

# POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN EDUCATION POLICY IN INDONESIA: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examines the political dynamics shaping education policy in Indonesia through a systematic literature review (SLR). While education policy is often framed as a technical and rational process, increasing evidence suggests that political interests, power relations, and governance structures play a decisive role in policy formulation and implementation.*

*Using the PRISMA framework, this study analyzes peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2025. The findings reveal that education policy in Indonesia is strongly influenced by elite actors, decentralization politics, institutional fragmentation, and ideological contestation. The review further demonstrates that decentralization reforms have produced both opportunities for local participation and challenges related to policy inconsistency and unequal implementation across regions. This study proposes a Political–Policy Interaction Model that conceptualizes policy processes as dynamic interactions between political forces and governance structures. The findings contribute to Public Policy Analysis by integrating political economy and governance perspectives into education policy research, particularly in developing countries.*

**Keywords:** Education policy, Political dynamics, Indonesia, Systematic literature review, Governance

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education policy has traditionally been conceptualized as a rational and technocratic process aimed at improving educational quality, access, and equity. However, contemporary scholarship increasingly argues that policy processes are inherently political because they involve power struggles, competing interests, ideological contestation, and institutional negotiations.<sup>[1][2]</sup> Education policies are therefore not merely technical instruments, but products of political compromise and governance arrangements shaped by both domestic and global actors.<sup>[1][3]</sup>

In many developing countries, including Indonesia, education policy reforms are closely linked to broader political transformations. Following the fall of the New Order regime, Indonesia implemented decentralization reforms through Law No. 22 of 1999 and Law No. 32 of 2004, transferring substantial authority from the central government to local governments. These reforms aimed to improve efficiency, accountability, and local responsiveness in public service delivery, including education. Nevertheless, decentralization also generated governance complexities, variations in policy implementation, and increasing influence of local political elites.<sup>[4][5]</sup> Previous studies have shown that Indonesian education policy is deeply influenced by political interests, ideological agendas, and institutional dynamics. Curriculum reforms, for example, often reflect broader political narratives concerning nationalism, citizenship, religion, and economic development.<sup>[6][7][8]</sup> Similarly, the implementation of inclusive education policies depends heavily on political commitment and local governance capacity.<sup>[9]</sup> Research in Aceh also demonstrates how political intervention can significantly affect educational quality and governance processes.<sup>[10]</sup>

At the global level, education policy is increasingly shaped by transnational governance networks, international organizations, and policy borrowing practices.<sup>[11][12]</sup> These global influences interact with

domestic political contexts, producing hybrid forms of governance and policy implementation. Consequently, understanding education policy requires an integrated perspective that combines governance theory, political economy, and policy analysis.

Despite the growing body of literature on education policy in Indonesia, existing studies remain fragmented and often focus on specific cases, regions, or policy programs. Few studies systematically synthesize the broader political dynamics underlying policy formulation and implementation. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by conducting a systematic literature review (SLR) examining how political dynamics shape education policy in Indonesia.

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## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) approach guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) framework. PRISMA is widely used to ensure transparency, rigor, and replicability in identifying, screening, and synthesizing academic literature. The SLR approach was selected because it enables researchers to systematically identify patterns, conceptual trends, and theoretical developments across a large body of literature. In this study, the review focuses specifically on political dynamics within Indonesian education policy.

### **2.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy**

The literature search was conducted using major academic databases, including:

- Scopus
- Web of Science
- Google Scholar

The search process used combinations of the following keywords:

- “education policy” AND “Indonesia”
- “politics” AND “education reform”
- “policy implementation” AND “governance”
- “decentralization” AND “education policy”
- “curriculum politics” AND “Indonesia”

The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025. Additional manual searches were conducted through reference tracking to identify relevant studies not captured through database searches.

### **2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

#### **Inclusion Criteria**

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Published between 2015–2025
- Focused on education policy in Indonesia
- Addressed political, governance, or institutional dimensions
- Empirical or theoretical studies

## Exclusion Criteria

- Non-academic publications
- Conference proceedings without peer review
- Articles unrelated to Indonesia
- Duplicate studies
- Studies focused solely on pedagogy without policy relevance

## 2.4 Data Analysis

The selected studies were analyzed using thematic analysis and qualitative synthesis techniques. The analysis was guided by Governance Theory, Political Economy, and Public Policy Analysis frameworks (Howlett, 2019; Sabatier, 2014).

