation of national education policies in Indonesia has not been uniform across all educational institutions. Strategic policies, including the Merdeka Curriculum, the New Student Admission System (PPDB), the Indonesia Smart Program (Program Indonesia Pintar/PIP), and the Teacher Mobilization Program (Program Guru Penggerak), have contributed to expanding educational access and improving educational quality. However, the effectiveness of their implementation has been influenced by differences in institutional characteristics, organizational capacity, and resource availability across educational institutions. These findings suggest that the implementation of national education policies within Indonesia's pluralistic education system is shaped not only by geographical disparities but also by variations in institutional governance and organizational culture (Arifin, 2021).

From the perspective of *pesantren* education, the implementation of national education policies demonstrates dynamics that differ from those observed in formal schools. The formal recognition of *pesantren* as an integral component of the national education system through Law Number 18 of 2019 has created greater opportunities for integrating national education policies with the *pesantren* education system (Usman & Widyanto, 2021). Nevertheless, policy implementation remains adaptive because *pesantren* continue to preserve their distinctive institutional characteristics, including the leadership of the *kiai* (Islamic scholar), the *pesantren* curriculum, a boarding-based educational culture, and relatively autonomous governance structures. These findings indicate that the successful implementation of national education policies within *pesantren* depends not only on the substance of the policies themselves but also on their capacity to accommodate the unique institutional characteristics of *pesantren*.

Analysis of National Education Policy Implementation Based on the Edwards III Model Policy Communication

The analysis indicates that policy communication is a critical factor influencing the implementation of national education policies (Mustofa & Raikhan, 2023; Nurjariah & Qadri, 2023; Zibbat & Hariri, 2024a). The dissemination of major policy initiatives, including the Merdeka Curriculum, the New Student Admission System (PPDB), and the Teacher Mobilization Program (Program Guru Penggerak), has utilized various digital platforms and inter-institutional coordination mechanisms. Nevertheless, policy information has not been uniformly understood at the implementation level, resulting in variations in policy interpretation and execution. These findings are consistent with Suyanto and Abbas (2020), who argued that unclear policy communication contributes to diverse interpretations among teachers in implementing curriculum reforms.

From the perspective of *pesantren* education, policy communication extends beyond formal bureaucratic mechanisms and is strongly influenced by the leadership of the *kiai*, who serves as the primary authority in institutional decision-making (Samudera, 2023). Policy dissemination and acceptance are generally more effective when endorsed by the *kiai*. Consequently, policy communication within *pesantren* operates through a combination of administrative procedures and religious leadership authority (Anis Aprianti & Siti Tiara Maulia, 2023).

Implementation Resources

The findings reveal that resource availability remains one of the principal

determinants of successful national education policy implementation. Unequal distribution of teaching personnel, inadequate educational facilities and infrastructure, and disparities in access to technology and educational funding continue to hinder the equitable implementation of educational policies, particularly in institutions with limited organizational capacity (Sari, Dewi, Fadila, & Rivadah, 2021; Zibbat & Hariri, 2024). These findings support Amal (2018), who identified resource limitations as a major factor reducing the effectiveness of education policy implementation.

Within the *pesantren* context, resource characteristics differ substantially from those of formal schools. Most *pesantren* rely on a diversified funding structure derived from community support, student contributions, foundation funding, and government assistance (Atik Likai Tanjua et al., 2025). This diversity of funding sources influences the institutional capacity of *pesantren* to adapt to national education policies, particularly in providing learning facilities, enhancing teacher competencies, and integrating the national curriculum with the *pesantren* curriculum.

Implementers' Disposition

The analysis demonstrates that the disposition of policy implementers, particularly school leaders and educators, significantly influences the success of national education policy implementation. Positive attitudes toward educational reform facilitate the implementation of government programs, although challenges such as resistance to change and increasing administrative workloads remain evident (Panut et al., 2021). These findings are consistent with Nugroho (2020), who emphasized that policy implementation success largely depends on the commitment and acceptance of policy implementers toward policy objectives.

In the *pesantren* education system, implementers' disposition is determined not only by the readiness of teachers and institutional administrators but also by the legitimacy and authority of the *kiai* as the institutional leader. The *kiai*'s acceptance of a policy can accelerate its implementation when it is perceived to align with the vision and values of the *pesantren*. Conversely, when a policy is considered incompatible with the institutional characteristics of *pesantren*, its adaptation tends to proceed more gradually, thereby influencing the pace of policy implementation (Imamuddin, 2025).

