Challenges and Strategies of Local Government in Implementing the Primary School New Student Admission System in Badung Regency

I Made Sumada[1], AA.Ayu Dewi Larantika[2], I Kadek Dede Junaedy[3], Dewa Putra Sedana[4], Dede Akhmad[5]

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the challenges and strategies faced by local governments in implementing the zoning system for New Student Admissions (NSA) at the primary school level in Badung Regency, Bali. The method used is a qualitative approach with in-depth interview techniques with school principals, Education Office officials, and technical staff in three sub-districts with different regional characteristics: Petang (rural), Mengwi (suburban), and Kuta Selatan (urban). The results of the study indicate that the implementation of the zoning system faces various challenges, including limited digital infrastructure, low digital literacy of parents, limited technical capacity of school human resources, and administrative conflicts in verifying population documents. The local government implements a responsive strategy through technical training, public socialization, and annual zoning evaluations based on spatial data. The study's discussion refers to four theoretical approaches: policy implementation theory (Van Meter & Van Horn), local government strategy (Bryson), good governance (Grindle), and educational equity (OECD). This study produces new findings in the form of a zoning analysis framework based on local regional characteristics and a comprehensive integration of theoretical approaches. Recommendations are given for strengthening digital capacity, adaptive zoning, and evaluation mechanisms based on public accountability.

Keywords: *Zoning System, New Student Admission, Local Strategy, Educational Equity, Good Governance.*

Introduction

Basic education is an important foundation in sustainable human resource development. The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, has established a zoning system policy in the New Student Admissions process to ensure equal access and quality of education, as regulated in Regulations of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 1 of 2021. This system aims to eliminate discrimination, increase social integration, and encourage students to attend school in their neighborhood.

However, the implementation of this policy faces serious challenges at the regional level, especially in Badung Regency, Bali Province. Badung is an area with high urbanization dynamics, disparities between regions, and significant population growth. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics of Badung Regency (2023) shows that the number of elementary school-age population has increased by 4.2% in the last two years, while the distribution of schools and the capacity of learning spaces is not evenly distributed between sub-districts. The following is a

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[1] Postgraduate Program of Ngurah Rai University, Email: made.sumada@unr.co.id
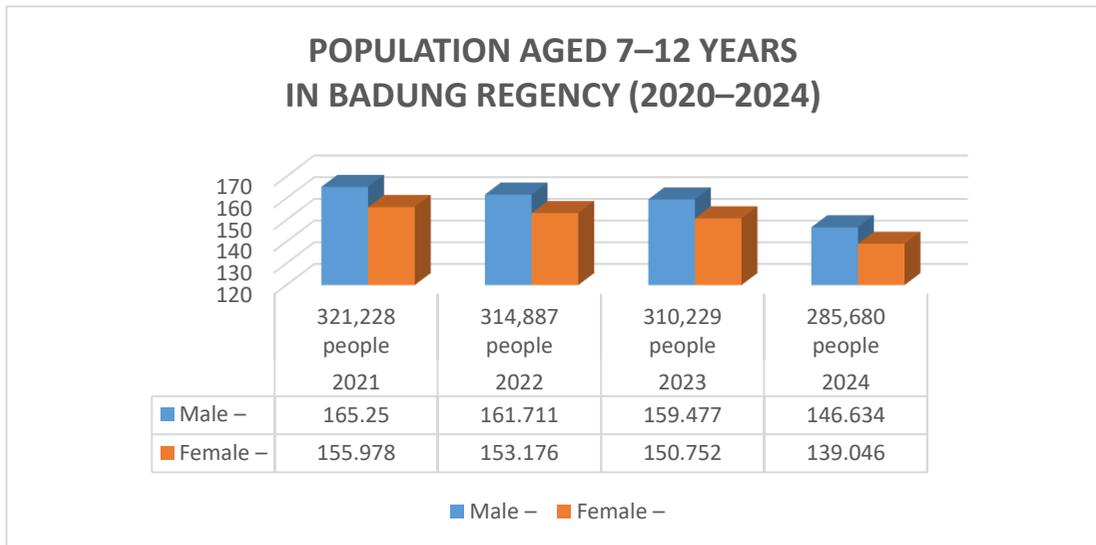[2] Departeman of Public Administration Warmadewa University, Email: agungdewilarantika@gmail.com
[3] The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of Ngurah Rai University, Email: dedejunaedy55@gmail.com
[4] The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of Ngurah Rai University, Email: dewaputrasedana17@gmail.com
[5] Public Administration Subang University, Email: ddakhmad@yahoo.com

table of the number of primary school-age population (7–12 years) in Badung Regency for 2020 to 2024:

**POPULATION AGED 7–12 YEARS
IN BADUNG REGENCY (2020–2024)**

	2021	2022	2023	2024
	321,228 people	314,887 people	310,229 people	285,680 people
Male –	165.25	161.711	159.477	146.634
Female –	155.978	153.176	150.752	139.046

Male –   Female –

Graph: Population Aged 7–12 Years in Badung Regency (2020–2024)é

Source: Educational Profile of the Office of Education, Youth, and Sports of Badung Regency 2024

The Badung Regency Government, through the Office of Education, Youth, and Sports, has established the latest policy regarding the acceptance of new students at the Primary School level by issuing Technical Instructions (TI) for Online New Students Admission for the 2024/2025 Academic Year. This policy refers to Regulations of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 1 of 2021 and the Letter of the Secretary General of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 6998/A5/HK.01.04/2022. The TI aims to ensure the implementation of objective, transparent, and accountable New Students Admission.

In the implementation of New Students Admission, there are several admission pathways, including:

1)   Domicile Pathway: Replacing the zoning pathway, intended for prospective students who are domiciled within the new student admission area determined by the local government. The quota for this pathway is at least 70% of the capacity of the education unit for primary schools.

2)   Affirmative Pathway: Intended for prospective students from economically disadvantaged families, with a quota of at least 15% of the capacity of the elementary school education unit.

3)   Parent/Guardian Transfer Pathway: Intended for prospective students whose parents/guardians have been transferred.

4)   Achievement Pathway: Intended for prospective students who have academic and non-academic achievements.

In the field, several major obstacles that arise include: (1) limited school capacity in densely

populated areas; (2) low public awareness of zoning policies; (3) parental resistance to location-based school choices; and (4) weak coordination between stakeholders such as the Education Office, school principals, and village officials. Similar findings were also reported by Wibowo & Mustaghfiroh (2022), who stated that the implementation of zoning requires social and institutional adjustments that are not simple.

On the other hand, the Badung Regency Government has attempted to respond to these challenges through a number of strategies, such as utilizing an online registration system, adjusting zoning boundaries based on geographical conditions, and involving the community in policy socialization. However, the effectiveness of these strategies has not been widely studied scientifically in the context of education decentralization policies in Indonesia.

In the past five years, the New Student Admissions (NSA) policy has become a major concern in studies of education governance in Indonesia, especially since the implementation of the zoning system by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2017, and has continued to be adjusted until now. This system aims to encourage equal access and quality of basic education, but its implementation at the regional level often faces complex challenges, both technically, administratively, and socially (Fauziah, 2021; Widodo & Prasetyo, 2020).

Various studies show that the success of the implementation of the NSA system is largely determined by the institutional capacity of the local government and the ability to coordinate between stakeholders (Wibowo, 2022). In many areas, the zoning system often raises resistance from the community, especially related to limited school capacity, inappropriate distance from residence, and the perception of unfairness in the selection process for entering public schools (Puspitasari & Hidayat, 2020; Maulidina, 2023). In addition, limited technological infrastructure and inequality in digital literacy are major challenges in implementing the online NSA system, especially in areas with rapid urbanization growth.

A study by Rachmawati and Yuniarti (2021) underlines the importance of adapting local policies that are responsive to the socio-economic conditions of the community. In the context of regional autonomy, district/city governments have the authority to adjust the implementation of NSA to the specific conditions of their regions, but not all regions can carry out policy innovation optimally. Research that focuses on tourism destinations such as Badung Regency is still very limited, even though this region faces high demographic dynamics and population mobility, which also affect the capacity and distribution of students in public elementary schools.

Thus, this study has an urgency to fill the empirical gap regarding the strategies and challenges of local governments in implementing a new student admission system in areas with special socio-economic characteristics. This study is expected to contribute to strengthening the governance of locally-based basic education services and supporting the formulation of policies that are more inclusive and adaptive to community needs.

Based on this background, this study aims to identify the main challenges and analyze the strategies carried out by the Badung Regency Government in implementing a new student admission system at the elementary school level. This study is expected to contribute to the literature on the implementation of locally based education policies and provide applicable policy input.