Thematic coding identified recurring themes related to:

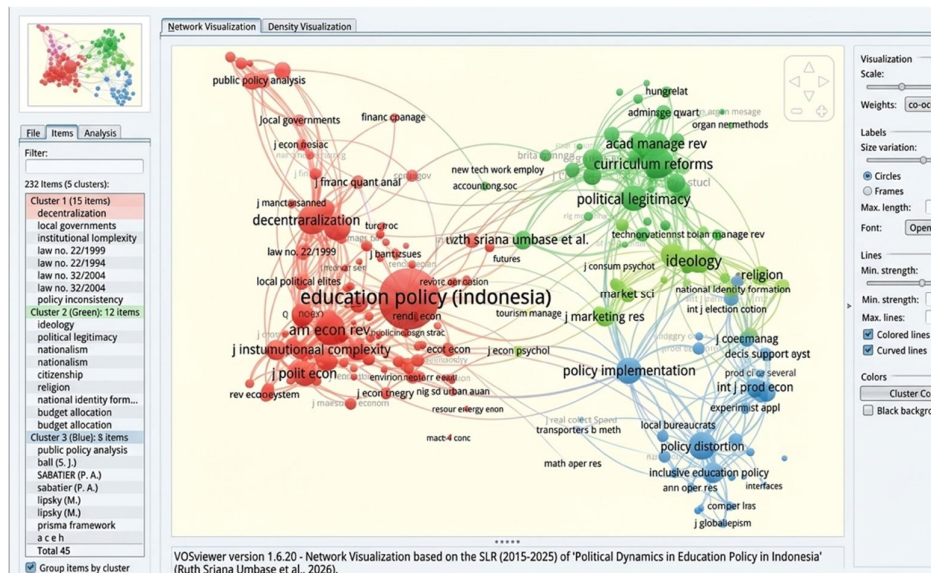
- Political actors and power relations
- Decentralization and governance
- Ideological influences
- Policy implementation challenges
- Institutional constraints

Bibliometric mapping using VOSviewer was also conducted to identify dominant research clusters, keyword relationships, and publication trends.

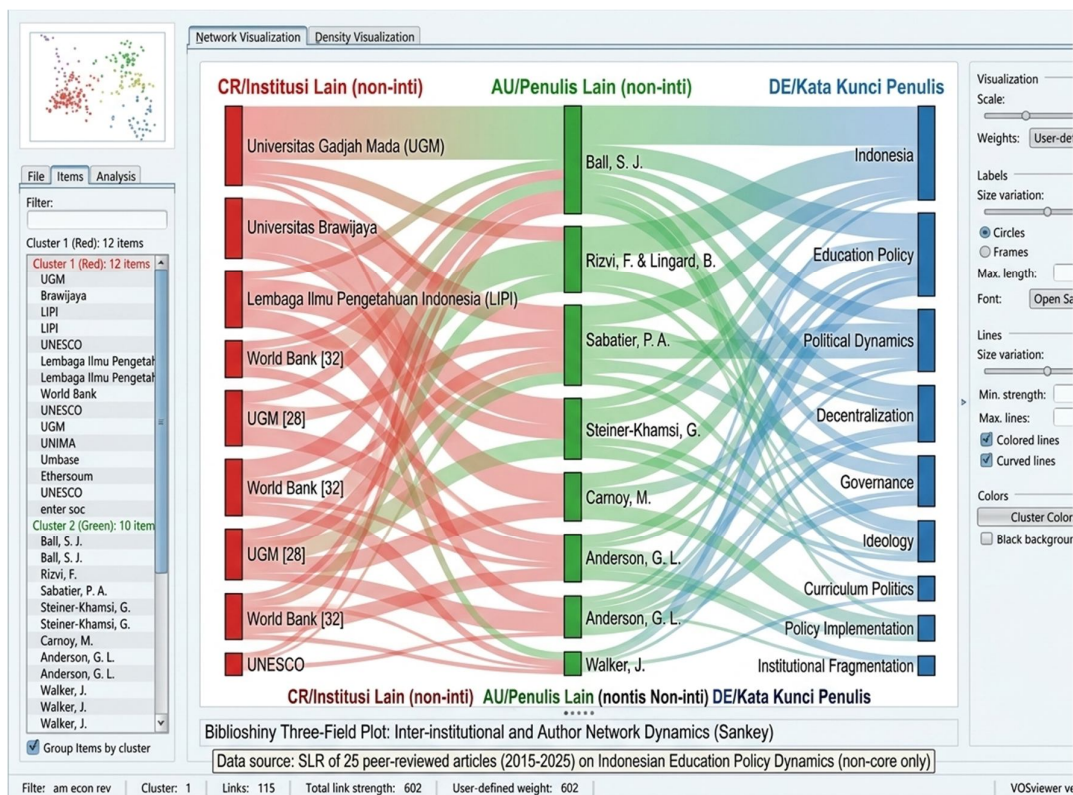
## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Overview of Selected Studies