Bureaucratic Structure

The findings indicate that bureaucratic structure influences the effectiveness of national education policy implementation through coordination mechanisms, the distribution of authority, and regulatory synchronization among government institutions. Bureaucratic fragmentation may result in inconsistent policy interpretations, overlapping responsibilities, and inadequate coordination in implementing educational programs (Fakhridana & Azizah, 2026; Mustofa, 2020). These findings support Purwanto and Sulistyastuti (2015), who argued that effective institutional coordination is a fundamental prerequisite for successful public policy implementation.

From the perspective of *pesantren* education, the bureaucratic structure is more complex because of the dual administrative authority shared between the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This institutional arrangement requires cross-sectoral coordination in implementing educational policies, particularly regarding curriculum development, institutional management, funding

mechanisms, and quality assurance systems. Therefore, the effectiveness of national education policy implementation within *pesantren* depends not only on their internal bureaucratic structures but also on the degree of policy harmonization between these two ministries.

The Impact of Policy Implementation on Equitable Access and Educational Quality

The analysis indicates that the implementation of national education policies has contributed to expanding access to education through several strategic initiatives, including the Indonesia Smart Program (*Program Indonesia Pintar* [PIP]), the transformation of the New Student Admission System (PPDB), and curriculum reform. These policies have promoted greater educational participation and broadened opportunities for accessing educational services. However, their impact has not been uniformly distributed, as implementation continues to be influenced by variations in institutional capacity, resource availability, and the characteristics of individual educational institutions. These findings are consistent with Azhari (2026) and the OECD (2023), who argue that achieving equitable access to education in Indonesia remains constrained by structural, geographical, and institutional challenges.

From the perspective of *pesantren* education, national education policies have created greater opportunities to strengthen the role of *pesantren* as an integral component of the national education system, particularly following the enactment of Law Number 18 of 2019 on *Pesantren*. Nevertheless, policy implementation across *pesantren* has demonstrated considerable variation due to differences in institutional governance, funding systems, curricula, and leadership structures. These findings suggest that expanding educational access through *pesantren* depends not only on the substance of national education policies but also on their ability to accommodate the distinctive institutional characteristics of *pesantren* (Khairani, Ali, & Imron Rosadi, 2021; Panut et al., 2021).

Regarding educational quality, the implementation of national education policies has contributed to improving teaching and learning through teacher professional development, curriculum reform, and the strengthening of quality assurance systems (Fadillah, 2015). However, within the *pesantren* context, educational quality is assessed not only by academic achievement but also by the successful integration of national education standards with *pesantren* values, character development, and the traditions of Islamic scholarship. Therefore, enhancing educational quality through national education policy implementation requires an adaptive approach that recognizes the diversity of Indonesia's educational systems. Such an approach is essential to achieving equitable access and improving educational quality while preserving the institutional identity and distinctive characteristics of *pesantren*.

Table 2. Summary of Policy Implementation Analysis Based on the Edwards III Model (Edwards, 1980)

Implementation Dimension	Key Findings	Pesantren Education Perspective	Implications for Equitable Access and Educational Quality
Communication	National education policies have been disseminated through various communication mechanisms; however, policy understanding	Policy communication is strongly influenced by the leadership of the <i>kiai</i> , making effective implementation highly dependent on the	Adaptive communication enhances policy acceptance and supports more effective implementation.

	among implementers remains inconsistent.	internalization of policies within the <i>pesantren</i> .	
Resources	The availability of human resources, infrastructure, technology, and financial support remains uneven across educational institutions.	<i>Pesantren</i> rely on diverse funding sources, including community support, foundations, student contributions, and government assistance, resulting in varying implementation capacities among institutions.	Resource disparities affect equitable access to educational services and the quality of teaching and learning.
Implementers' Disposition	The commitment and attitudes of policy implementers significantly influence successful policy implementation.	The legitimacy and leadership of the <i>kiai</i> play a crucial role in either accelerating or delaying the acceptance and implementation of national education policies.	Institutional leadership support strengthens implementation effectiveness and policy sustainability.
Bureaucratic Structure	Inter-institutional coordination continues to face bureaucratic fragmentation during policy implementation.	Policy implementation within <i>pesantren</i> is influenced by the dual administrative authority of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, requiring cross-sectoral coordination.	Greater policy harmonization between ministries is essential to support more effective implementation within Indonesia's pluralistic education system.

