

Reformulating New Student Admission Policy for SDG 4: A Local Values-Based Approach in Elementary Schools and Islamic Madrasahs in Gresik Regency

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To explore opportunities and challenges in implementing the New Student Admission Policy (PPDB) at elementary schools and Islamic elementary madrasahs (MI) in Gresik Regency, East Java, Indonesia. It examines how local education authorities manage national regulations while considering social, cultural, and geographical contexts. **Method:** A qualitative approach was employed, collecting data through interviews with stakeholders from selected SD and MI under the Gresik Regency Education Office and Ministry of Religious Affairs. Observations and document analyses supplemented the data, which were interpreted using relevant policy concepts and regulations to understand local implementation practices. **Results:** Successful PPDB implementation depends on local actors' ability to navigate complex social and administrative demands. Flexible, culturally adapted policies promote equitable access, relevant educational outcomes, and high-quality services. Effective implementation requires cross-institutional coordination, strong social networks, and active community participation. Zoning systems and affirmative policies are essential to prevent exclusion and ensure schools in low-attractiveness areas receive adequate support. **Novelty:** The research offers a novel contribution by reformulating the implementation of the New Student Admission Policy (PPDB) beyond technical and administrative procedures through the integration of local values, socio-cultural contexts, and community needs. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on policy compliance and operational aspects, this study demonstrates how context-sensitive policy implementation can strengthen equitable and inclusive access to basic education while advancing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), particularly Targets 4.1 and 4.5.

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a fundamental pillar in shaping human capital, social equity, and sustainable development. In Indonesia, the national education system is governed by comprehensive legal frameworks, including Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional and Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 57 Tahun 2021 tentang Standar Nasional Pendidikan, which aim to ensure quality, accessibility, and equity at all levels of education (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, 2003; 2021; 2022). However, implementing these policies in diverse local contexts remains a challenge, particularly in balancing centralized standards with regional social, cultural, and religious realities (Abdul Wahab & Solichin, 2005; Agustino, 2016; Ahmad Mukhlisin, 2021).

This policy direction is closely aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), which aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education for all. Effective student admission policies play a strategic role in achieving this goal by expanding equitable access to basic education and reducing disparities in educational opportunities across different communities. In particular, Targets 4.1 and 4.5 emphasize universal access to quality primary education and the elimination of inequalities in educational participation. Within this context, the

implementation of the New Student Admission Policy (PPDB) should not only comply with administrative regulations but also accommodate local socio-cultural conditions to ensure that every child has fair and meaningful access to quality education.

The New Student Admission Policy (PPDB) exemplifies these challenges, as it requires local authorities to translate national regulations into operational practices that respond to community needs and values. In Gresik Regency, East Java, PPDB implementation encompasses both public elementary schools (SD) under the Ministry of Education and Islamic elementary madrasahs (MI) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. These dual streams reflect the broader dualism of Indonesia's educational system, where secular and religious schools operate under different governance structures yet serve overlapping communities (Abdul Wahab, n.d.; Muhammad Saifuddin et al., 2020; Mizani, 2013).

Policy implementation is not merely about procedural compliance; it involves a dynamic interaction between policy content, institutional capacity, and socio-cultural environments. Scholars such as Mazmanian and Sabatier emphasize that successful implementation depends on multiple variables, including clarity of objectives, availability of resources, organizational structure, implementor disposition, and environmental conditions (Subarsono, 2005; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Weimer & Vining, 1991). Similarly, Edwards III and Grindle highlight the importance of communication, coordination, and stakeholder engagement to reduce misinterpretation and enhance the effectiveness of policy enactment (Subarsono, 2005).

In Gresik, PPDB implementation faces unique social-cultural dynamics. Many communities demonstrate a strong preference for MI in areas with high religiosity, while SD often experiences lower enrollment despite having comparable educational quality (Shindy Lestari & Salminawati, 2021). This disparity underscores the need for a value-sensitive policy implementation approach, which integrates local norms, religious values, and community expectations into the operationalization of national education policies (Grin et al., 2010; Hall & Soskice, 2019). Furthermore, multi-level governance principles suggest that local actors must adapt national frameworks to fit regional demographic, cultural, and geographic realities to achieve equitable educational access (Hooghe & Marks, 2018).

