IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ZONING SYSTEM AS A SELECTION METHOD FOR HIGH SCHOOL ENTRANCE IN RELATION TO SCHOOL DISTRIBUTION

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ABSTRACT
Education is a fundamental pillar of national development, and equitable access to education is crucial for achieving educational equality. In Indonesia, the government has implemented a zoning system as a selection mechanism for State Senior High School admissions. This system prioritizes students based on the proximity of their residence to the school. However, disparities in the distribution of high schools across various regions pose significant challenges to the effectiveness of this policy. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the zoning system in Pasuruan Regency, East Java, by examining the distribution of high schools and its impact on students' access to education. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, data on the number and location of high schools were obtained from the official website of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The findings reveal that the zoning system is less effective in areas where the distribution of high schools is uneven. Many sub-districts lack adequate school facilities, forcing students to travel long distances or enroll in schools outside their zones, often facing admission barriers due to the zoning policy. As a result, students from underserved areas experience limited educational opportunities, further exacerbating educational inequality. To improve the effectiveness of the zoning system, the government should prioritize the equitable distribution of high school facilities before fully enforcing the policy. Strengthening infrastructure in underserved regions will enhance access to quality education and ensure a more inclusive and fair educational system.

Keywords: education equity, school distribution, high school admission, zoning system

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important pillars for a nation's development. Without a well-structured and accessible education system, achieving national progress becomes significantly challenging (Susilowati et al., 2024). One of the key strategies to improve education quality is ensuring equal access to education for all students, regardless of socioeconomic background. The Indonesian government has taken steps towards this goal by implementing a 12-year compulsory education policy, ensuring that students complete at least Senior High School (SMA) or Vocational High School (SMK) (Margiyanti & Maulia, 2023). This initiative aims to increase the number of students who complete secondary education and contribute to a more educated workforce in the future. To facilitate equal access to quality education, the government introduced the zoning system as a primary method for the admission of new students into public high schools. This policy, regulated under the Ministry of Education in 2021, mandates that student enrollment in public schools be determined based on geographical proximity to the school. The zoning system prioritizes students who live closer to a particular school, ensuring that those within a designated radius are given priority for admission (Jaelani, 2024). The goal is to eliminate disparities in school selection and provide students with an equal opportunity to attend schools within their residential zones. However, the implementation of the zoning system has faced several challenges, primarily concerning school distribution disparities across different regions. The unequal distribution of schools, especially in rural and underdeveloped areas, presents significant obstacles to achieving the intended goals of the zoning system

(Anwar, 2022). Certain regions lack adequate public Senior High Schools (SMAN) or Vocational High Schools (SMKN), making it difficult for students to find suitable schools within their designated zones. This has led to situations where students must travel long distances or seek alternative educational institutions outside their immediate surroundings, thereby undermining the effectiveness of the zoning system.

The issue of unequal school distribution is exacerbated by the demographic variations in different regions. Urban areas typically have a higher concentration of high schools compared to rural areas, where educational infrastructure remains limited (Kurniawan et al., 2021). This imbalance results in a greater burden for students living in underserved regions, as they face challenges related to transportation, financial costs, and academic performance. Students from low-income families are particularly disadvantaged, as they may lack the financial resources to afford transportation or private school fees if they are unable to enroll in a public school within their zone. Another significant challenge associated with the zoning system is the limitation it imposes on student choice. While the policy aims to promote equal access to education, it restricts students from selecting schools based on their preferences, academic strengths, or career aspirations. Many students may find themselves enrolled in schools that do not align with their educational goals, which can impact their motivation and overall academic performance (Firdaus et al., 2019). In some cases, high-performing students are unable to access schools with better resources and learning environments simply because they do not reside within the designated zone. Furthermore, the zoning system has resulted in disparities in school quality. Schools located in affluent areas often have better facilities, more qualified teachers, and greater access to educational resources compared to schools in lower-income districts. This creates an educational divide, where students in well-resourced zones receive a higher quality education than those in underserved areas (Hartono & Lestari, 2022). Consequently, the policy, which was intended to promote educational equity, has inadvertently contributed to the persistence of inequalities in educational access and outcomes.