Research Problems

a.   What are the challenges faced by the local government in implementing the zoning

system for new primary school student admissions in Badung Regency?

b.   What is the local government's strategy for overcoming obstacles in implementing the zoning-based new student admissions system?

Theoretical Foundation

Theory of Policy Implementation

Policy implementation is a stage that bridges between policy formulation and results (output/outcome). In the context of educational policies such as the New Student Admissions system, implementation plays an important role in ensuring that policies run according to their objectives. Several theories of public policy implementation are described by the author as follows:

a) **Theory of Van Meter and Van Horn (1975)**

Policy implementation is a crucial stage in the public policy cycle because it determines whether a policy can run according to its stated objectives. Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) stated that policy implementation is a dynamic process, which is influenced by six main variables, namely:

1)   Policy Standards and Objectives: The extent to which the policy has clarity and consistency of objectives.

2)   Resources: Availability of funds, human resources, information, and supporting facilities.

3)   Inter-Organizational Communication: Vertical and horizontal information flow in the bureaucracy.

4)   Characteristics of Implementing Agents: Organizational structure, technical competence, and implementing capacity.

5)   Implementing Disposition (Attitude and Commitment): Commitment, understanding, and attitude towards the policy.

6)   Social, Economic, and Political Environment: Community support, local dynamics, and political legitimacy.

b) **Theory of Policy Implementation by Mazmanian and Sabatier**

Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) developed one of the most comprehensive and systematic theories of public policy implementation. They stated that the success of policy implementation is highly dependent on three main groups of variables, namely: (1) the characteristics of the policy itself, (2) the capabilities of implementers and institutions, and (3) external environmental conditions. This theory also emphasizes the importance of the implementation process as a series of complex interactions between policies, implementers, and the socio-political context. Each variable is explained as follows:

1.   Characteristics of Policy Substance (Tractability of the Problem)

Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) stated that a policy will be easier to implement if the problem to be solved can be clearly defined, involves a limited number of actors, and the technology or resolution procedures are available. In the context of the New Student Admissions policy, if the zoning system is not accompanied by a clear zone definition, accurate population data, and a

capable information technology system, then its implementation will face major challenges. This shows that the substance of the policy must be prepared by considering the ease of technical implementation.

2.   Structural Capacity and Commitment of Policy Implementers (Non-statutory Variables of Influence)

According to this Theory, the success of implementation is largely determined by the performance of the implementing organization, the availability of human and financial resources, and the political and administrative commitment of the main actors. In areas such as Badung Regency, challenges arise when schools have uneven capacities, and when regional officials do not have sufficient training or understanding of the digital-based zoning system. Commitment from regional leaders, heads of education offices, and school principals determines the effectiveness of implementation.

3.   Social, Political, and Economic Conditions (External Variables)

External environmental factors such as community support, local economic conditions, political pressure, and the media also influence the implementation of policies. The NSA system often encounters resistance from the community because it is considered unfair, especially when access to favorite schools is limited by zoning provisions. In addition, media coverage of the chaos of the NSA system nationally or locally can also affect public perception and policy legitimacy. Therefore, policy implementers must be adaptive and responsive to these dynamics.

4.   Clarity of Objectives and Policy Stability

Mazmanian and Sabatier also emphasize that policy objectives must be clear, realistic, and consistent over a certain period of time. When there is a sudden change in the technical rules of NSA (eg, zoning quota, affirmation, achievement), this creates uncertainty for implementers and the community. Policy stability is important to ensure that the implementation process can run sustainably and measurably.

5.   Monitoring and Evaluation Activities

In the Mazmanian and Sabatier model, evaluation activities of the implementation process and results are also an important part of the success of the policy. Evaluation allows implementers to know the extent to which the policy has been running according to plan and to make continuous improvements.

c) Theory of Policy Implementation by Merilee S. Grindle

Merilee S. Grindle (1980) is one of the important thinkers in the field of public policy implementation, especially in the context of developing countries. In her book "Politics and Policy Implementation in the Third World", Grindle emphasizes that policy implementation is not merely a technical and procedural issue, but is greatly influenced by the dynamics of politics, power, and the interests of the actors involved. Grindle compiles a policy implementation analysis framework into two main variable groups: "Content of Policy" and "Context of Implementation". These two aspects are considered to influence each other in determining the success or failure of implementing a policy.

