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From Regulation to Implementation: A Library Research on the Implementation Gap in Educational Innovation Policy in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the gap between educational innovation policy regulations and their implementation in Indonesia. The study focuses on educational decentralization, teacher readiness, digital infrastructure inequality, bureaucratic barriers, and the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy. This research employed a qualitative approach with a library research design and narrative synthesis. The data were obtained from scholarly journal artides, government policy documents, official reports, and relevant institutional publications, primarily published between 2021 and 2025. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis by identifying recurring themes, comparing findings across sources, and synthesizing them into an integrated conceptual framework. The findings reveal that the implementation gap in educational innovation policy is influenced by five interrelated dimensions: unequal regional capacity in decentralized governance, limited teacher readiness, digital infrastructure inequality, bureaucratic fragmentation, and weak evidence-based policy evaluation. These findings indicate that educational innovation cannot rely solely on regulatory reform. Instead, it requires contextual implementation strategies, school-level capacity building, continuous teacher professional development, equitable digital infrastructure, and participatory monitoring and evaluation. This study contributes to the discourse on education policy by offering a conceptual synthesis of the structural barriers that hinder the translation of policy regulations into meaningful educational transformation in Indonesia.

Keywords: education policy, educational innovation, implementation gap, Merdeka Belajar, educational decentralization

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INTRODUCTION

Education policy plays a strategic role in shaping the direction of human resource development. In Indonesia, various education regulations have been designed to address challenges related to quality, equity, relevance, and the ability of the education system to respond to social change. Policies such as the 2013 Curriculum, Merdeka Belajar, the Merdeka Curriculum, the Platform Merdeka Mengajar, the National Assessment, and the Sekolah Penggerak Program are part of the government's efforts to promote a more flexible, adaptive, and student-centered transformation of education.

However, the success of education policy is not determined solely by the quality of regulatory formulation. It also depends on the capacity of the education system to translate policies into practice at the level of schools and classrooms. In practice, policy implementation often reveals a gap between regulatory design and the actual conditions of educational institutions. This gap is reflected in teacher readiness, infrastructure availability, school management capacity, local government support, and the clarity of mentoring and evaluation mechanisms.

One of the most prominent educational innovation policies in recent years is Merdeka Belajar and the Merdeka Curriculum. These policies emphasize curriculum flexibility, student-centered learning, meaningful assessment, and character development through the Pancasila Student Profile

Strengthening Project. The government has also provided several forms of implementation support, including the Platform Merdeka Mengajar, teacher learning communities, good-practice sharing programs, webinar series, development partners, and help centers. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these supports depends heavily on teacher capacity, digital access, and school readiness.

The implementation gap becomes more complex because Indonesia adopts a decentralized education system. In this system, the central government determines the national policy direction, while local governments and schools play important roles in technical implementation. Decentralization creates opportunities for policy adaptation according to local contexts. However, it may also produce implementation disparities when fiscal capacity, managerial ability, and human resources differ significantly across regions. Schools in areas with strong infrastructure and resource support tend to be more prepared to adopt educational innovation than schools in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost regions.

In addition to decentralized governance, teacher readiness is a crucial factor in the implementation of educational innovation policy. Teachers are the main actors who translate policy into classroom practice. Curriculum and learning policy reforms require teachers to understand new concepts, develop instructional materials, design assessments, use technology, and adjust learning strategies to students' needs. When such changes are not accompanied by continuous training and adequate mentoring, policies risk being implemented administratively rather than substantively.

Digital inequality is another major issue in the implementation of educational innovation. Many recent education policies rely on digital platforms for teacher training, instructional material provision, data management, and assessment implementation. These policies require internet access, digital devices, and technological literacy. However, access to educational technology remains uneven. Digital disparities may cause schools with limited facilities to face difficulties in utilizing digital -based education programs and platforms.

Previous studies have shown that education policy implementation in Indonesia often faces challenges related to teachers, bureaucracy, infrastructure, and policy coordination. However, many studies tend to examine these factors separately. Studies that connect these factors within a single conceptual framework remain limited. Therefore, this study seeks to provide a critical synthesis of the factors contributing to the gap between regulation and implementation in Indonesia's educational innovation policy.