The final review included approximately 25 peer-reviewed articles from 200 samples discussing education policy and political dynamics in Indonesia. The selected studies covered multiple policy domains, including decentralization, curriculum reform, inclusive education, educational equity, and governance.



Picture 1. Bibliometric mapping – vosviewer meta analysis



**Picture 2.** Three-Field Plot in Vosviewer

Bibliometric mapping demonstrated increasing scholarly attention toward themes such as governance, decentralization, curriculum politics, educational inequality, and policy implementation.

The analysis identified three dominant clusters:

1. Governance and decentralization
2. Curriculum politics and ideology
3. Policy implementation and institutional capacity

### 3.2 Thematic Findings

#### 3.2.1 Political Actors and Power Relations

The findings indicate that education policy in Indonesia is shaped by multiple actors operating across different governance levels. These actors include the central government, local governments, political elites, bureaucratic institutions, international organizations, and civil society groups. Power relations among these actors significantly influence policy outcomes. National-level actors often maintain control over strategic policy directions, while local governments exercise discretion in implementation processes. This creates tensions between national standardization and local autonomy.

Several studies also highlight the role of political elites in influencing budget allocation, curriculum orientation, and educational priorities.<sup>[10]</sup> Political intervention can produce policy inconsistency and unequal distribution of educational resources. International organizations and global policy networks additionally influence Indonesian education policy through policy borrowing, funding mechanisms, and global governance frameworks.<sup>[11][12]</sup>

### 3.2.2 Decentralization and Governance Complexity

Decentralization emerged as one of the most dominant themes in the literature. While decentralization aimed to improve responsiveness and local participation, the findings demonstrate that it also generated governance complexity and institutional fragmentation.

The literature identifies several consequences of decentralization:

- Increased local autonomy
- Variability in policy implementation
- Unequal administrative capacity
- Coordination challenges between central and local governments
- Increased local political influence

Studies suggest that local governments often differ significantly in their capacity to implement national education policies effectively. Regions with stronger institutional capacity tend to demonstrate better educational outcomes, while weaker regions experience implementation gaps and policy distortions.

These findings support broader governance literature arguing that decentralization does not automatically improve policy effectiveness without sufficient institutional coordination and administrative capacity.<sup>[13][14]</sup>

### 3.2.3 Ideological and Political Interests

The literature further reveals that education policy is strongly influenced by ideological and political interests. Curriculum reforms in Indonesia frequently reflect debates concerning nationalism, citizenship, religion, and economic modernization.<sup>[15]</sup> Alhamuddin demonstrate that curriculum development processes often involve political negotiation between competing ideological groups.<sup>[16]</sup> Similarly, Sari argue that civic education curricula are shaped by broader political objectives related to national identity formation and political legitimacy.<sup>[17]</sup> The findings also indicate that education policy is frequently used as a political instrument to strengthen governmental legitimacy and public support. Political actors may promote highly visible educational reforms to demonstrate responsiveness and leadership, even when implementation capacity remains limited.

