



Educational Policy Transformation in Indonesia: From the Old Order to the Reform Era

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Abstract

Education is a strategic instrument in national development, playing a vital role in improving human resource quality, strengthening national identity, and promoting economic growth. In the Indonesian context, educational policies have undergone significant transformations influenced by political regime changes from the Old Order, New Order, and Reform Era. This study aims to analyze the transformation of educational policies in Indonesia across these three periods. The study employed a qualitative method using a content analysis approach to examine various regulations, policy documents, and relevant academic literature. The findings reveal that educational policies during the Old Order were primarily oriented toward ideological formation and national identity building, while those of the New Order focused on national development through a centralized education system. In contrast, educational policies during the Reform Era emphasized decentralization, democratization, and increased public participation in educational governance. The study further demonstrates that political transitions have significantly influenced the direction and characteristics of national educational policies. Despite various policy reforms, their implementation continues to face challenges, including regulatory inconsistencies, weak policy execution, and gaps between policy formulation and educational practice. Therefore, more consistent, evidence-based educational policies supported by effective governance are required to enhance educational quality sustainably and respond adaptively to global challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a strategic instrument in national development as it plays a crucial role in enhancing human resource quality, strengthening social cohesion, and promoting economic growth (Sharma et al., 2021). From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, education is regarded as an investment that increases individual productivity and contributes to a country's economic development. Therefore, the quality of education is often considered a key indicator of a nation's progress and competitiveness (Abdillah et al., 2023; Cochran-Smith et al., 2020; Engkizar et al., 2026).

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In the era of globalization, educational systems worldwide face increasingly complex challenges arising from technological advancements, social transformation, and changing labor market demands. International organizations such as UNESCO and OECD emphasize the importance of educational systems that foster twenty-first-century skills, including critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education), highlight the importance of ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education as a foundation for sustainable development (F. A. Rahman et al., 2025; Tadol et al., 2025).

Despite various reforms, the Indonesian education system continues to face several challenges, including unequal access to education across regions, disparities in educational quality, and inadequate learning outcomes at various educational levels (Kassymova et al., 2025; Mutiarameses et al., 2025). Numerous evaluations have indicated that the implementation of educational policies is often hindered by limited resources, frequent regulatory changes, and inconsistencies between policy objectives and educational practices. These conditions suggest that educational success depends not only on policy formulation but also on the consistency and effectiveness of policy implementation (Prasetyo, 2022; Ramdayana et al., 2023).

Historically, the development of education in Indonesia has been closely linked to the country's political dynamics. Since independence, educational policies have undergone significant transformations influenced by ideological orientations, national development strategies, and governance reforms (Lubis & Nasution, 2021). During the Old Order era, educational policies were primarily directed toward nation-building and ideological consolidation. In the New Order era, educational policies focused on national development through a centralized educational system. In contrast, the Reform Era was characterized by educational decentralization, greater public participation, and efforts to democratize educational governance (Zulkarnain, 2017).

Several studies have examined the development of educational policies in Indonesia during specific periods, including educational policies in the Old Order era, educational centralization during the New Order, and educational reforms in the Reform Era. However, most of these studies remain fragmented and focus on a single political period. Comprehensive studies that analyze the transformation of educational policies across different political regimes to identify patterns of change, continuity, and their implications for the national education system remain relatively limited.

Addressing this gap, this study aims to analyze the transformation of educational policies in Indonesia during the Old Order, New Order, and Reform Era. The study employs a qualitative method using a content analysis approach to examine relevant regulations, policy documents, and academic literature. The contribution of this study lies in providing a comparative analysis of how political regime changes have influenced the direction, characteristics, and implementation of national educational policies (Aisyah & Nurhayati, 2021; Miftah, 2018). Therefore, this study is expected to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the development of educational policies in Indonesia and provide insights for formulating more adaptive and sustainable educational policies in the future (Adrivat et al., 2024; Wu & Shen, 2016).