The local government in Gresik has taken proactive measures to harmonize SD and MI programs, including infrastructure improvements, teacher professional development, and integration of local values in school curricula (Helda Yusfarina & Zamroni, n.d.; Petrus Jacob et al., n.d.). Affirmative initiatives, such as additional funding, teacher incentives, and scholarships, aim to strengthen SD competitiveness in culturally conservative areas, while MI programs incorporate modern pedagogical training to meet urban expectations (Schuermann & Brighouse, 2020). Collaborative governance involving parents, religious leaders, civil society, and educational authorities ensures participatory policy-making and strengthens social legitimacy (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Institutional complementarity further frames the relationship between SD and MI. Rather than viewing these institutions as competing entities, SD focuses on literacy, numeracy, and 21st-century skills, while MI emphasizes religious, moral, and character development (Hall & Soskice, 2019; Brighouse & Schuermann, 2020). When effectively coordinated, this dual system creates a pluralistic and adaptive educational ecosystem that respects local diversity while maintaining alignment with national educational objectives.

Given these dynamics, this study explores opportunities and challenges in reformulating PPDB implementation in Gresik Regency by integrating local values, socio-cultural considerations, and institutional complementarities. The findings aim to provide evidence-

based guidance for policymakers and local authorities to design a more responsive, inclusive, and sustainable student admission system that accommodates both SD and MI, enhances equitable access, and strengthens community trust in public education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design aimed at investigating the implementation of the New Student Admission Policy (PPDB) in elementary schools (SD) and Islamic elementary madrasahs (MI) in Gresik Regency. The research prioritizes a context-sensitive approach, integrating socio-cultural and religious considerations alongside formal administrative procedures, to understand the ways in which local authorities adapt national regulations to community expectations (Sugiyono, 2022; Shindy Lestari & Salminawati, 2021).

Research design and paradigm

The study adopts a case study approach within an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, emphasizing the subjective experiences and social constructions of policy implementers and stakeholders (Abdul Wahab & Solichin, 2005; Agustino, 2016). This design allows for a detailed exploration of the processes, challenges, and adaptations involved in PPDB execution, accounting for both procedural and value-based dimensions.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted across a purposive sample of SD and MI institutions in both urban and rural areas of Gresik Regency. Participants included:

1. Officials from the Gresik Regency Education Office and the Ministry of Religious Affairs;
2. School principals and teachers;
3. Parents and guardians;
4. Community and religious leaders;
5. School committees and local administrators (Petrus Jacob et al., 2022; Helda Yusufarina & Zamroni, n.d.).

Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of stakeholders with direct involvement in PPDB, as well as community representatives who influence school choice decisions. This multi-stakeholder approach allows for capturing diverse perspectives on policy implementation, local value integration, and institutional complementarity (Hall & Soskice, 2019; Hooghe & Marks, 2018).

Data collection techniques

Data were collected through multiple complementary methods:

1. Observation: Non-participant observations were conducted during the entire PPDB process, from registration to student placement, to document administrative procedures, community interactions, and adherence to national guidelines (Spradley, 1979).
2. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were performed following a seven-step procedure adapted from Sugiyono (2022), allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences, challenges, and strategies in implementing PPDB (R1/KD/7-11-2024; R2/SD/7-11-2024).