### 3.2.4 Policy Implementation Challenges

Policy implementation emerged as another major issue across the reviewed studies. Many policies encounter difficulties during implementation due to institutional weaknesses, bureaucratic resistance, limited resources, and inconsistent governance practices. Consistent with Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy theory, local bureaucrats and school administrators often reinterpret policies according to local realities and constraints. This creates implementation variation across regions.<sup>[18]</sup>

The literature identifies several implementation challenges:

- Policy distortion at local levels
- Limited financial resources
- Inadequate administrative capacity
- Weak intergovernmental coordination
- Resistance from local stakeholders
- Political intervention in implementation processes

Studies on inclusive education policy also reveal that successful implementation depends heavily on local political commitment and institutional support. <sup>[19][20]</sup>

## DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Reinterpreting Education Policy as a Political Process

This review challenges the conventional technocratic understanding of education policy by demonstrating that policy processes in Indonesia are deeply embedded within political structures and power relations. Education policy cannot be separated from broader governance systems because policy decisions involve negotiation among competing actors with different interests, ideologies, and institutional capacities. This finding aligns with Ball's argument that policy should be understood as a dynamic process shaped by discourse, power, and institutional practice.<sup>[1]</sup> The findings also support political economy perspectives emphasizing that policy outcomes are influenced by broader socio-political structures rather than purely technical considerations<sup>[1]</sup>

### 4.2 Elite Influence and Policy Outcomes

The review indicates that political elites play a dominant role in shaping education policy priorities and implementation processes. Elite influence may produce policy bias favoring political interests over educational equity and long-term institutional development. In several cases, education policy becomes closely linked to political legitimacy and electoral interests. Consequently, reforms may prioritize symbolic visibility rather than sustainable institutional improvement. This finding is consistent with advocacy coalition theory, which argues that policy processes are shaped by competing coalitions seeking to advance their ideological and political objectives.<sup>[21][22]</sup>

### 4.3 Governance and Institutional Constraints

Although decentralization reforms were intended to improve governance efficiency and local responsiveness, the findings demonstrate that decentralization also introduces institutional fragmentation and coordination challenges. The effectiveness of education policy implementation depends heavily on governance capacity, intergovernmental coordination, and institutional coherence. Without strong institutional support, decentralization may increase inequality between regions. These findings align with governance literature emphasizing that institutional quality is a critical determinant of policy effectiveness.<sup>[23][24][25]</sup>

### 4.4 Contribution to Theory

This study contributes to Public Policy Analysis by integrating governance theory, political economy perspectives, and education policy analysis into a unified framework. The study also contributes empirically by synthesizing fragmented literature concerning political dynamics in Indonesian education policy. The findings demonstrate the importance of analyzing education policy not only as a technical process but also as a political and institutional phenomenon.<sup>[26][27]</sup>

### 4.5 Conceptual Model

#### Figure 1. Political–Policy Interaction Model

##### Political Inputs

- Ideology
- Political interests

- Institutional context

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#### **Policy Process**

- Negotiation
- Conflict
- Power contestation

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#### **Policy Output**

- Policy formulation

↓

#### **Policy Outcome**

- Policy implementation
- Aligned or distorted implementation

↓

#### **Moderating Factors**

- Governance structure
- Actor capacity
- Decentralization

#### **Model Explanation**

The Political–Policy Interaction Model illustrates how political forces interact with institutional structures to shape education policy outcomes. Political actors influence policy agendas through ideological narratives, governance structures, and institutional power relations.

The model demonstrates that policy outcomes are not determined solely by policy design, but also by governance conditions, actor capacity, and implementation contexts. Effective implementation therefore depends on institutional coordination, political commitment, and governance quality.<sup>[28][29][30]</sup>

## **4. CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that education policy in Indonesia is fundamentally shaped by political dynamics, governance structures, and institutional conditions. The systematic review reveals that decentralization, elite influence, ideological contestation, and governance fragmentation significantly affect both policy formulation and implementation. The findings challenge technocratic assumptions that education policy is purely rational and administrative. Instead, education policy should be understood as a political process involving negotiation, conflict, and power relations among multiple actors. This study contributes to Public Policy Analysis by integrating political economy and governance perspectives into education policy research. Future studies should further explore comparative regional dynamics, actor networks, and the long-term effects of political intervention on educational equity and quality.

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