

The Politics Of Education In Indonesia In The Struggle Of Populist Promises And Budget Reality

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ABSTRACT: Education policy in Indonesia has long been a battleground between populist promises and the constraints of the state budget. One of the latest policies, the free meal program for students, requires a substantial financial allocation. However, this comes at a time when the education sector is facing budget cuts, raising concerns about the sustainability and impact of such policies. This study aims to analyze the effects of populist education policies on budget allocation and the overall quality of education services in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach based on policy analysis, this research examines how budget reductions affect educator welfare, learning facilities, and equitable access to education. While the free meal program is intended to enhance student well-being, the findings suggest that cuts in education funding could undermine efforts to improve teaching quality and exacerbate disparities in learning opportunities, particularly in underprivileged regions. The study highlights the trade-offs involved in implementing populist policies. While such initiatives can generate short-term political gains and address immediate concerns, they may compromise long-term educational development if not supported by a well-structured budget plan. A balanced approach is necessary—one that accommodates student welfare initiatives without sacrificing investments in teacher development, infrastructure, and curriculum enhancement. This study recommends that policymakers adopt a sustainable budget planning strategy that aligns with both populist goals and the long-term needs of the education sector. Only through careful financial management and evidence-based policy decisions can Indonesia ensure both student welfare and quality education services in the future.

Key words: Educational Politics, Populist Policies, Education Budgets, Education Quality, Public Policy.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a central role in the development of a nation, serving as a foundation to create quality and highly competitive human resources. In Indonesia, education is not only seen as a process of knowledge transfer, but also as a tool to shape national character and identity. Therefore, education policy is often the main concern in the national political agenda. Educational politics refers to how political policies and decisions affect a country's education system (Dahyanti dkk., 2024). In Indonesia, education politics is an important issue because the policies taken by the government have a direct impact on the quality and accessibility of education. Political decisions

related to the budget, curriculum, and educational standards will determine the direction and quality of national education.

In addition, education policies in Indonesia are often influenced by political dynamics and priorities of the ruling government. For example, during the administration of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the government launched the School Operational Assistance (BOS) program in July 2005 to provide direct financial assistance to schools in an effort to improve access and quality of education (Lubis dkk., 2024). This program aims to ease the burden of education costs for the community and improve the quality of basic education in Indonesia.

However, the implementation of these programs does not always go smoothly. Challenges such as budget constraints, inadequate management capacity, and regional disparities often hamper the effectiveness of education policies (Dewi dkk., 2025). For example, although the government has allocated 20% of the state budget for education, the distribution and utilization of these funds still face various obstacles that affect the quality and accessibility of education in various regions.

In the context of Indonesian politics, populist promises often appear in political campaigns, especially related to the education sector. Politicians often promise to increase the education budget, improve school facilities, and improve the welfare of teachers in an effort to attract voters' sympathy. These promises reflect the community's expectations for a better and more equitable education system.

However, the reality after the election is often not in line with the promises delivered. Budget constraints and other development priorities are the main reasons why populist promises in the education sector are difficult to realize. For example, despite commitments to increase education budgets, funding allocations are often insufficient to meet all needs, such as improving school infrastructure or improving teacher welfare (Puspita Sari & Suryaningsi, 2023).

This phenomenon poses a serious problem in the Indonesian education system. The mismatch between political promises and budget realization can reduce public trust in the government. In addition, this also has an impact on the quality of education received by students. When the budget is inadequate, programs to improve the quality of education are difficult to implement, which ultimately affects the output of national education. (Sukari & Sugiyarti, 2024)

Inconsistencies between political promises and budget realization can create disparities in access and quality of education. Remote areas or with limited resources may not receive adequate attention, so the educational gap between regions is widening. This is contrary to the principle of social justice mandated by the Indonesian constitution.