1.   Content of Policy

The content of the policy is the things that are inherent in the policy itself. Grindle describes

several key elements in this category, including:

a.   Interests Contained in the Policy

Public policy is often the result of a compromise between various political and bureaucratic interests. If there are too many interests to be accommodated, the direction and objectives of the policy can be blurred and making it difficult the implement. In the context of NSA, zoning policies may conflict with the interests of the community for access to favorite schools, or the interests of schools in maintaining academic reputation.

b.   Desired Scope of Change

The greater the change desired by a policy, the greater the challenges of its implementation. The zoning-based NSA system, for example, is a form of systemic reform that requires a change in the mindset of the community, the distribution of information evenly, and the restructuring of school capacity in various regions.

c.   Resources Provided

Resources that include finance, human resources, technology, and time are important components. A technology-based NSA policy requires adequate digital infrastructure and HR capabilities to operate the system effectively.

d.   Policy Success Criteria

A policy will be easier to evaluate and implement if it has measurable and realistic indicators of success. In the NSA policy, success can be seen from the level of equal access, reduced burden on favored schools, and community satisfaction.

2. Context of Implementation

The context of implementation refers to the environment in which the policy is implemented. Grindle (1980) highlighted several important factors, namely:

a.   Characteristics and Power of Implementing Actors

Policy implementers, such as education office officials, school principals, and NSAPPDB officers, have a great influence on directing implementation. If they do not have the technical capacity or have their own interests, then the policy may not be implemented according to the initial objectives.

b.   Strategy and Managerial Capacity

The success of implementation is also greatly influenced by the strategy and management capabilities of the implementers. For example, how the local government designs NSA SOPs, manages conflicts of interest, and responds to public complaints. Without responsive and professional management, implementation will experience technical and social obstacles.

c.   Social, Political, and Administrative Environment

These factors include regional political stability, public trust in the government, and the readiness of administrative institutions. PPDB policies that are implemented without effective communication or sufficient public participation tend to encounter resistance, protests, or even system manipulation.

d) Theory of Policy Implementation by Michael Lipsky (1980): Street-Level Bureaucracy

Michael Lipsky, in his book entitled Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services (1980), introduced the concept of street-level bureaucrats, namely government employees who interact directly with the public in providing public services, consisting of:

a. Theory of Basic Premises

Lipsky (1980) stated that the implementation of public policy is basically carried out by street-level bureaucrats, not by policymakers at the top level. Therefore, the behavior, decisions, and capacity of field officers greatly determine how policies are implemented and perceived by the public.

a) Main Elements in Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory

1) Discretion

Street-level bureaucrats have discretionary authority or freedom to make decisions in the field. In many cases, they interpret and adjust the rules based on the real conditions and limitations they face. In the NSA, for example, school officials may face cases of document inconsistencies, sudden relocation of parents, or unclear domicile of students. In these situations, they must decide whether to accept students or reject them based on their interpretation of the rules. This discretion can have a positive impact if used wisely, but it can also open up opportunities for discriminatory or unfair practices.

2) Limited Sources

Street-level bureaucrats often work under conditions of constraints, such as:

a)   The number of staff is not balanced with the number of new student applications.

b)   The limitations of the NSA information system, which is slow or error-prone.

c)   Time pressure in completing data verification.

As a result, they simplify procedures, limit services, or create unwritten rules to speed up the process.

3) Direct Interaction with Public

Street-level bureaucrats become direct representatives of the state to the community. When the community is disappointed with the NSA service, the disappointment is not directed at policymakers, but at teachers, school officers, or school operators. This makes lower-level bureaucrats bear a considerable social and emotional burden in the implementation practice.

4)   Routines and Work Patterns

To cope with work pressure and case complexity, street-level bureaucrats develop work routines that can deviate from formal procedures. They can form "informal policies" based on experience, intuition, or social pressure. For example, prioritizing students who arrive early, who bring letters of recommendation, or who come from families of teachers/schools.

5)   Values Conflict and Ethical Dilemma

Lower-level   bureaucrats   often   experience   conflicts   between   policy   rules   and personal/community values. For example, a principal wants to follow zoning rules, but also

wants to help orphaned students who are administratively outside the zone. This is where the implementation dilemma occurs.