3. Document Analysis: Relevant policy documents, guidelines, school records, previous research, and government reports were reviewed to triangulate findings and contextualize the field data (Angelika Bule Tawa, 2019; Petrus Jacob et al., 2022).
4. Focus Group Discussions: Discussions with teacher groups, parents, and community leaders provided insight into collective perceptions and local norms influencing school choice.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using a thematic, interactive model as proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, incorporating stages of data collection, condensation, display, and conclusion verification (Sugiyono, 2022). Triangulation of observation, interviews, and documents was employed to enhance credibility and confirmability. Analytical frameworks included policy implementation theory (Abdul Wahab & Solichin, 2005; Agustino, 2016), collaborative governance theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008), multi-level governance (Hooghe & Marks, 2018), and value-sensitive policy implementation (Giddens, 1991; Goyette & Mullen, 2021).

Validity and Reliability

To ensure rigor, several strategies were applied:

1. Credibility: Extended engagement, member checking, and triangulation across sources and methods.
2. Dependability and Confirmability: Audit trails documented all steps and decisions, enabling replication and ensuring consistent interpretation.
3. Transferability: Detailed descriptions of local contexts, institutional structures, and participant characteristics allow findings to be applied to comparable educational settings (Shindy Lestari & Salminawati, 2021).

By combining multiple methods and theoretical lenses, this methodology allows for an in-depth understanding of how PPDB policies are locally adapted, how stakeholders negotiate policy objectives with cultural and religious expectations, and how SD and MI complement each other within Gresik's educational ecosystem.