Discussion

National Education Policy Implementation from the Perspective of the Edwards III Model

The findings indicate that the implementation of national education policies cannot be understood as a uniform process across all educational institutions (Atik Likai Tanjua et al., 2025; Fakhridana & Azizah, 2026; Sulistiawati et al., 2024). Although major policy initiatives, including the Merdeka Curriculum, the Indonesia Smart Program (*Program Indonesia Pintar* [PIP]), the Teacher Mobilization Program (*Program Guru Penggerak*), and the transformation of the New Student Admission System (PPDB), were designed to promote equitable access to and improve the quality of education, their effectiveness varies according to the institutional characteristics of individual educational settings. These findings support Edwards' (1980) argument that successful policy implementation results from the interaction among four key dimensions: communication, resources, implementers' disposition, and bureaucratic structure (Habsana, Kencono, & Fridayani, 2026; Putra & Khaidir, 2017). However, within Indonesia's pluralistic education system, these dimensions do not operate in a linear manner; rather, they are shaped by the organizational characteristics of educational institutions, including *pesantren*.

From the perspective of *pesantren* education, policy communication extends beyond formal administrative mechanisms and is strongly influenced by the leadership of the *kiai*, whose authority and legitimacy play a decisive role in institutional policymaking (Burhanudin & Syamsul Falah, 2025). Likewise, the resource dimension demonstrates distinctive characteristics, as most *pesantren* finance their operations through a combination of community support, foundation funding, student

contributions, and government assistance (Rohma, 2026). Regarding implementers' disposition, the acceptance of national education policies largely depends on their compatibility with *pesantren* values and on the legitimacy of the *kiai* as the institutional leader. Meanwhile, the bureaucratic structure dimension is shaped by the coordination between the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, making policy harmonization between these institutions a crucial prerequisite for effective implementation. These findings suggest that the Edwards III Model remains highly relevant; however, its application should be interpreted contextually to reflect the distinctive characteristics of the *pesantren* education system.

This study extends the literature on educational policy implementation by demonstrating that the success of national education policies depends not only on the quality of policy design but also on their capacity to adapt to the diversity of educational systems. Accordingly, *pesantren* should not be viewed merely as objects of policy implementation but rather as an analytical lens for understanding the dynamics of national education policy implementation within Indonesia's pluralistic education system. This perspective implies that national education policies require implementation strategies that are more flexible, collaborative, and context-sensitive to achieve equitable access and improved educational quality while preserving the distinctive institutional identities of diverse educational institutions.

Table 3. Positioning the Research Findings within the Edwards III Policy Implementation Model from the Perspective of *Pesantren* Education

Edwards III Variable	Theoretical Concept	Research Findings	Interpretation from the <i>Pesantren</i> Education Perspective
Communication	Clear and consistent communication enhances the effectiveness of policy implementation.	Policy dissemination has not been uniformly understood across all educational institutions.	Policy communication is influenced by the leadership pattern and legitimacy of the <i>kiai</i> as the principal institutional decision-maker.
Resources	Effective implementation requires adequate resources.	Significant disparities exist in resource capacity among educational institutions.	The distinctive funding structure and resource management practices of <i>pesantren</i> influence their capacity to adapt to national education policies.
Implementers' Disposition	The commitment of policy implementers determines implementation success.	Implementers generally demonstrate positive attitudes toward policy implementation, although their disposition is influenced by organizational characteristics.	The legitimacy of the <i>kiai</i> may either facilitate or delay policy implementation depending on the alignment of national policies with <i>pesantren</i> values.
Bureaucratic Structure	A well-coordinated bureaucratic structure improves implementation effectiveness.	Inter-institutional coordination has not yet been fully integrated.	The dual administrative authority of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs necessitates policy harmonization in the governance and supervision

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Edwards (1980).