Based on previous research that discussed related themes, one of which is Ecin Kuraesin, who wrote an Analysis of Various Regulations on Education Financing in Indonesia (Kuraesin, 2024). This study analyzes various regulations on education financing in Indonesia, focusing on the suitability of existing policies to higher regulations, such as the 1945 Constitution. Using the literature study method, this study highlights the difference in the allocation of the education budget, especially related to the provision of 20% of the State Budget and the Regional Budget which should be allocated outside the salary of educators. The Constitutional Court's decision to include educators' salaries in the calculation of the education budget is considered to reduce the proportion of funds available for educational facilities and infrastructure. The study also reveals how political factors can affect education budget allocation at the regional level, which has an impact on the effectiveness of education policies in Indonesia.

Furthermore, research from Bagas Kara and Dadang Dahlan discussed the Influence of the Education Budget on the Human Development Index (HDI) in Indonesia for the Period 2004 to 2023. (Baskara & Dahlan, 2024a) which discusses the influence of the education budget on the Human Development Index (HDI) in Indonesia during the period 2004–2023. Using quantitative methods and a correlational approach, this study analyzes the relationship between the amount of education budget and the increase in HDI, based on secondary data from the Ministry of Finance, UNDP, and BPS. The results of the regression analysis showed a very strong correlation between the education budget and the HDI, with a determination coefficient of 0.943, which indicates that the increase in the education budget has a significant impact on human development. Every increase of one trillion rupiah in the education budget is estimated to increase HDI by 0.002 units. This research emphasizes the importance of the policy of increasing the education budget as an effective strategy in improving the welfare and quality of life of the Indonesian people.

Based on previous research, this study aims to examine the relationship between populist political promises in the education sector and budget policies implemented in Indonesia. By understanding these dynamics, it is hoped that solutions can be found to minimize the gap between people's expectations and existing realities. This study will also explore the factors that influence decision-making in education budget allocation, as well as their impact on the quality and accessibility of education in Indonesia.

Through this approach, it is hoped that effective strategies can be identified to ensure that political promises in the education sector are not only rhetoric, but also realized in concrete policies that have a positive impact on society. Thus, education in

Indonesia can develop in accordance with the expectations and needs of the community, and be able to answer global challenges in the 21st century.

By understanding the complexity of the relationship between politics, populist promises, and budget realities in the education sector, it is hoped that this research can make a real contribution to the formulation of more effective and equitable education policies in Indonesia.

METHOD

Dalam penelitian ini, pendekatan yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif dengan teknik studi pustaka. Metode kualitatif dipilih karena penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami secara mendalam bagaimana politik pendidikan di Indonesia dipengaruhi oleh janji populis dan realitas anggaran. Studi pustaka merupakan metode yang efektif dalam menganalisis kebijakan pendidikan karena memungkinkan peneliti untuk mengeksplorasi berbagai perspektif yang telah dikaji dalam penelitian sebelumnya serta memahami konteks historis dan sosial dari kebijakan yang diimplementasikan. (Adlini dkk., 2022)

The data in this study were collected from various secondary sources, including national education policy documents, official government reports, academic journals, and books relevant to the research topic. The policy documents analyzed include the National Education System Law (Sisdiknas Law), Government Regulations related to education budget allocation, and other policy documents that regulate the implementation of education in Indonesia. The analysis of these documents aims to identify the gap between the political promise of education and the reality of budget implementation.

This study also uses data from previous studies that discuss related issues, both nationally and internationally. By examining the results of previous research, researchers can identify general patterns in education politics and factors that affect the realization of education policies in Indonesia. Case studies from several regions are also used to provide an overview of how education policies are implemented differently in different regions, especially related to budget allocation and the effectiveness of their implementation.

Through this approach, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the political dynamics of education in Indonesia in relation to populist promises and budget realities. By relying on credible academic sources and in-depth analysis of policy documents, this research contributes to identifying challenges and opportunities in the formulation of more sustainable and realistic education policies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the political promise of education and its implementation.

Political promises in the education sector are often a strategic instrument for political actors to attract public support. Every time the momentum of the general election, the issue of education is often used as campaign material that promises to improve the system, improve the welfare of educators, and access to education that is more inclusive and equitable. However, after the electoral process ended, the realization of the political promise did not always go as expected. Budget limitations, changes in policy priorities, and bureaucratic constraints are the main factors that make these promises difficult to implement optimally.