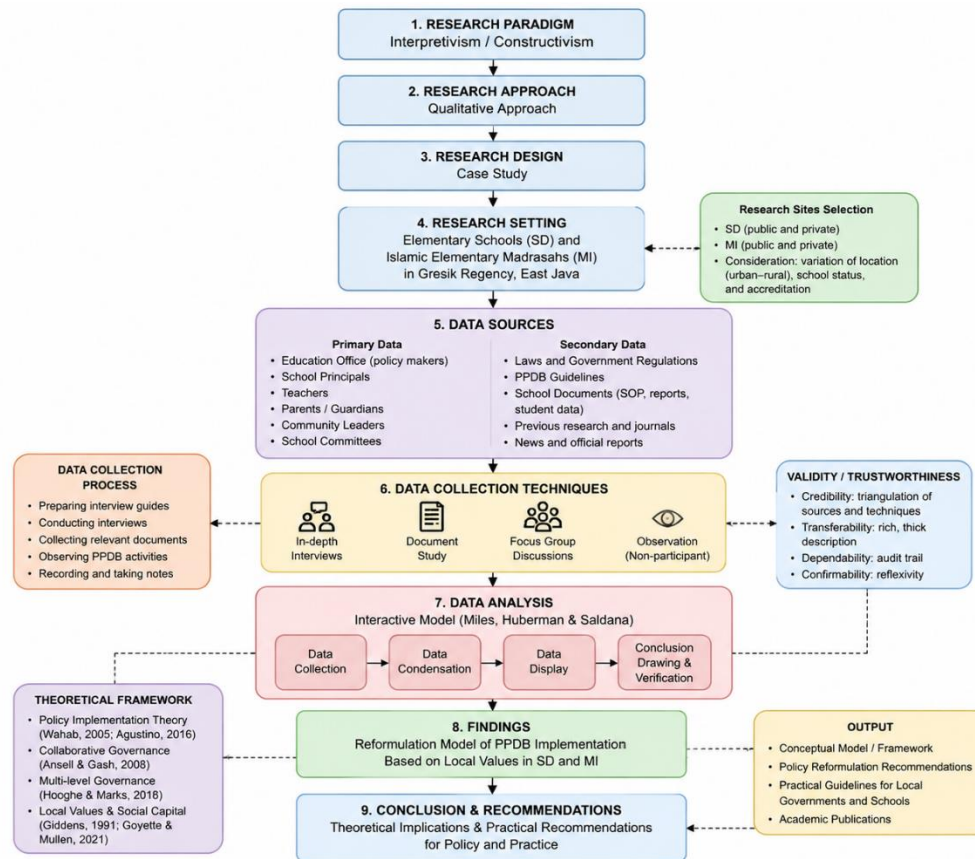


Figure 1. Research methodology flowchart

This flowchart illustrates the hierarchical stages of the research methodology, beginning with paradigm selection, moving through design, setting, data collection, and analysis, and concluding with findings and policy recommendations. The chart highlights data sources, collection techniques, analytical steps, and theoretical frameworks integrated into the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings show that the implementation of the New Student Admission Policy (PPDB) in Gresik Regency cannot be separated from the institutional structure of basic education, which consists of elementary schools (SD) under the Education Office and Islamic elementary madrasahs (MI) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The quantitative data indicate that Gresik Regency has 838 basic education institutions, consisting of 389 public elementary schools, 77 private elementary schools, 2 public Islamic elementary madrasahs, and 370 private Islamic elementary madrasahs. This distribution demonstrates that public elementary schools remain the largest category, while private Islamic madrasahs also occupy a very strong position in the local education landscape. In percentage terms, public elementary schools account for 46.4%, private Islamic elementary madrasahs account for 44.2%, private elementary schools account for 9.2%, and public Islamic elementary madrasahs account for only 0.2%. These data indicate that SD and MI are both important providers of basic education in Gresik, although they operate under different institutional authorities and social legitimacy.

The distribution of students across sub-districts also shows uneven patterns between SD and MI. Some sub-districts, such as Menganti, Driyorejo, and Gresik, show stronger enrollment in SD, while other sub-districts, such as Manyar, Bungah, and Ujungpangkah,

show a relatively higher number of MI students. For example, Menganti recorded 9,528 SD students and 5,724 MI students, while Manyar recorded 5,552 SD students and 6,219 MI students. In Bungah and Ujungpangkah, the number of MI students is also higher than SD students, indicating a strong community preference for religion-based education in these areas. This pattern confirms that PPDB implementation in Gresik is not only an administrative process, but also a reflection of social, cultural, religious, and geographical differences across local communities.

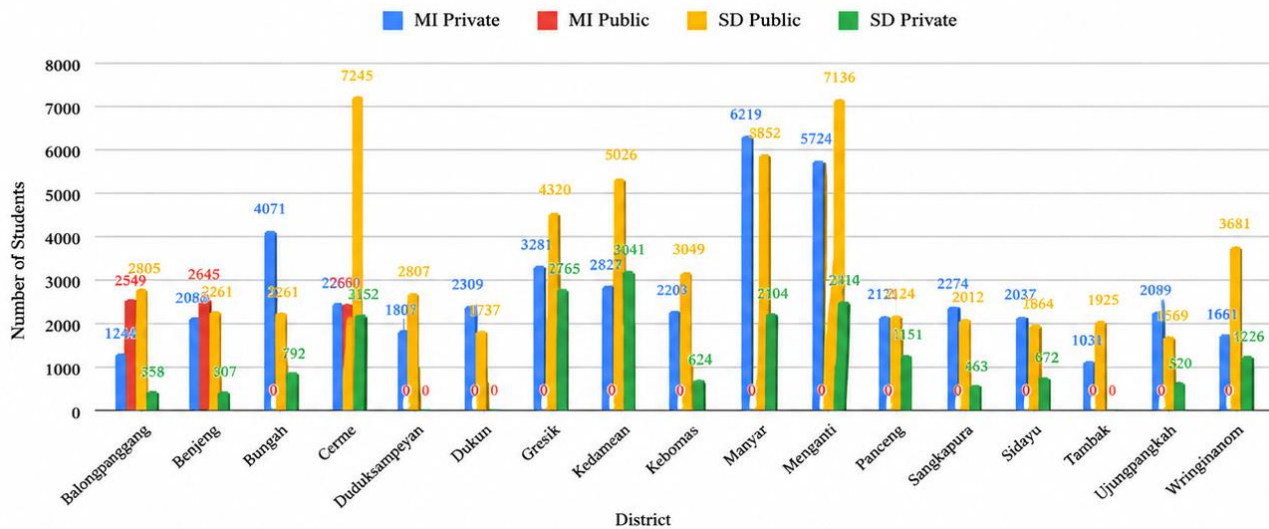


Figure 1. Student enrollment distribution in public and private elementary schools and Islamic elementary madrasahs in Gresik regency