Based on this background, this study addresses three main research questions. First, what factors contribute to the gap between regulation and implementation in educational innovation policy in Indonesia? Second, how are decentralization, teacher readiness, digital infrastructure, bureaucracy, and policy evaluation interconnected in influencing the implementation of educational innovation? Third, what strategies can be developed to bridge the gap between regulatory design and the reality of policy implementation?

This study aims to analyze the main factors contributing to the implementation gap in educational innovation policy in Indonesia, develop a thematic synthesis based on the literature, and formulate a conceptual model and strategic recommendations to strengthen the implementation of education policy in a more contextual, participatory, and sustainable manner.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research. This method was selected because the study aimed to analyze and synthesize various scholarly sources and policy documents related to the implementation gap in educational innovation policy in Indonesia. This study did not apply a strict systematic literature review approach and therefore did not claim to use the PRISMA protocol. Instead, it used narrative synthesis to connect findings from different sources into an integrated analytical framework.

The data sources consisted of scholarly journal articles, academic books, policy documents, government reports, and official institutional publications relevant to education policy, educational innovation, Merdeka Belajar, educational decentralization, teacher readiness, digital inequality, and policy implementation. The study prioritized publications issued between 2021 and 2025 in order to

capture the most recent developments. However, several classical theoretical sources were also included because of their conceptual relevance to policy implementation and educational change.

The literature search was conducted through Google Scholar, SINTA, Garuda, DOAJ, national journal repositories, and official websites of institutions such as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Statistics Indonesia, OECD, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank. The keywords used included Indonesian education policy, education policy implementation, Merdeka Belajar, Merdeka Curriculum, educational decentralization, teacher readiness, digital divide in education, educational policy implementation, education reform in Indonesia, and digital inequality in education.

The inclusion criteria for the selected sources were as follows: (1) discussing education policy or educational innovation in Indonesia; (2) being relevant to policy implementation, teacher readiness, decentralization, bureaucracy, or digital infrastructure; (3) being published by credible journals, publishers, or institutions; and (4) making a substantive contribution to the analysis of implementation gaps. The exclusion criteria included: (1) sources that were not relevant to education policy; (2) popular articles without clear data or academic argumentation; (3) publications whose credibility could not be verified; and (4) documents that contained only opinion-based claims without adequate references.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and narrative synthesis. The first stage involved reading and identifying the main ideas of each source. The second stage involved grouping the findings into major themes, including decentralization, teachers, digitalization, bureaucracy, and policy evaluation. The third stage involved comparing findings across sources to identify similarities, differences, and interconnections. The fourth stage involved developing a narrative synthesis and a conceptual model of the implementation gap in educational innovation policy.

The trustworthiness of the study was maintained through source triangulation, cross-checking across documents, and conceptual audit trails. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing journal articles, policy documents, and official reports. Cross-checking was conducted to ensure that major claims were supported by more than one source or by credible official sources. Conceptual audit trails were maintained by documenting the process of theme categorization and the basis for drawing conclusions.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The Dynamics of Educational Innovation Policy in Indonesia

The findings indicate that educational innovation policy in Indonesia has developed dynamically. Policy changes have been introduced to respond to the need for improved quality, equity, and relevance in education. The Merdeka Curriculum and Merdeka Belajar are examples of policies that emphasize flexibility, student-centered learning, and the use of technology to support teacher professional development.

However, rapid policy dynamics have not always been accompanied by equal implementation readiness. Several studies indicate that curriculum and learning policy reforms often require significant adaptation at the school level. Teachers are expected not only to understand new concepts but also to develop teaching materials, adjust assessment practices, manage differentiated learning, and utilize digital platforms. When implementation support is inadequate, policy changes may be perceived as administrative obligations rather than pedagogical transformation.

The findings also show that flexibility within the Merdeka Curriculum may serve both as an opportunity and a challenge. Flexibility allows schools to adjust learning practices according to local contexts. However, schools with limited managerial capacity and resources may struggle to translate flexibility into practice. As a result, the same national policy may generate different qualities of implementation across schools and regions.