A key factor influencing the success of the zoning system is the level of government support and investment in school infrastructure. In regions where the government has actively expanded educational facilities and allocated sufficient resources, the zoning system has been more effective in achieving its goals (Suhendra et al., 2021). However, in areas where infrastructure development has been slow or inadequate, students continue to face challenges in accessing quality education. Addressing this issue requires a concerted effort from policymakers, educational authorities, and community stakeholders to ensure that all regions have sufficient school facilities to accommodate student needs. To improve the effectiveness of the zoning system, several policy recommendations can be considered. First, the government should prioritize the development of new high schools in underserved regions. Expanding school infrastructure in rural and disadvantaged areas would help address the imbalance in school distribution and reduce the need for students to travel long distances. Additionally, investment in digital learning platforms and distance education programs could provide alternative solutions for students who face geographical barriers to education. Another important step is to revise the zoning policy to allow for greater flexibility. Implementing a hybrid zoning model that considers both geographic proximity and student preferences could help address some of the challenges associated with restricted school choice. Special provisions should be made for students in regions with limited school options, enabling them to apply to schools outside their designated zones without facing significant disadvantages in the admission process (Jaelani, 2024). Moreover, financial support mechanisms should be established to assist students from low-income backgrounds. Providing transportation subsidies, scholarships, or stipends for students who need to travel to school can help alleviate some of the financial burdens associated with school access. Additionally, efforts should be made to improve the quality of education in all schools, ensuring that students receive a

high standard of learning regardless of their location. This includes investing in teacher training programs, enhancing school facilities, and integrating technology into the learning process.

Collaboration between government agencies, educational institutions, and the private sector is also essential in addressing the challenges associated with the zoning system. Public-private partnerships can play a crucial role in supporting school development projects, funding educational initiatives, and providing additional learning resources for students. Community engagement is equally important, as local stakeholders can help identify specific needs and contribute to the implementation of effective solutions. In conclusion, while the zoning system has been introduced as a means to promote equal access to education, its implementation has revealed several challenges that must be addressed. Unequal school distribution, limitations on student choice, and disparities in educational quality remain significant concerns. To enhance the effectiveness of the policy, targeted interventions such as infrastructure expansion, policy revisions, financial support, and collaboration between stakeholders must be prioritized. By addressing these issues, the zoning system can fulfill its intended purpose of ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students in Indonesia. Strengthening educational infrastructure, improving school quality, and fostering inclusivity in educational policies will contribute to a more just and effective education system that benefits all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background or geographical location.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive quantitative approach to systematically examine the effectiveness of the zoning system as a selection mechanism for high school admissions in Pasuruan Regency, East Java Province. A descriptive quantitative approach is used to analyze numerical data and provide a comprehensive overview of the school distribution across different sub-districts. The rationale behind selecting this approach is to quantitatively assess the extent to which the zoning policy ensures equitable access to education, particularly in regions with varying levels of educational infrastructure.

Research Location and Justification

Pasuruan Regency, which consists of 24 sub-districts, was chosen as the research site due to its diverse geographical and socio-economic characteristics. The region comprises urban, semi-urban, rural, and disadvantaged areas, making it an ideal case study for evaluating how zoning policies function under different circumstances. The selection of Pasuruan Regency is also based on the presence of disparities in school distribution, with some sub-districts having multiple schools while others lack sufficient educational facilities. This disparity makes it essential to analyze whether the zoning system effectively facilitates equitable student placement or if it exacerbates educational accessibility issues.

Data Collection Method

The study utilizes the documentation method, in which data is gathered from secondary sources, particularly official government records and publicly available databases. The primary data source is the Basic Education Data System (Dapodikdasmen) of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia. The data collected includes: 1) The number of public and vocational high schools (SMAN and SMKN) in each of the 24 sub-districts of Pasuruan Regency. 2) The geographical distribution of schools, including their locations relative to population centers. 3) Potential gaps in educational infrastructure, particularly in sub-districts with few or no high schools.