In the context of the zoning-based New Student Admissions (NSA) system at the primary school level, this theory is very relevant to identify obstacles that arise at the technical and institutional levels. For example, the inconsistency between national policies and local conditions can be a factor inhibiting implementation. In addition, the lack of supporting facilities, the lack of technical training, or weak coordination between educational institutions can also affect the effectiveness of implementation. Therefore, the Theory of policy implementation is the main conceptual basis for examining the challenges faced by the Badung Regency government in implementing the NSA system fairly and efficiently.

Theory of Local Government Strategy

John M. Bryson (2018) developed a strategic planning approach for public and non-profit organizations, including local governments. He emphasized that effective strategies must be oriented towards public missions, collaboration with stakeholders, and responsive to environmental changes. The Main Principles of Bryson's Theory (2018) are:

1)   Orientation to Public Mission

Local governments must design strategies based on the main mission of public services, not just internal efficiency or political interests.

2)   Stakeholder Involvement

Strategies are designed by involving various parties such as citizens, NGOs, the private sector, and other government agencies. This is important to build legitimacy and successful implementation.

3)   Internal and External Environmental Analysis (SWOT)

Bryson emphasized the importance of analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as a basis for strategic decision making.

4)   Planning as a Learning Process

Strategic planning not only produces documents, but also serves as a collective learning process that strengthens organizational capacity.

5)   Focused Strategic Action

Strategy must produce real and targeted actions that have an impact, not too broad and abstract.

6)   Continuous Evaluation and Adjustment

Strategy must be evaluated periodically and adjusted to the dynamics of the environment, and not be rigid.

Bryson defines strategic planning as: "A disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it." (Bryson, 2018, p. 10) This means that strategic planning is a systematic, participatory, and future-oriented process for determining policy direction and resource allocation, especially in public organizations such as local governments. In his approach, Bryson emphasizes five key principles that distinguish public sector strategy from private sector strategy:

Aspect	Description
1. Public Mission	Local governments are not profit-oriented, but rather public service and community welfare.
2. Complexity and Plurality of the Actor	The many actors (Regional People's Representative Assembly, Local Government Offices, community, NGOs) require coordination and strategic dialogue.
3. Accountability Needs	Strategies must be publicly and politically accountable.
4. Limited Sources	Local governments face fiscal constraints, so strategies must prioritize crucial needs.
5. Rapid Environmental Changes	Regulatory, social, and political changes demand adaptive and dynamic strategies.

The Strength of Bryson's Theory for Local Government

Aspect	Strengths
Participative	Facilitate participation of various actors (bottom-up and top-down).
Responsive and Adaptive	Strategies can change according to local and political conditions.
Structural and Measurable	The process is clear, evidence-based, and performance is measurable.
Public Objective Oriented	Focus on service delivery and achievement of development goals.

Strategy in the public sector, according to Bryson (2018), is a process of planning and implementing decisions that are systemic and collaborative to achieve organizational goals by considering the dynamics of the external environment. This theory emphasizes the importance of four elements: external context analysis (environmental scanning), data-based strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and continuous strategy implementation and evaluation.

About NSA in Badung Regency, the local government's strategy includes how to overcome community resistance to the zoning system, how to build a transparent public information system, and how to provide a responsive complaint and consultation service mechanism. Therefore, this strategy theory is used to examine in depth the efforts and approaches taken by local governments in dealing with the social and institutional dynamics that accompany the new student admission process.

Theory of Good Governance

Good governance is an important principle in modern public administration, especially in education services. According to Grindle (2019), good governance includes the principles of transparency, accountability, participation, effectiveness, efficiency, and justice. further explained that Theory of good governance is focused on a more contextual and pragmatic approach, taking into account political realities and institutional capacity in developing countries. Judith A. Grindle, in her various works, including the 2018 thought update, stated that: introducing the idea of good enough governance, which emphasizes that not all principles of good governance must be applied perfectly at the same time, especially in developing countries. The focus is:

1.   Achieving realistic progress in governance.

2.   Adjusting to local institutional capacity and political conditions.

3.   Prioritizing governance reforms that have the most impact on improving public welfare. Governance reform should focus on what is feasible and most likely to generate development outcomes, rather than aiming for idealistic, one-size-fits-all models. (Grindle, 2018)

The implications of Grindle's thinking are realistic and contextual, rejecting the all-too-perfect approach, such as total transparency or full accountability from the start. Governance reforms should be: incremental; tailored to local conditions and focused on tangible outcomes, such as improved public services or poverty reduction.