The findings also reveal differences in PPDB governance between SD and MI. Although both systems are built on the same principles of objectivity, transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination, the quota allocation and institutional authority differ significantly. SD under the Education Office applies a stronger zoning-based system, with 70% of student admission allocated through zoning. Meanwhile, MI under the Ministry of Religious Affairs applies a more flexible zoning system, with only 30% allocated through zoning and broader space for non-zoning pathways, such as achievement, affirmation, and parental transfer. This difference creates distinct implementation patterns. SD tends to emphasize spatial equity and neighborhood-based access, while MI has greater flexibility to accommodate community preferences and institutional characteristics.

The qualitative findings show that community preference for SD or MI is strongly shaped by local values. Religious values, community influence, social conformity, psychological comfort, collective identity, tradition, and stigma all appear as important factors in school choice. Among these themes, the role of community and religious leaders appears as the strongest factor. This means that parents often do not make school choices individually, but through social interaction with religious leaders, neighbors, extended family, and community groups. In areas where religious identity is strong, MI is often perceived as the most appropriate institution because it is considered capable of strengthening Islamic values, moral education, and religious character from an early age.

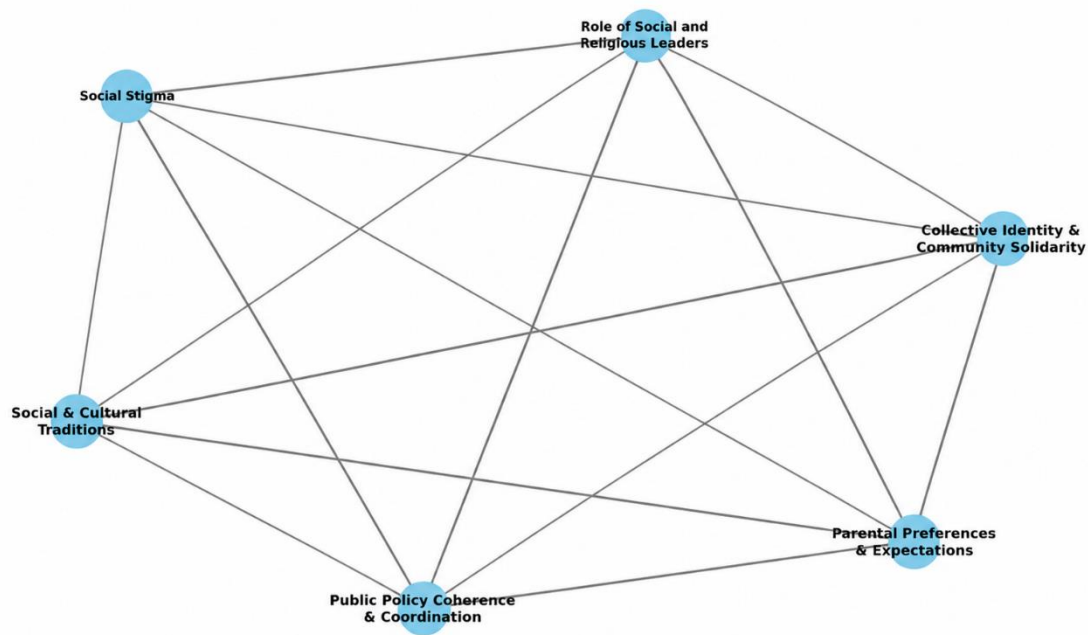


Figure 2. Network analysis of socio-cultural factors influencing school choice

The interviews further indicate that differences between rural and urban areas create different patterns of educational preference. In rural areas with strong religious orientation, MI tends to be more attractive because it is closely associated with religious institutions, pesantren networks, and respected religious figures. In contrast, urban and more socio-economically open areas tend to show stronger preference for SD because parents associate SD with academic readiness, formal educational continuity, modern facilities, and preparation for future educational competition. Thus, the choice between SD and MI reflects two different orientations: religious and moral continuity on one side, and academic and modern educational orientation on the other.