Educational policy serves as a fundamental framework that shapes the objectives, structure, and implementation of educational systems. Changes in educational policy are often influenced by broader political, social, and economic transformations occurring within a country. Consequently, understanding the historical development of educational policies is essential for examining how policy priorities have evolved over time and how these changes have affected the direction of educational development. Such an understanding may also provide valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges associated with educational reform in contemporary contexts.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative method using a content analysis approach to examine the transformation of educational policies in Indonesia during the Old Order, New Order, and Reform Era. The content analysis approach was selected to systematically identify, categorize, and interpret policy orientations, educational objectives, and governance patterns reflected in educational regulations and policy

documents across different political periods (Busral et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2026; Kyngäs, 2020).

The data sources consisted entirely of documentary materials, including educational regulations, government policy documents, legislation, official reports, academic books, and relevant scholarly articles discussing educational policy in Indonesia. These documents were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives and their contribution to understanding policy changes across different political regimes. The unit of analysis in this study was national educational policy during the Old Order, New Order, and Reform Era. Particular attention was given to policy orientations, educational objectives, governance structures, and implementation strategies that characterized each period (Pohontsch, 2019; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

Data were collected through a comprehensive literature review and document analysis. Relevant documents were identified, reviewed, and organized according to the historical period and policy themes under investigation. The collected data were then analyzed using content analysis procedures involving data reduction, coding, categorization, interpretation, and thematic synthesis to identify patterns of continuity and change in educational policy (Fatmawati, 2025; Kara, 2023). To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was employed by comparing information derived from multiple sources, including regulations, policy documents, academic literature, and historical records. This process helped ensure the credibility and consistency of the interpretations generated from the data analysis (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Gerring, 2017).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Educational Policy during the Old Order Era

The results of the content analysis of various educational regulations and policy documents indicate that during the Old Order Era (1945–1966), education was positioned as a strategic instrument for ideological struggle and national identity formation. In the post-independence context, education functioned not only as a means of knowledge transmission but also as a political tool for instilling the values of nationalism, patriotism, and state ideology (Ramadhan, 2020; Zulkarnain, 2017). This orientation was reflected in Law No. 4 of 1950, which emphasized that the purpose of education was to develop morally upright individuals, democratic citizens, and responsible members of the nation and state. Consequently, education became an essential means of fostering unity within Indonesia's diverse society.

An analysis of curriculum development reveals a strong integration between pedagogical and ideological dimensions. The 1947, 1952, and 1964 curricula not only contained academic content but were also heavily infused with state ideology, particularly through the concept of *Manipol USDEK*. Education was directed toward shaping revolutionary citizens with political awareness and loyalty to the state, positioning schools as agents of political socialization as well as instruments for legitimizing political authority (Fikri et al., 2023; Rismana & Hernawati, 2025).

These findings are consistent with H.A.R. Tilaar's view that education during the Old Order Era was largely indoctrinative, where students were encouraged to accept ideological values with limited opportunities for critical thinking. The learning process emphasized conformity rather than the development of critical reasoning, resulting in underdeveloped academic freedom and scientific culture. From an educational policy perspective, this condition demonstrates that education was strongly influenced by political and ideological interests, as Stephen J. Ball argues that educational policy is never politically neutral (A. Rahman & Wahyuni, 2023).

In terms of educational governance, the education system during this period was not managed optimally. Educational management functions such as planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation were not carried out systematically due to limited human resources, inadequate infrastructure, and challenging post-independence economic conditions. Furthermore, educational decision-making was not based on comprehensive data

and needs assessments, often leading to ineffective policy implementation. These findings reinforce Michael Fullan's argument that the success of educational policy depends largely on implementation quality and organizational capacity (Sain et al., 2024; Scheerens, 2015).

Nevertheless, educational policies during the Old Order Era made an important contribution to establishing the foundation of Indonesia's national education system. Efforts to expand educational access through *Sekolah Rakyat* (People's Schools) and the promotion of national values laid the groundwork for subsequent educational development (Astini, 2022; Bujuri et al., 2023). Overall, educational policy during this era was characterized by a strong ideological orientation, with notable strengths in national identity formation, although it continued to face limitations in governance and academic quality.