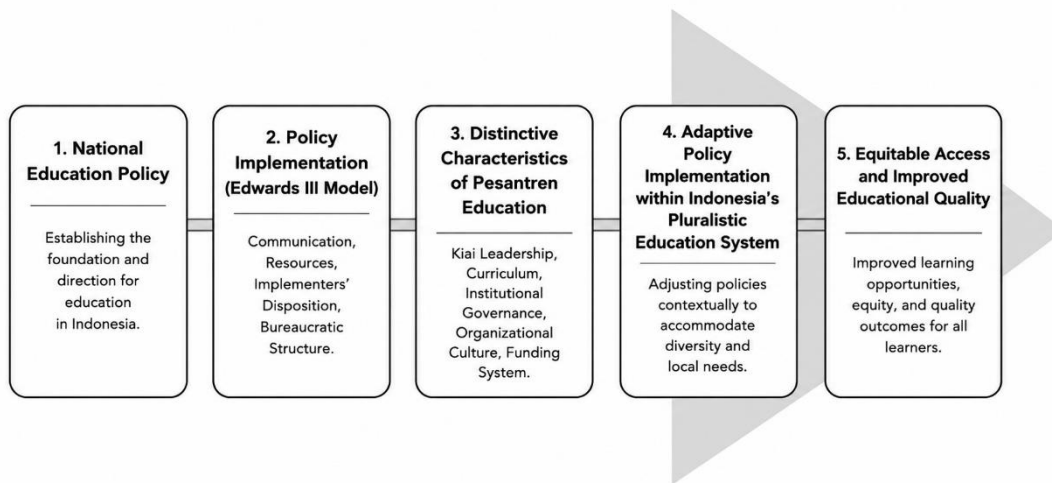


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of National Education Policy Implementation from the Perspective of Pesantren Education

Resources as a Determinant of Educational Quality

The findings indicate that resource availability remains a critical factor influencing the successful implementation of national education policies. Beyond the quality of educators, the availability of educational facilities, infrastructure, and financial support determines the capacity of educational institutions to implement government policies effectively. Within the *pesantren* context, resource characteristics differ from those of formal schools because institutional financing is generally derived from a combination of community support, foundation funding, student contributions, and government assistance.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on the development of *madrasahs*, which demonstrate that the implementation of Islamic education policies continues to face challenges related to institutional development, funding, teacher professional capacity, and curriculum integration (Fakhriddana & Azizah, 2026; Nur Azizah, Farida, & Yanti, 2026). This suggests that the effectiveness of policy implementation depends not only on the quantitative availability of resources but also on the institutional capacity to manage those resources in accordance with the distinctive characteristics of each educational institution.

Implementers' Disposition and Policy Implementation Challenges

This study demonstrates that implementers' disposition constitutes a key determinant of successful national education policy implementation. Within the *pesantren* education system, implementers' disposition is reflected not only in the attitudes of teachers and institutional administrators but also in the legitimacy of the *kiai* as the institutional leader. The acceptance of national education policies largely depends on their compatibility with the values, traditions, and educational vision of *pesantren* (Mustofa, 2023).

These findings reinforce the diffusion of innovation perspective, which argues that policy adoption occurs through an organization's internal decision-making

processes. In *pesantren*, national education policies are more readily implemented when they are perceived as consistent with *pesantren* values and receive the endorsement of the *kiai*. Therefore, implementers' disposition within *pesantren* is influenced not only by individual commitment but also by institutional mechanisms governing the acceptance and adaptation of policy innovations.

Table 4. Dialogue Between the Research Findings and Previous Studies

Implementation Aspect	Findings of This Study	Dialogue with Previous Studies	Synthesis
Communication	Policy communication is shaped by the leadership of the <i>kiai</i> , with policy dissemination occurring through both bureaucratic channels and institutional authority.	Edwards III (1980) emphasized the importance of clear communication, while studies on <i>pesantren</i> policy formulation (2020) suggest that the legal recognition of <i>pesantren</i> should be accompanied by communication strategies aligned with their institutional characteristics.	Effective policy communication in <i>pesantren</i> depends on integrating bureaucratic mechanisms with the leadership authority of the <i>kiai</i> .
Resources	Implementation capacity varies according to differences in funding, human resources, and educational facilities across <i>pesantren</i> .	Studies on <i>madrasah</i> development indicate that funding, human resource development, and curriculum integration remain major implementation challenges.	Strengthening implementation requires resource development strategies tailored to the institutional characteristics of <i>pesantren</i> .
Implementers' Disposition	Policy acceptance is influenced by the legitimacy of the <i>kiai</i> and the compatibility of national policies with <i>pesantren</i> values.	Diffusion of innovation theory explains that policy adoption depends on internal organizational decision-making processes.	Within <i>pesantren</i> , implementers' disposition is shaped not only by individual commitment but also by leadership legitimacy and institutional policy adoption processes.
Bureaucratic Structure	Policy implementation is influenced by coordination between the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs.	Edwards III emphasized the importance of a supportive bureaucratic structure, while previous studies indicate that inter-institutional coordination remains a persistent challenge.	Greater policy harmonization between ministries is required to improve implementation effectiveness within the <i>pesantren</i> education system.