The study also finds that local government has attempted to respond to these differences through several strategies. The Education Office and the Ministry of Religious Affairs conduct coordination to discuss student distribution, school promotion, technical guidelines, and community outreach. The local government also encourages SD to strengthen religious education through programs such as Qur'an reading and writing, religious habituation, religious-based character education, and local culture-based learning. This strategy is intended to reduce the perception that SD only provides general education, while MI is the only institution capable of providing strong religious education. Therefore, PPDB reformulation in Gresik is directed toward a more flexible zoning system, affirmative support for low-demand SD, stronger public communication, and the integration of local values into basic education policy.

Discussion

The results indicate that PPDB implementation in Gresik Regency is deeply influenced by the relationship between formal policy design and local social reality. Although PPDB is formally designed as a national policy to regulate student admission in an objective, transparent, accountable, and non-discriminatory manner, its implementation in Gresik shows that policy effectiveness depends on how well the policy can respond to local culture, community values, and institutional diversity. This finding is important because the title of the study emphasizes the need to reformulate PPDB implementation based on local values.

In this context, local values are not merely cultural symbols, but practical forces that shape parental decisions, school competitiveness, student distribution, and public trust in educational institutions.

The difference between SD and MI governance reflects the dual structure of Indonesian basic education. SD and MI have the same educational level, but they are managed by different authorities and operate with different social meanings. SD is institutionally linked to the Education Office and tends to represent general education, literacy, numeracy, and formal academic preparation. MI is institutionally linked to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and tends to represent religious learning, moral development, and Islamic character formation. This distinction affects PPDB implementation because parents do not only compare administrative requirements or school distance, but also compare the symbolic value of the school. In communities with strong religious traditions, MI is considered more aligned with family values and community identity.

The student distribution data strengthen this argument. The fact that MI enrollment exceeds SD enrollment in several sub-districts shows that zoning alone cannot fully explain school choice. If PPDB is implemented only as a technical zoning mechanism, the policy will fail to capture the real motives of parents. In Gresik, parents often consider whether the school environment supports religious practice, whether religious leaders recommend the institution, whether the school is socially accepted by the community, and whether the institution is seen as protecting children's moral development. Therefore, the reformulation of PPDB must move beyond administrative standardization and begin to include socio-cultural mapping as a basis for policy design.

The network analysis of socio-cultural factors also shows that the role of community and religious leaders is central in shaping school choice. This finding suggests that PPDB implementation cannot rely only on official circular letters, school announcements, or online registration systems. In communities where religious leaders have strong influence, policy communication must involve figures who are trusted by the community. Religious leaders, village leaders, school committees, and parent groups can become strategic actors in explaining the purpose of PPDB, reducing misinformation, and building public trust toward both SD and MI. This supports the idea that education policy at the local level requires collaborative governance, because the government cannot work alone in contexts where social legitimacy is strongly shaped by informal community authority.

The difference between rural and urban preferences also has important implications. In rural areas, educational decisions are more strongly connected to religious continuity, community solidarity, and social comfort. Parents tend to choose MI because it is perceived as closer to the moral and spiritual environment they want for their children. In urban areas, educational decisions are more often linked to academic achievement, facilities, formal curriculum, and future competitiveness. This does not mean that rural communities ignore academic quality or that urban communities ignore religion. Rather, it shows that each area has a different dominant logic in choosing schools. A rigid PPDB policy will not be able to respond fairly to these differences. Therefore, local government needs a differentiated policy strategy that considers the social character of each sub-district.

The findings also show that the government's role is not limited to enforcing PPDB rules. The government must become a mediator between national policy and local needs. In Gresik, this role appears through coordination between the Education Office and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, improvement of SD facilities, religious education strengthening in SD, teacher training, and community-based communication. These efforts indicate that PPDB

reformulation should not be interpreted as changing admission rules only. It also means strengthening school capacity, improving public perception, and creating balance between academic and religious expectations.