Data Analysis Technique

The collected data is processed through a descriptive statistical approach, where numerical data related to school distribution is tabulated and analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and disparities. The analysis

involves: 1) Mapping the distribution of high schools in Pasuruan Regency to assess which sub-districts have adequate educational infrastructure and which lack access. 2) Comparing school availability between urban, semi-urban, and rural sub-districts to determine how the zoning system impacts students in different regions. 3) Identifying gaps in school accessibility that may prevent students from benefiting from the zoning policy, particularly in areas where schools are scarce or absent. 4) Evaluating policy implications, specifically whether the zoning system aligns with the government's goal of equitable education distribution or if it inadvertently reinforces educational disparities.

By applying descriptive statistics and comparative analysis, this study provides empirical evidence regarding the zoning system's effectiveness in achieving its intended objectives. The findings are expected to offer insights for policymakers, educational planners, and stakeholders on the need for infrastructure development before enforcing zoning-based school admissions. Through this approach, the research contributes to the broader discussion on educational equity, offering recommendations for improving the zoning system to ensure fair access to high-quality secondary education for all students, regardless of their geographical location.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data obtained from the official website of the Indonesian Ministry of Education's Basic Data (Dapodikdasmen), it is evident that the distribution of high schools (SMA) and vocational high schools (SMK) in Pasuruan Regency is uneven. The total number of high schools recorded is nine, while vocational high schools amount to fourteen, distributed across different districts. The concentration of SMA is higher in districts such as Bangil, Pandaan, and Purwosari, which are closer to urban centers. Meanwhile, several districts, including Purwodadi, Pasrepan, and Rejoso, lack high schools entirely. This imbalance in the educational infrastructure presents significant challenges for prospective students, particularly those residing in districts without SMA facilities.

Table 1. Number of high schools in each sub-district in Pasuruan Regency

Name of District	Number of High Schools	Number of SMKN
Pandaam District	1	0
Bangil District	2	1
Gempol District	0	1
Beji District	0	1
Prigen District	0	1
Sukorejo District	0	2
Purwosari District	1	1
Purwodadi District	0	0
Kejayan District	1	0
Rembang District	0	1
Wonorejo District	0	1
Kraton District	0	0
Grati District	0	1
Tutur District	0	1
Lekok District	0	0
Nguling District	1	1

Name of District	Number of High Schools	Number of SMKN
Pasrepan District	0	0
Rejoso District	0	0
Gondang Wetan District	1	0
Lumbang District	1	0
Winongan District	0	1
Pohjentrek District	0	0
Tosari District	1	0
Puspo District	0	1

The lack of SMA in several districts forces students to seek education outside their domicile district, leading to increased commuting distances and associated challenges. The Indonesian government's zoning system, which prioritizes students residing near the school, exacerbates the issue. Prospective students from districts without an SMA often face rejection due to limited quotas allocated for non-local students. This limitation restricts their educational opportunities and compels them to opt for vocational schools or private institutions, which often entail higher tuition fees. Several studies highlight the impact of school accessibility on educational outcomes. For instance, research by Kurniawan et al. (2021) found that students who have to travel long distances to school often experience higher dropout rates and lower academic performance due to fatigue and increased transportation costs. Additionally, Rahmawati & Suryadi (2020) argue that geographical disparities in educational access contribute to broader socioeconomic inequalities, as students from underprivileged regions face additional barriers in achieving academic success. Another key issue arising from the uneven distribution of high schools is the misalignment between student preferences and available educational institutions. In districts where only vocational schools (SMK) are available, students interested in pursuing general education (SMA) have limited options. This situation forces them to either relocate, bear additional financial burdens by enrolling in private schools, or settle for vocational education despite their aspirations. Studies indicate that educational choices significantly impact students' future career prospects. According to Firdaus et al. (2019), students who are compelled to enter vocational schools due to a lack of general high schools often struggle with motivation and career satisfaction. This misalignment may also lead to inefficiencies in human resource development, as students do not receive education that aligns with their strengths and career aspirations.