Educational Policy during the New Order Era

The results of the content analysis indicate that during the New Order Era, educational policy underwent a significant transformation by positioning education as a primary instrument of national development. Policy orientation shifted from an ideological approach toward a developmentalist approach, in which education was viewed as a strategic investment for producing productive human resources and supporting economic growth. Within this framework, education became an integral component of the national development agenda (Irham et al., 2021; Syafitri & Hardi, 2021).

The government implemented various strategic programs, including the construction of elementary schools through the *SD Inpres* program and the introduction of compulsory basic education. These initiatives successfully expanded educational access to remote areas and increased school participation rates. The findings indicate that educational policies during the New Order Era achieved broader educational equity compared to the previous period (Hidayat & Syafaruddin, 2020; Prasetyo, 2022; Rahman & Wahyuni, 2023).

However, success in quantitative expansion was not fully accompanied by improvements in educational quality. The analysis of educational policies reveals that the education system during this era was highly centralized. Nearly all aspects of educational management, including curriculum development, financing, and evaluation, were determined by the central government. This condition limited opportunities for innovation at the school level and positioned teachers primarily as policy implementers rather than contextual learning developers. These findings are consistent with Christopher Bjork's view that excessive centralization can hinder creativity and innovation in education.

From a managerial perspective, the education system during the New Order Era possessed advantages in terms of efficiency, control, and consistency of program implementation because all planning processes were centrally coordinated with clearly defined targets. However, the top-down approach also resulted in limited stakeholder participation at the local level and reduced responsiveness to local needs. Furthermore, an evaluation system focused primarily on quantitative academic achievement encouraged rote learning practices, thereby limiting the development of students' critical and creative thinking skills (E. Engkizar et al., 2024; Purwanto et al., 2023; Syafruddin et al., 2023).

Overall, educational policy during the New Order Era achieved considerable success in expanding educational access and supporting the national development agenda. The centralized system enabled the government to implement educational programs in a coordinated and measurable manner. Nevertheless, the dominance of a centralized approach also created several limitations, particularly in fostering creativity, local participation, and flexibility within the education system (Jamaludin, 2025). Therefore, educational policy during this era reflected a strong developmental orientation with significant quantitative achievements, while continuing to face challenges in improving educational quality.

Educational Policy during the Reform Era

The results of the content analysis indicate that the Reform Era represented a significant phase in the development of educational policy in Indonesia, marked by a paradigm shift from centralization toward decentralization and the democratization of education. These changes emerged as a response to broader reform demands advocating transparency, public participation, and greater regional autonomy across various sectors, including education.

One of the major milestones of educational reform was the enactment of Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System. This legislation established that education is a shared responsibility of the central government, local governments, and society (Miftah,

2018; Risma & Hernawati, 2025; Supriyanto & Hidayat, 2020). Furthermore, the law provided greater autonomy for local governments and educational institutions to manage education according to local characteristics and needs.

Within the framework of decentralization, educational management underwent substantial changes through the implementation of school-based management. Schools were granted greater authority over resource management, curriculum development, and strategic decision-making. This policy was expected to enhance the effectiveness of educational administration while encouraging innovation at the institutional level (Marzuki et al., 2021; Ramdayana et al., 2023).

Policy transformation was also reflected in the continuous evolution of the curriculum. Beginning with the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK), followed by the School-Based Curriculum (KTSP), the 2013 Curriculum, and most recently the Merdeka Curriculum, the government sought to align the education system with global demands and twenty-first-century competencies (Putra et al., 2024; Saffina et al., 2020). The curriculum shifted from a sole focus on content mastery toward the development of competencies, character, and critical and creative thinking skills.