Decentralization and Unequal Regional Capacity

Educational decentralization provides greater authority to local governments and schools in managing educational services. Ideally, decentralization enables national policies to be adapted to local

needs. However, the findings show that unequal regional capacity is one of the main sources of implementation gaps in educational innovation policy.

Regions with stronger fiscal capacity, human resources, and infrastructure tend to be more prepared to implement new policies. In contrast, regions with limited budgets, difficult geographical access, and teacher shortages face greater implementation barriers. This condition indicates that a uniform national policy requires differentiated implementation strategies based on regional capacity.

Decentralization also requires strong coordination among the central government, local governments, school supervisors, principals, and teachers. When coordination is ineffective, policy implementation may become overlapping, slow, or inconsistent. Therefore, decentralization must be supported by mentoring mechanisms, technical assistance, and evaluation systems that strengthen local implementation capacity.

Teacher Readiness and Human Resource Capacity

Teacher readiness is the most direct factor determining the success of educational innovation policy at the classroom level. Teachers are the primary implementers of policy in learning practice. The findings indicate that many new education policies require a shift in teachers' roles from knowledge transmitters to adaptive, reflective, and creative learning facilitators.

Challenges related to teacher readiness appear in several aspects. First, some teachers do not fully understand the concepts and objectives of new policies. Second, teacher training is often short-term and not always followed by continuous mentoring. Third, teachers face administrative burdens that may reduce the time available for designing meaningful learning. Fourth, teachers' digital literacy remains uneven, even though many educational innovation programs rely on digital platforms.

Teacher readiness should not be viewed solely as an individual responsibility. School support, principal leadership, teacher learning communities, academic supervision, and school supervisor mentoring also influence teachers' ability to implement policy. Therefore, teacher capacity building should be carried out through school-based and professional community-based approaches, rather than relying only on centralized training.

Digital Inequality and Educational Infrastructure

The findings show that digital inequality is a significant barrier to the implementation of educational innovation policy. Current educational transformation is increasingly connected to the use of technology, including learning platforms, digital administration, computer-based assessment, and online teacher training. This condition requires internet connectivity, digital devices, and technological competence.

However, access to digital infrastructure remains unequal. Urban schools are more likely to have adequate internet access and devices than schools in remote areas. This inequality prevents technology-based policies from being implemented equally. Digital platforms designed to expand access to learning and training may instead widen disparities if they are not accompanied by equitable infrastructure and digital literacy development.

Digital inequality is not only related to internet access but also to teachers' and students' ability to use technology meaningfully. Therefore, educational digitalization strategies need to address three aspects simultaneously: infrastructure, devices, and digital literacy. For schools with limited access, the development of offline content and blended mentoring models should be considered.

Bureaucratic Barriers and Institutional Fragmentation

Bureaucratic barriers are among the factors that slow down the implementation of educational innovation policy. Indonesia's education system involves multiple actors and levels of government. When roles and responsibilities are unclear, coordination among institutions becomes less effective. This may lead to slow information distribution, overlapping programs, and weak responses to implementation problems at the school level.

Administrative burden is also a recurring issue in education policy implementation. Teachers and principals are sometimes directed more toward fulfilling formal documentation requirements than improving the quality of learning. This condition may cause educational innovation policy to be perceived as administrative change rather than pedagogical improvement.

Institutional fragmentation is also reflected in the lack of integration between central policies, local programs, school supervision, and teachers' needs. Therefore, education governance reform

should focus on simplifying procedures, clarifying roles, strengthening cross-level coordination, and using data to support implementation decisions.

Weak Evidence-Based Evaluation

The findings indicate that education policy evaluation still needs to be strengthened. Evaluation often focuses on administrative compliance, such as document completeness, program reporting, or formal achievement indicators. However, the success of educational innovation policy should be measured by the quality of implementation and its impact on learning processes and student outcomes.

International data such as PISA show that learning quality remains a significant challenge for Indonesia. Although policy reforms have been introduced, improving learning outcomes requires consistent and sustainable implementation at the school level. Therefore, policy evaluation should connect policy design, implementation processes, resource support, and student learning outcomes.