The implementation of the zoning system by the Ministry of Education aims to promote equitable access to quality education by prioritizing students based on geographic proximity to schools. While this policy is beneficial in urban areas with an adequate number of schools, it poses significant challenges in regions with an uneven school distribution, such as Pasuruan Regency. In areas like Bangil and Purwosari, where multiple high schools exist, students have the flexibility to choose their preferred schools, ensuring fair educational access. However, in districts with no high schools, students are at a disadvantage as they must compete for limited spots in other sub-districts. Consequently, rather than achieving educational equity, the zoning system inadvertently exacerbates disparities by limiting the choices available to students from underserved regions. A report by Suhendra et al. (2021) on zoning policy implementation in rural Indonesia highlights that the system disproportionately benefits students in well-equipped regions while disadvantaging those in remote areas. Furthermore, Hartono & Lestari (2022) emphasize that the rigid zoning policy discourages student mobility, thereby restricting access to better educational opportunities for students in marginalized areas. Addressing the issue of educational inequality in Pasuruan Regency requires a multi-faceted approach involving policy reforms, infrastructure development, and strategic educational planning. The government should prioritize the establishment of new high schools in districts

that currently lack access to SMA. This initiative could be achieved through collaboration between the central and regional governments, leveraging public-private partnerships to accelerate school construction. Investing in digital education platforms and distance learning programs can also supplement physical school infrastructure, enabling students in remote areas to access quality education. Given the challenges posed by the zoning system, modifications should be introduced to ensure flexibility for students from underserved regions. Possible adjustments include special quotas for students from districts without high schools, allowing them to enroll in nearby sub-districts without being disadvantaged by zoning restrictions. Hybrid zoning policies that consider both geographical proximity and socio-economic conditions should be implemented to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds receive fair access to education. Scholarship programs and transportation assistance should be provided for students who need to travel long distances to attend school, reducing the financial burden on families.

To mitigate the challenges faced by students who are unable to access SMA, the government should enhance the quality of SMK programs, ensuring that vocational education becomes an attractive and viable alternative. This includes aligning vocational curricula with industry needs, providing students with skills that enhance their employability and career prospects. Offering dual-degree programs that allow students to obtain both vocational and general education qualifications can also expand their future options. Encouraging partnerships between schools and local industries ensures that SMK graduates have direct pathways to employment or further education. The findings of this study highlight the pressing issue of educational inequality in Pasuruan Regency due to the uneven distribution of high schools. The lack of SMA in certain districts forces students to seek alternative educational pathways, often at a higher cost and inconvenience. The current zoning policy, while effective in well-equipped areas, further exacerbates disparities by limiting access for students from underserved regions. To achieve equitable access to education, it is essential for policymakers to implement targeted interventions, including the expansion of school infrastructure, revision of zoning regulations, and enhancement of vocational education. Addressing these challenges will not only improve educational accessibility but also contribute to the overall development and social mobility of students in Pasuruan Regency.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals significant disparities in the distribution of high schools across Pasuruan Regency, with certain districts entirely lacking access to general high school education. This uneven distribution forces students to travel long distances, often facing rejection due to the zoning system, thereby limiting their educational opportunities and increasing financial burdens. The zoning system, while designed to promote educational equity, instead exacerbates inequalities, particularly in rural areas with inadequate educational infrastructure. The consequences of this disparity are far-reaching, affecting student motivation, career prospects, and overall human resource development. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach, including expanding educational infrastructure, revising zoning policies to accommodate students from underserved areas, and improving the quality of vocational education to provide better career pathways. Policymakers must implement targeted interventions to ensure that all students, regardless of their geographical location, have equal access to quality education. Strengthening collaborations between government and private sectors, investing in digital learning alternatives, and providing financial assistance for students in remote areas can significantly bridge the existing educational gap. By prioritizing these measures, Pasuruan Regency can move toward a more equitable and inclusive education system that supports long-term socioeconomic development.

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