In many cases, the education policies promised in political campaigns do not have well-thought-out budget planning. This can be seen from the imbalance between the promise to improve educational facilities and the reality of the country's fiscal capacity. Although the government has constitutionally allocated 20% of the State Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBN) for education, the distribution of these funds is often disproportionate, with most of it being used for employee spending, while investment in improving the quality of learning is still limited.

In addition, inequality in policy implementation is also influenced by geographical and social factors. Areas with more advanced infrastructure tend to adopt new policies faster than remote areas that still face limited facilities and educators. As a result, the promise of equal distribution of education that is often campaigned for becomes difficult to realize because of the disparity that is still inherent in the national education system (Slamet, 2014)

Furthermore, changes in political leadership often hinder the continuity of pre-designed educational programs. A change of government can bring about policy changes that are not always aligned with long-term development plans in the education sector. Programs that have been running well can be stopped or redirected due to different political interests, thus hindering the consistent achievement of national education targets.

On the other hand, populist promises in education are often not accompanied by concrete implementation strategies. For example, the promise of improving teacher welfare is not always accompanied by supportive regulations, so many educators still face problems related to welfare and professionalism. The lack of clarity in the implementation of this political promise has led to dissatisfaction among educators and the public who expect significant changes in the education system. (Tuti & Ismira, 2024)

As a consequence of the lack of policy continuity and implementation challenges, many educational programs have failed or are only symbolic. Education subsidy

programs such as School Operational Assistance (BOS) or the Smart Indonesia Card (KIP) often face technical obstacles in their distribution and supervision, so they are not fully effective in achieving the goal of improving access and quality of education for all levels of society.

The impact of the mismatch between political promises and the reality of education policy implementation is not only felt in the short term, but also affects the development of human resources in the long term. Uncertainty in education policy can hinder the achievement of national education quality targets, which ultimately affects the competitiveness of the workforce and the socio-economic development of the nation.(Hutagalung dkk., 2024)

To overcome this challenge, more research-based education policies and factual needs in the field are needed. The government needs to implement more realistic budget planning, strengthen education governance, and ensure the continuity of cross-government policies. Thus, education politics is not only a campaign tool, but also functions as a development instrument that has a real impact on society.

Case studies or concrete data on education budgets in Indonesia.

The education budget in Indonesia has become an important topic in efforts to improve the quality of human resources. Although the government has allocated 20% of the State Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBN) for the education sector, the implementation and effectiveness of the use of the funds still face various challenges. Case studies and concrete data from various studies provide an overview of the dynamics of education budget management in Indonesia.

One of the relevant studies is a study that evaluates the implementation of the use of Regional School Operational Assistance (BOSDA) in State Vocational Schools throughout Denpasar City. This study uses the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) model to assess the effectiveness of the use of BOSDA funds. The results show that even though funds have been disbursed, there are obstacles in planning and implementation that affect the optimization of budget use.(Baskara & Dahlan, 2024b)

In addition, other research highlights problems in the calculation of school fees related to the receipt of aid funds. Case studies at SMP Negeri 4 Pakem and SMP Islam Al-Azhar 26 Yogyakarta show that cost-volume-profit analysis can help in determining break-even points and more accurate funding needs. This is important to ensure that the allocation of funds is in accordance with the operational needs of the school.(Slamet, 2014)

The management of special autonomy funds (otsus) is also a concern in the context of the education budget. Research in Yahukimo Regency evaluates the practice

of planning, implementing, and monitoring special autonomy funds in the education and health sectors. The results identify that the lack of human resource capacity and weak supervision mechanisms are obstacles in the management of the fund.

Evaluation of the budget as a tool for planning and management control has also been carried out. A case study in the Primary Cooperative of Kartika C.14 Salatiga shows that without standard guidelines in budget preparation, the function of the budget as a planning and control tool cannot run optimally. This emphasizes the importance of clear standards and guidelines in budget management. In addition, research on investment diversification in the Education Fund Management Institution (LPDP) shows that investment diversification strategies can improve the sustainability of education funds. By managing a diversified investment portfolio, LPDP can mitigate risks and ensure the availability of funds for scholarships and other educational programs. (Pratama & Supriyono, 2020)

The Smart Indonesia Program (PIP) as one of the social security policies in the education sector has also been evaluated. Research shows that although PIP aims to improve access to education for children from underprivileged families, its implementation still faces obstacles such as the accuracy of targets and funding distribution mechanisms.