Evidence-based evaluation should involve various stakeholders, including teachers, principals, supervisors, local governments, parents, and students. Such involvement is important so that evaluation functions not only as a control mechanism but also as a collective learning process to improve policy implementation.

Table 1. Synthesis of Findings on the Implementation Gap in Educational Innovation Policy in Indonesia

Dimension of the Gap	Form of the Problem	Impact on Implementation	Direction for Improvement
Educational decentralization	Unequal fiscal, managerial, and human resource capacity across regions	Policy implementation varies across regions and schools	Regional technical assistance, needs-based mentoring, and capacity equalization mechanisms
Teacher readiness	Uneven understanding of policy concepts, pedagogical competence, and digital literacy	Policies tend to be implemented administratively rather than substantively	Continuous training, learning communities, coaching, and academic supervision
Digital infrastructure	Unequal internet access, devices, and digital literacy	Digital platforms cannot be optimally used by all schools	Infrastructure equity, subsidized devices, offline content, and digital training
Bureaucracy and coordination	Unclear division of roles between central and local actors; high administrative burden	Slow information flow, overlapping programs, and delayed implementation response	Governance reform, administrative simplification, and cross-level coordination
Policy evaluation	Evaluation remains oriented toward document compliance	The impact of policy on learning quality is difficult to measure	Data-based monitoring, impact evaluation, and stakeholder involvement

Table 2 shows that the implementation gap in educational innovation policy is not caused by a single factor. It emerges from the interconnection between regional capacity, teacher readiness, digital infrastructure, bureaucratic governance, and the quality of policy evaluation. Therefore, improvement strategies cannot rely solely on regulatory reform but must also address implementation capacity at the levels of regions, schools, and teachers.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Implementation Gap in Educational Innovation Policy in Indonesia

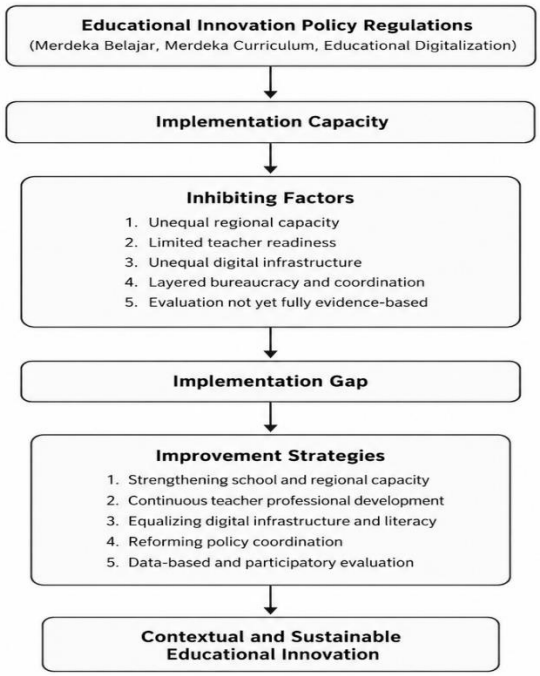


Figure 1 explains that educational innovation policy regulations require adequate implementation capacity. When regional capacity, teacher readiness, infrastructure, bureaucracy, and evaluation systems are not sufficiently prepared, a gap emerges between policy and practice at the school level. This gap can be bridged through strengthening school and regional capacity, developing teachers professionally, equalizing digital infrastructure, reforming governance, and implementing data-based evaluation.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the implementation gap in educational innovation policy in Indonesia is systemic. This gap cannot be explained solely by teacher or school limitations. Instead, it should be understood as the result of interactions among policy design, implementation capacity, resources, and education governance. From the perspective of policy implementation theory, a well-formulated policy may still fail when objectives, resources, communication, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structures do not support implementation at the field level.

Educational decentralization provides space for policy contextualization, but it also creates variations in implementation. Regions with strong fiscal and institutional capacity can adapt more quickly to new policies. In contrast, regions with limited capacity require more intensive technical support. This means that national policy cannot rely on a uniform implementation design. The government needs to develop adaptive mentoring models based on the capacity categories of regions and educational institutions.