These findings align with Pasi Sahlberg's perspective that successful educational reform should be based on teacher professionalism, trust in schools, and minimal bureaucratic intervention. In the Indonesian context, the success of educational decentralization largely depends on the capacity of teachers and school management to independently and innovatively manage the learning process (Engkizar et al., 2025; Syahrial et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the implementation of decentralized educational policies continues to face numerous challenges. One of the major issues is the disparity in educational quality across regions. Areas with sufficient resources tend to develop education more effectively, while disadvantaged regions continue to struggle with limitations in infrastructure, teaching personnel, and access to technology.

At the implementation level, decentralization also requires strong managerial capacity at both regional and school levels. In reality, not all regions possess the human resources necessary to manage education autonomously. Limited competencies in planning, implementation, and evaluation remain significant barriers to the effectiveness of decentralization policies. In addition, coordination between the central and local governments continues to present challenges in educational policy implementation. Policies formulated at the national level cannot always be effectively implemented at the local level due to differences in regional conditions and institutional readiness. This situation reflects the persistent gap between policy formulation and practice, which remains a longstanding issue in Indonesia's educational governance (Caena & Redecker, 2019; Fuadi, 2024; Muttaqin et al., 2015).

The relatively rapid pace of curriculum change has also created challenges for teachers and schools. Frequent curriculum revisions without adequate support and guidance may create difficulties in implementation and reduce the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes. Therefore, policy stability and implementation consistency remain essential components of educational reform (Kumar, 2019; Moslimany et al., 2024). Overall, educational policy during the Reform Era brought progressive changes through decentralization, democratization, and increased educational autonomy. However, the success of these policies depends heavily on the readiness of human resources, managerial capacity, and effective collaboration between central and local governments. Consequently, strengthening data-driven educational governance, enhancing teacher professionalism, and promoting more adaptive and sustainable policies remain essential priorities.

The Transformation of Educational Policy in Indonesia from the Old Order to the Reform Era

The findings indicate that the transformation of educational policy in Indonesia occurred through three major phases. During the Old Order Era, education functioned as an instrument for national identity formation and ideological consolidation. In the New Order Era, policy orientation shifted toward national development through a centralized and standardized education system. Subsequently, the Reform Era was characterized by decentralization, democratization, and increased educational autonomy (Sutarso, 2011; Yani, 2023). These developments demonstrate a paradigm shift from an ideological orientation to a

developmental orientation, which later evolved into a more participatory and adaptive model of educational governance.

Despite these shifts in policy orientation, several issues remained relatively consistent across all periods, including gaps between policy formulation and implementation, limitations in human resource capacity, and challenges in ensuring equitable educational quality. These findings suggest that regulatory changes have not always been accompanied by adequate institutional capacity building (Moyo et al., 2014).

Therefore, the success of educational policy transformation depends not only on changes in policy direction but also on the effectiveness of implementation, organizational capacity, and the sustainability of educational reforms (Adrivat et al., 2024; Prasetyo, 2022; Sumiati et al., 2024). Consequently, future educational policy development should be grounded in evidence-based approaches, remain responsive to social change, and ensure both equitable access and continuous improvement in educational quality.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of educational policy in Indonesia demonstrates a dynamic shift in policy paradigms, moving from an ideological orientation during the Old Order Era, to a development-oriented and centralized system during the New Order Era, and subsequently to a decentralized and democratic approach during the Reform Era. The findings indicate that each period possessed distinct characteristics, achievements, and challenges in the development of the national education system. These transformations reflect the close relationship between educational policy and the political context in which it was formulated and implemented.

The study further reveals that, despite numerous policy reforms, several persistent challenges remain, particularly in policy implementation, institutional capacity, stakeholder coordination, and the gap between policy formulation and educational practice. From an educational management perspective, these findings highlight the importance of stronger integration among policy planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of educational governance and service delivery.

Therefore, future educational policy development should be directed toward a more evidence-based and long-term approach, supported by strengthened managerial capacity at various levels of educational governance. In addition, enhancing teacher professionalism and ensuring consistency in policy implementation are essential for building a more adaptive, high-quality, and sustainable education system. Through these efforts, educational policy transformation can move beyond normative change and contribute to meaningful and lasting improvements in educational quality.

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