Relevance to Developing Countries Grindle highlights that international institutions often judge governance by developed country standards, when in fact, Many developing countries do not have the same capacity, and their focus should be on reforms that are most feasible and have immediate impact. He criticizes normative models such as those created by the World Bank and UNDP for being too rigid and not paying enough attention to the political dimensions and local power dynamics. So the contributions to Governance Science are:

1.   Shifting the focus from the normative to the pragmatic.

2.   Emphasizing incremental improvement as a governance process.

3.   Respecting the different political, social, and economic contexts in each country.

4.   Making tangible results in public service delivery is the main indicator of governance success.

It can be concluded that good governance is not about pursuing perfection simultaneously, but about prioritizing the most impactful and feasible reforms in a given context. This approach is relevant for developing countries like Indonesia, which still face challenges in bureaucratic capacity, politics, and resources.

Theory of Educational Equity

Definition of Equity in Education according to OECD (2020) defines equity in education as: "The extent to which education systems ensure that personal and social circumstances - such as gender, ethnic origin or family background - do not hinder achieving educational potential" (OECD, 2020, p. 13). This means that equity in education does not only mean providing equal opportunities, but also providing different support according to student needs, so that all learners can achieve their maximum potential. Furthermore, the OECD states two dimensions of justice, namely:

a. Equity in Access and Participation

a)   Every child should be able to access education without economic, geographic, social, or cultural barriers.

b)   This includes access to early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary education.

b. Equity in Learning Conditions and Outcomes

a)   Equity also means that all children have a fair chance to succeed in learning, including access to:

1)   Quality teacher,

2)   Relevant Curriculum,

3)   Social and psychological support,

4)   Adequate learning resources

b)   The OECD emphasizes the importance of compensatory policies for vulnerable groups (e.g., students from low-income backgrounds, immigrants, or disabilities).

Next, the OECD framework is explained in detail, as in the table below:

Table: OECD Framework for Equity and Quality of Education

Pillars of Policy	Description
Preventing early failure	Early intervention in preschool and primary school is essential to prevent inequality from becoming entrenched.
Intervening with students who are falling behind	Remedial programs, mentoring, and personal assistance are essential.
Giving more to those who need more	This is called "proportional universalism": the distribution of resources proportional to the level of need.
Ensuring a just educational transition	Ensuring that students from all backgrounds can continue to higher education or vocational training.

According to the OECD (2020), equity in education is not to just about providing equal access, but also ensuring that all learners receive the support they need to succeed. Therefore, education policies must be adaptive, affirmative, and based on social data.

However, in practice, the implementation of the zoning system can present new challenges if the quality of schools between regions is uneven or if the community has not received sufficient information. Thus, the Theory of equity in access to education becomes an evaluative perspective to examine whether the system implemented truly reflects the principles of equity and non-discrimination.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the description above, the theoretical framework in this study combines four theories. Van Meter & Van Horn's policy implementation theory is used to identify challenges in implementing the NSA system. Bryson's local government strategy theory is used to analyze the form of strategy implemented by the Badung Regency local government. Grindle's good governance theory serves as an analytical tool for the quality of governance and public services in the student admission process. Meanwhile, the OECD's educational justice theory is used to assess whether the zoning system has supported fair and equal access to education.

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the challenges and strategies of the Local Government in implementing the New Student Admissions (NSA) system at the Primary School level in Badung Regency, Bali Province. This approach was chosen because it is able to capture phenomena in depth in a complex and dynamic context (Yin, 2018). Qualitative studies allow researchers to understand the policy implementation process from the perspective of actors in the field.

Location and Participants of the Research

The selection of participants was done by purposive sampling, involving parties who have direct involvement in the new student admission process. The total number of participants interviewed was 15 people, representing diverse and relevant perspectives.

Data Collection Technique

The data were collected through three main techniques:

1.   Semi-structured in-depth interviews with key informants to explore institutional strategies and challenges in implementation.

2.   Documentation study, including analysis of regional regulation documents, student admission SOPs, school meeting minutes, and public complaint reports for 2022–2024.

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method based on the stages of Braun and Clarke (2006), namely:

1.   Reading and understanding the data thoroughly

2.   Identifying initial codes manually and with the help of NVivo 14 software

3.   Grouping codes into main themes related to challenges and strategies

4.   Reviewing and refining themes

5.   Interpreting findings within the framework of policy implementation theory, especially referring to Grindle (2017) and Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983)

To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, the researcher implemented the following strategies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): Triangulation of data sources (interviews, FGDs, documents); Member check, by asking for confirmation from several key informants on the summary of interview results; Peer debriefing, through discussions with two education policy experts; Thick description to provide a rich contextual picture; and Audit trail, which is a systematic recording of the entire data collection and analysis process.