The concept of institutional complementarity is highly relevant to this discussion. SD and MI should not be positioned as competing institutions that weaken each other. Both can be developed as complementary institutions within the same basic education ecosystem. SD can continue strengthening literacy, numeracy, science, technology, and academic readiness, while also integrating local religious and cultural values. MI can continue strengthening religious character while improving academic quality, digital literacy, and pedagogical innovation. When both institutions are supported proportionally, parents will have fairer choices, and the education system will become more inclusive and responsive to diverse community aspirations.

The findings also reveal the need for affirmative policy for SD in areas with low public interest. Some SD, especially small schools in religious areas, experience difficulty attracting students because they are perceived as less religious or less socially legitimate than MI. This situation can create institutional vulnerability, including low enrollment, weak school image, and the risk of school merger or closure. Affirmative support may include additional funding, teacher incentives, religious program development, infrastructure improvement, school branding, and partnership with local religious communities. These strategies are important to ensure that SD remains socially relevant and does not lose its function as a public basic education institution.

At the same time, reformulation must avoid forcing uniformity between SD and MI. The goal is not to make SD become MI or MI become SD. The goal is to build a policy model that recognizes institutional differences while ensuring equal educational access and quality. Local-value-based PPDB should respect the religious character of Gresik society, but it should also guarantee that every child has access to quality basic education regardless of whether parents choose SD or MI. This requires flexible zoning, stronger coordination between institutions, transparent public communication, and data-based planning.

The findings also highlight the broader contribution of locally adaptive admission policies to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). By recognizing community diversity, institutional complementarities, and local socio-cultural characteristics, the reformulated PPDB model promotes more equitable and inclusive access to primary education, in line with Targets 4.1 and 4.5. Rather than applying uniform admission mechanisms across all contexts, the findings suggest that flexible and context-sensitive implementation enables education policies to better address local needs while reducing disparities in educational opportunities. Consequently, integrating local values into student admission policies not only enhances policy effectiveness but also supports the development of a more inclusive and sustainable education system.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: PPDB implementation in Gresik Regency is influenced by social, cultural, and religious diversity. SD emphasizes literacy and numeracy with a 70% zoning system, while MI applies flexible zoning with affirmative and achievement-based pathways. Enrollment patterns reflect local community preferences and values. **Implication:** Context-sensitive and collaborative policy management can create an adaptive, pluralistic education system that ensures equitable access to quality basic education, balances academic and religious development, and integrates local community values. Such an approach contributes

to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), particularly Targets 4.1 and 4.5, by promoting inclusive, equitable, and accessible educational opportunities for all learners while reducing disparities in student admission across diverse socio-cultural contexts. Furthermore, integrating local values into policy implementation strengthens public trust, enhances policy responsiveness, and supports the development of a more sustainable and inclusive education system. **Limitation:** Findings are based on qualitative data, policy review, and network analysis; implementation may vary across districts due to local socio-cultural and institutional differences. **Future Research:** Future studies should quantitatively evaluate zoning and affirmative policies, assess PPDB outcomes, and explore strategies for integrating national standards with local social, cultural, and religious contexts.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Nur Hamidah was responsible for conceptualizing the study, designing the research, supervising the project, validating the results, and critically reviewing the manuscript. **Mustaji** contributed to developing the methodology, collecting and analyzing data, and revising the manuscript. **Bambang Sigit Widodo** provided support for the literature review, data processing, visualization, and administrative tasks.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors confirm that they have no financial, personal, or professional relationships that could have influenced the design, execution, results, or conclusions of this study.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF AI OR DIGITAL TOOLS IN WRITING

The authors affirm that no artificial intelligence, automated content generation software, or other digital writing tools were used at any stage of the research, data analysis, or manuscript preparation. All aspects of data handling, interpretation, and writing were conducted solely by the authors, who take full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the manuscript.

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