In addition, research on the development of school funding sources in Vocational High Schools (SMK) shows that diversification of funding sources, including cooperation with industry and alumni, can increase school financial independence. This is important to reduce dependence on government funds and improve the quality of education.

Factors that cause the remaining budget overcalculation (SiLPA) have also been identified. A study in the Yogyakarta City Government and Kulon Progo Regency found that the commitment to prepare the budget and the realization of activities that were not optimal contributed to the formation of SiLPA. This shows the need for more realistic budget planning and effective implementation. (Ramadhan & Sugiyono, 2015)

Overall, case studies and concrete data on education budgets in Indonesia show that although funding allocation has been improved, challenges in planning, implementation, and monitoring still need to be addressed. Increasing the capacity of human resources, clear management standards, and diversifying funding sources can be strategic steps to optimize the use of the education budget.

The impact of policies on the quality of education.

Government policies play a crucial role in determining the quality of education in Indonesia. Various initiatives have been launched to improve the quality of education,

but their implementation often faces challenges that affect their effectiveness. One of the significant policies is the decentralization of education through regional autonomy. The goal is to give authority to local governments to manage education in accordance with local needs. However, research shows that the lack of professionalism and coordination between the central and local governments can hinder the effectiveness of these policies, thus impacting disparities in the quality of education between regions.(Partini dkk., 2023)

In addition, the free education policy implemented by the government aims to increase access to education for all levels of society. However, the implementation of this policy faces obstacles such as budget and infrastructure limitations, which can affect the quality of educational services provided(Sholeh, 2023). Teacher certification policies have also been implemented to improve the competence of educators. However, research shows that while certification can improve teacher professionalism, there are challenges in its implementation, such as a lack of effective training and continuous evaluation.(Usman dkk., 2022)

In addition, school zoning policies that aim to equalize access to quality education often cause controversy. Some studies show that the implementation of these policies has not been fully effective in addressing educational inequality, and may even create new problems such as mass transfer of students to certain schools(Syafi'i & Ikwandi, 2023). The national curriculum policy, which often changes, also has an impact on the quality of education(Sholeh dkk., 2024). Too frequent curriculum changes can confuse teachers and students, as well as affect the consistency of the learning process(Yuniarti, 2024). Research shows that curriculum stability is essential to achieving the expected educational goals.(Suryadi dkk., 2024)

Policies related to educational infrastructure, such as school construction and renovation, have a significant impact on the quality of education. The availability of adequate facilities can increase student learning motivation and teacher teaching effectiveness. However, budget constraints are often an obstacle in the implementation of this policy. Government policies in improving the quality of education are also influenced by political factors. Policy changes that often occur due to the change of government can disrupt the continuity of education programs, thus affecting the overall quality of education(Abror dkk., 2024).

Although the government has issued various policies to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, challenges in implementation and external factors often hinder its effectiveness. Therefore, continuous evaluation and improvement are needed to ensure that the policies implemented can achieve the expected goals.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the education budget has a significant influence on the improvement of the Human Development Index (HDI) in Indonesia. With a determination coefficient of 0.943, the results of the regression analysis indicate that the increase in education budget allocation directly contributes to the improvement of the quality of human resources, especially in the aspects of education, health, and living standards. However, although the education budget has increased year by year, its distribution and utilization still face various challenges, including limited infrastructure, inequality between regions, and effectiveness in budget management and supervision. This shows that increasing the budget alone is not enough to ensure better quality education without an effective implementation strategy based on real needs.

This study emphasizes that education policies must be more directed at equitable access and improving the quality of education, not just increasing the budget. Policy sustainability and the sustainability of fund allocation are key factors in creating long-term impacts on human development in Indonesia. Therefore, the government needs to ensure that the allocated budget is used optimally to improve the quality of education as a whole. Reform in the budget system, increased transparency, and synergy between the central and regional governments are needed so that education policies can be more effective in supporting sustainable human development.

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