Teacher readiness is a critical point because all education policies ultimately lead to classroom practice. Teachers require not only conceptual understanding of policy but also operational examples, opportunities for reflection, mentoring, and support from professional communities. One-directional and short-term training is insufficient to transform learning practices. Teacher professional development should be continuous, school-based, and connected to the real problems teachers face in classrooms.

Digital inequality demonstrates that technology-based innovation does not automatically produce educational equity. Technology can expand access when infrastructure and digital literacy are available. However, in schools with limited internet connectivity, inadequate devices, and uneven teacher digital competence, technology may become a new source of inequality. Therefore, educational digitalization must be accompanied by a differentiated approach, including offline content, direct mentoring, and user-friendly platform simplification.

Educational bureaucracy also plays an important role in determining policy effectiveness. When policies are implemented through complicated administrative procedures, the orientation of change may shift from improving learning quality to fulfilling formal documentation. Education policy reform must therefore be accompanied by administrative reform so that teachers and principals have greater space to focus on students' learning processes. Administrative simplification does not mean eliminating accountability, but rather directing accountability toward more meaningful outcomes.

Evidence-based evaluation is a prerequisite for ensuring that educational innovation policies have a real impact. Evaluation should not only measure the number of schools implementing a curriculum or the number of teachers attending training. It should also examine changes in learning practices, assessment quality, student engagement, access disparities, and learning outcomes. Evaluation data should be used to improve policy rather than merely to fulfill administrative reporting requirements.

Thus, the gap between regulation and implementation in educational innovation policy needs to be addressed through a more contextual approach. Policies should not stop at program launching; they must be accompanied by implementation roadmaps, resource allocation, mentoring systems, and clear evaluation mechanisms. Educational transformation requires continuity between national policy vision and the reality of schools as the primary spaces of implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the gap between regulation and implementation in educational innovation policy in Indonesia is caused by five interrelated factors: unequal regional capacity within the decentralized system, limited teacher readiness, digital infrastructure inequality, bureaucratic barriers and institutional fragmentation, and weak evidence-based policy evaluation.

The findings suggest that educational innovation cannot be achieved merely through the formulation of new regulations. Policy success depends heavily on implementation capacity at the levels of regions, schools, and teachers. Without capacity building, mentoring, resource equity, and appropriate evaluation, educational innovation policies risk producing administrative change rather than substantive transformation in learning processes.

Strategies to bridge this gap should be directed toward strengthening school and regional capacity, developing teachers' professional competence continuously, equalizing digital infrastructure and digital literacy, reforming bureaucratic coordination, and implementing data-based monitoring and evaluation. Through these approaches, educational innovation policy can become more responsive to local contexts and more likely to generate meaningful improvements in the quality of education in Indonesia.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This study has several important implications. First, the central government needs to design education policies by considering variations in regional and school capacity. National policies should be accompanied by flexible, needs-based, and context-sensitive implementation schemes.

Second, local governments need to strengthen the roles of school supervisors, teacher learning communities, and principals as implementation mentors. Implementation support should not rely solely on online training or formal socialization but should also be realized through academic supervision, coaching, and direct mentoring.

Third, teacher professional development should be directed toward continuous and practice-based models. Teachers need opportunities to discuss, experiment, reflect, and improve their learning practices according to students' needs.

Fourth, educational digitalization needs to be accompanied by infrastructure equity, digital literacy development, and offline learning alternatives. In this way, technology can serve as a tool for equity rather than becoming a new source of inequality.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This study has limitations because it uses library research and narrative synthesis, without involving direct empirical data from teachers, principals, supervisors, or local education offices. Therefore, the findings are conceptual and based on interpretation of the available literature.

In addition, this study does not apply a strict systematic literature review procedure. It does not present a PRISMA flow diagram, the number of identified articles, excluded articles, or a quantitative quality appraisal of the reviewed studies. Future research may use a systematic literature review or multi-case field study to test and deepen the conceptual findings presented in this article.

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