Research Findings and Discussion

Research Findings

Based on data triangulation from in-depth interviews with school principals, education department officials, and technical staff, the following seven main themes were obtained:

Theme 1: Zoning as a Tool for Equalizing Access, but Not Yet Completely Fair. All informants stated that the zoning system aims to bring educational services closer to students' domiciles. However, in practice, this system is not yet completely fair due to manipulation of domiciles, imbalances in capacity between schools, and zones that are not yet proportional. "Children who live close to the school are displaced because some are using their family cards. (Principal, Mengwi), further stated that we arrange zones based on the radius and number of school-age students." (Official)"

Theme 2: Technical and Social Challenges in the Implementation of Digital NSA. The digital NSA system is considered not yet fully stable, especially during the peak registration period.

Technical staff face a large workload, while schools in rural areas (Petang) have difficulty accessing and mentoring. Social challenges include local elite intervention and community resistance to the selection results. "On the first day, the server was down. We had to be fully alert. (Technical Staff), It was conveyed that Parents kept asking for an explanation if their children did not pass, even though they lived close by (Principal, Kuta Selatan).

Theme 3: Capacity Gap between Schools and Regions. There is a disparity in technical readiness, operator competency, and facilities between schools. Schools in densely populated areas such as Kuta Selatan have technical and human resource advantages, while schools in Petang rely on community approaches and informality. "In our school, there is only one operator, and he has never participated in formal training." (Principal, Petang)

Theme 4: Good Governance Practices Are Still Limited to the Formal Level. Good governance principles, such as transparency and accountability, are implemented through online information publications and complaint channels. However, in practice, not all schools actively participate in society, and internal monitoring mechanisms are still weak. "We have opened a hotline and complaint post, but sometimes there are still those who 'play behind the scenes'." (Official)

Theme 5: Cross-Level Coordination Not Yet Synergistic. Coordination between the agency, school, and technical team is running but not yet systematic. Communication still relies on WA groups and informal meetings, with a lack of clear standard procedures (SOPs). "If there is a problem, we have to ask the agency via WA or call directly." (Technical Staff), and "Sometimes schools are slow to update data to the server." (Technical Official).

Theme 6: Lack of Training and Strengthening of Operational Capacity. All actors stated that NSA technical training is still sporadic, close to the implementation time, and does not target continuous improvement of operator competency. "The training is impromptu. Many operators learn by themselves." (Principal, Mengwi).

Theme 7: System Improvement Proposal and Zoning Reform. All informants conveyed the need for system improvements, both from the technical side (server strengthening, system UI), social (fair zoning map), and institutional (domicile data audit, affirmative and achievement pathways). "Zoning needs to be opened transparently through digital maps and checked directly in the field." (Official), "There must be a special pathway for high-achieving students and poor students." (School Principal, Kuta Selatan)

The triangulation results show that although the zoning policy in Badung Regency is normatively designed to realize fair access to education, its implementation still faces significant technical, social, and institutional challenges. There is a need for strengthening a fair digital system, continuous training for operators, and reform of zoning policies based on spatial and social data. The implementation of the principle of good governance must be expanded, not only administratively, but also in strengthening public participation and social supervision.

Discussion

This study aims to comprehensively understand the implementation of the zoning system policy in the New Student Admissions (NSA) at Primary School level in Badung Regency, with a focus on the following two problem formulations: a) What are the challenges faced by local governments in implementing the zoning system in the admission of new primary school students in Badung Regency? b) What is the local government's strategy in overcoming obstacles in implementing the zoning-based new student admissions system?

a)   Challenges in Implementing the Zoning System

Based on Van Meter & Van Horn's policy implementation theory, implementation challenges arise due to the mismatch between policy design and actual conditions in the field. In the context of the NSA in Badung Regency, the main challenge is Domicile and Data Manipulation. In this case, the principal and technical staff reported the rampant use of fictitious domicile documents by parents who want to enroll their children in "favorite" schools. This disrupts the principle of spatial justice and reduces public trust in the zoning system. Digital Infrastructure Inequality The centralized online NSA system faces problems with server overload, limited internet access, and a lack of technical training in several schools, especially in the Petang area.