Bureaucratic Structure and Inter-Institutional Coordination

The findings indicate that bureaucratic structure is a significant factor affecting the effectiveness of national education policy implementation. Within the *pesantren* context, implementation is influenced by coordination between the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Bisri, 2026). This dual administrative authority requires stronger policy synchronization in institutional development, curriculum reform, quality assurance, and educational governance (Fanani, Wahyono, & Aniaty, 2024; Millah & Sari, 1970).

These findings suggest that the bureaucratic structure governing *pesantren* is more complex than that of formal schools. Consequently, effective inter-ministerial coordination is essential to ensure that national education policies are implemented successfully while preserving the distinctive institutional characteristics of *pesantren*.

Implications of Policy Implementation for Equitable Access and Educational Quality

The findings demonstrate that national education policy implementation has contributed to improving both equitable access to education and educational quality. However, within the *pesantren* education system, implementation effectiveness is determined not only by the four implementation variables proposed by Edwards III but also by the distinctive institutional characteristics of *pesantren* (Putra & Khaidir, 2017). The dialogue between the present findings and previous studies on *pesantren* policy formulation, Islamic educational institution development, and diffusion of innovation indicates that successful policy implementation is strongly influenced by the leadership of the *kiai*, institutional governance, funding systems, and policy adoption mechanisms within *pesantren* (Atik Likai Tanjua et al., 2025; Hermina, 2026; Mustofa, 2023; Zamsiswaya & Wilis, 2026).

Accordingly, this study demonstrates that the Edwards III Policy Implementation Model remains an appropriate analytical framework for examining national education policy implementation. Nevertheless, within the context of *pesantren* education, the model should be interpreted contextually by considering institutional characteristics, the leadership of the *kiai*, and the mechanisms of innovation diffusion. These findings represent the study's conceptual contribution by extending the applicability of the Edwards III Model to Indonesia's pluralistic national education system.

Table 5. Policy Implications of National Education Policy Implementation from the Perspective of Pesantren Education

Dimension	Key Findings	Policy Implications
Policy Communication	Policy communication within <i>pesantren</i> is shaped by the leadership of the <i>kiai</i> and institutional communication mechanisms.	The government should develop adaptive communication strategies by actively involving <i>kiai</i> and <i>pesantren</i> leaders as key actors in policy implementation.
Resources	Implementation capacity is influenced by variations in funding, human resource quality, and educational facilities across <i>pesantren</i> .	Affirmative policies are needed to strengthen funding, enhance teacher competencies, and improve educational facilities according to the institutional characteristics of <i>pesantren</i> .
Implementers' Disposition	Policy acceptance depends on the legitimacy of the <i>kiai</i> and the alignment of national policies with <i>pesantren</i> values.	Policy implementation should adopt a participatory approach to strengthen institutional support and accelerate policy adoption.
Bureaucratic Structure	Policy implementation continues to be affected by the dual administrative authority of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs.	Greater regulatory harmonization and stronger inter-ministerial coordination are required to improve the governance and development of <i>pesantren</i> education.
Policy Implementation	Implementation effectiveness is influenced by the distinctive institutional characteristics of <i>pesantren</i> .	National education policies should be designed more adaptively to accommodate the diversity of educational institutions within Indonesia's national education system.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that national education policy implementation within Indonesia's pluralistic education system cannot be treated as a uniform process, since the pesantren perspective reveals that governance structures, curricula, organizational cultures, and the leadership of the kiai substantially shape how policies are received and adapted. The four variables of the Edwards III model, namely communication, resources, implementers' disposition, and bureaucratic structure, remain relevant, yet their operation within pesantren is mediated by distinctive institutional characteristics and innovation diffusion mechanisms that formal-school approaches cannot fully capture. This study is limited, however, by its exclusive reliance on documentary analysis, which does not capture the empirical dynamics of implementation across different types of pesantren, nor the perspectives of kiai, teachers, and policymakers as frontline actors. Future research should therefore adopt case study or field-based approaches involving diverse pesantren settings, and may employ comparative or mixed-methods designs to examine more rigorously how institutional characteristics, kiai leadership, and innovation diffusion mechanisms influence national education policy implementation across varying institutional and regional contexts.

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