Weak Coordination and Governance. Coordination between the Education Office, schools, and technical teams is not yet systematic. Communication is mostly done informally, without standard SOPs. This has an impact on inconsistencies in technical implementation and delays in responding to field obstacles. Weak Public Participation and Oversight. Based on Grindle's Theory of good governance, the principles of transparency and accountability have only been implemented administratively. However, public oversight and community involvement in evaluating the system are still very limited. Educational Equity is Not Yet Substantive. Following the OECD's view on educational justice, the zoning system does not provide equal access for students from poor groups or those living in densely populated areas and at risk of marginalization.

b)   Local Government Strategy to Overcome Challenges. From the perspective of public strategy, according to Bryson, the ideal strategy must be adaptive to local conditions, involve various actors, and be based on verifiable data. The strategies that have been and are being implemented by the Badung Regency Government include:

1.   Radius and Density-Based Zoning. The government has developed a zoning map based on distance and population density, taking into account school capacity. This is an important step to create a more equitable distribution of students.

2.   Strengthening Affirmative Pathways. To address inequality, affirmative pathways have been opened for students from poor families and 3T areas. However, realization is still low due to limited socio-economic verification.

3.   Socialization and Information Services for NSA. The Education Office conducts online socialization, complaint hotlines, and regular school assistance. These efforts reflect a responsive public service strategy, although not yet fully distributed.

4.   Digitalization and Strengthening of Information Technology Systems. The government encourages the strengthening of the web-based NSA system, as well as integration with population data from the government to verify the validity of domicile in real time. This is in line with the practice of e-governance that is accountable.

5.   Technical Training and Human Resource Capacity Development. Although not routine, technical training has been carried out ahead of the implementation of NSA. Continuous strengthening is needed so that school operators have adequate technical competence.

6.   Annual Evaluation and Zoning Revision. Every year, the Regional Government evaluates the NSA system and revises the zoning map. This evaluation is based on data on the number of applicants, public complaints, and student distribution.

Closing

Conclusion

This study shows that the implementation of zoning policies in the Primary School NSA in Badung Regency still faces substantial challenges. These challenges include spatial inequality, manipulation of domicile documents, limited digital infrastructure, weak coordination between institutions, and low community participation in policy evaluation. These findings show a gap between administrative justice regulated in the policy and substantive justice felt by the community.

The local government's strategy so far has been adaptive, such as the preparation of distance-based zoning maps and affirmation for vulnerable groups, but has not been fully responsive to social dynamics and field challenges. The implementation of the principles of good governance is still normative, while the practice of social accountability and cross-sector collaboration is not optimal. Thus, improving the zoning system requires spatial and social-based policy reformulation, strengthening school infrastructure, and cross-agency data integration.

Suggestions

1)   For the Regional Government, it is necessary to reformulate the zoning system that takes into account geographical conditions, population density, and socio-economic aspects of residents more accurately and in real time.

2)   For the Education Office, it is necessary to provide routine technical training for school operators and develop digital communication and coordination channels between NSA implementers.

3)   For Schools, it is important to strengthen the involvement of school committees and parents in supervising the implementation of NSA so that social accountability is strengthened.

4)   For further researchers, it is necessary to conduct longitudinal studies to monitor the impact of zoning on learning outcomes, equal quality, and the dynamics of educational mobility between regions.

Policy Recommendation

1)   The Badung Regency Government is advised to form a Regional-Based NSA Service Unit that functions as a center for assistance, community advocacy, and a liaison between the agency and schools.

2)   Real-time spatial and population data integration is needed between the Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration, the Education Agency, and schools so that the verification process is more accurate.

3)   Development of an interactive NSA platform with simulation features, digital assistance, and community reporting to strengthen the dimensions of transparency and public control.

4)   The regional government can draft a special Regent Regulation on Adaptive Zoning to provide a legal basis for flexibility in acceptance based on the region.

Research Novelty

This research provides scientific and practical contributions as follows:

1)   Produce an analytical model for the implementation of regional character-based zoning policies, which combines rural, suburban, and urban perspectives.

2)   Integrate four theoretical approaches simultaneously (Van Meter & Van Horn, Bryson, Grindle, and OECD) in examining the interaction between policy implementation, regional strategy, governance, and educational equity.

3)   Provide contextual evidence-based insights for the development of locally-based zoning policies in tourism and high mobility areas such as Badung.

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