Policy Networks in Education Policy: An Empirical Study at the City and Regency Level in West Java Province, Indonesia

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Abstract : Policy networks play a crucial role in the development and implementation of education policies at the regional level, as they involve interaction and collaboration between government actors, educational institutions, teachers, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), communities, and the private sector. This study aims to analyze the role of policy networks in education policies in cities/regencies in West Java Province and the obstacles faced in increasing their effectiveness. The study used a qualitative approach with descriptive-analytical methods. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies of actors involved in education policies. The results show that education policy networks still face obstacles in the form of unequal distribution of resources, limited actor capacity, weak coordination between actors, regulatory barriers, and a lack of shared learning mechanisms. This study concludes that strengthening policy networks through collaborative forums, increasing actor capacity, simplifying regulations, sustainable collaborative mechanisms, and shared learning are strategic steps to increase the effectiveness of education policies at the regional level in West Java.

Keywords: policy network, education policy, collaboration, City/Regency, West Java

1. INTRODUCTION

Education policy is a crucial component of regional development, significantly impacting the quality of human resources and regional competitiveness. The formation and implementation of education policies are not solely the responsibility of government entities; they are shaped by collaborative networks of stakeholders, including educational institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, and local communities (Crocco, 2021). These education policy networks facilitate stakeholder engagement, ensuring that policies are responsive to local needs and priorities (Amiel et al., 2024). By fostering collaborative governance, these networks enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of education policies, enabling a more inclusive approach to policymaking. Furthermore, educational institutions serve as vital actors in these networks, bridging the gap between policy and practice (Hidayat, 2024).

Policy networks are crucial in the public policy process, emphasizing the interdependent relationships among various actors. According to Rhodes (2007), the success of public policy depends on the quality of interactions and collaborations, which are influenced by the distribution of information, resources, and power within these networks. Marsh and Rhodes further highlight that the structural and relational characteristics of these networks, referred to as network patterns, significantly influence the effectiveness of policy implementation and innovation (Saber & Gomaa, 2020). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for effective policy network management, as they facilitate or hinder collaboration among actors (Ombagi et al., 2023). The interplay of interdependent relationships and network patterns is fundamental to achieving successful public policy outcomes, underscoring the importance of strategic engagement among stakeholders.

In West Java Province, the education sector grapples with significant challenges, including unequal access to education, the need to improve teacher quality, and adapt the curriculum to local contexts. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive education policy reforms that emphasize equitable access and enhanced teacher training and development (Nurhayati et al., 2025). Furthermore, curriculum localization is crucial to

ensure that educational content is relevant to regional contexts, thereby improving student engagement and outcomes (Kusuma et al., 2024). Effective implementation of this policy requires cross-sector collaboration, which can facilitate resource sharing and expertise exchange among various stakeholders (Sukandi, A, 2024).

To foster a more equitable and effective education system in West Java, it is crucial to analyze the role of education policy networks at the city and district levels. These networks comprise various stakeholders whose interactions significantly influence education policy decisions, highlighting the importance of understanding local governance structures (Purwanto et al., 2020). Using policy network analysis, this study aims to uncover the dynamics of these relationships, thereby contributing to theoretical advancements in policy network research and practical improvements in interactor collaboration (Ilhami, 2023). Effective collaboration among stakeholders is crucial to addressing the unique challenges faced in the region, ultimately leading to the development of an equitable education system that provides all students with equal opportunities (Raflika et al., 2024). This research is expected to improve the quality of education in West Java by fostering a collaborative environment that prioritizes equity and effective governance.

2. Literature review
1. Policy Network

Policy networks is an approach that explains that public policy is formed through interactions between interdependent actors. Rhodes (1997) states that policy networks encompass relatively stable patterns of relationships between governmental and non-governmental actors, in which resources, information, and influence are distributed among them. This approach emphasizes the importance of collaboration and resource exchange in achieving public policy goals.

Marsh and Rhodes (1992) suggest that policy networks are characterized by membership, intensity of interaction, distribution of power, and stability of relationships. In the context of local government, policy networks encompass relationships between local governments, educational institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, and local communities. Effective networks enable cross-sector coordination, information exchange, and shared learning, which enhance the quality of public policy.

2. Education Policy

Education policy is a government instrument for designing, regulating, and evaluating education systems to ensure they align with national development goals and local needs. According to Ball (1994), education policy is not only technical but also political, as it involves the interests of various actors in determining the direction, content, and implementation of policy.

At the regional level, education policy is influenced by local dynamics, resources, and the capacity of local governments. The effectiveness of education policy depends heavily on collaboration between actors, such as education offices, schools, teachers, communities, NGOs, and the private sector. The involvement of these various actors aligns with the policy network perspective, where collaboration and information exchange between actors are key to successful education policy implementation.

The integration of policy networks into education policy allows for innovation, collective learning, and solutions that are more responsive to local problems. Thus, policy network analysis is crucial for understanding how interactions between actors influence the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of education policy at the regional level.

3. Research methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical approach. The qualitative approach was chosen to deeply understand the patterns of policy networks, interactions between actors, and their impact on the formulation and implementation of education policies at the regional level. The research was conducted in several cities/regencies in West Java Province. The study focused on education policy networks involving local governments, educational institutions, teachers, NGOs, communities, and

the private sector. The research emphasized the relationships between actors, the distribution of resources, and coordination and collaboration in regional education policies.

4. Results & Discussion

The results of the identification of empirical problems in education policy in West Java include:

One of the main problems is the disparity in access to and quality of education across regions in West Java Province. More developed cities/regencies have adequate educational facilities, teachers, and infrastructure, while remote or rural areas face limited resources. This creates a gap in educational quality and limits learning opportunities for some students.

Interaction between actors in education policy networks remains weak. Local governments, educational institutions, teachers, NGOs, and communities often work in siloed or fragmented ways. This limited collaboration hinders information exchange, policy innovation, and more effective coordination of education programs.

The capacity of teachers, educational staff, and non-governmental actors involved in education policy remains variable. Some teachers and NGOs have limited skills and knowledge related to curriculum development, learning innovation, and policy implementation, impacting the effectiveness of education policies.

Complex bureaucratic procedures and regulations that do not support the participation of non-governmental actors hinder the implementation of education policies. This limits the space for innovation, collaboration, and decision-making based on local needs.

Collaborative evaluation mechanisms and shared learning between actors within education policy networks are still minimal. Consequently, good practices are difficult to disseminate, and successful education policy innovations in one region are difficult to replicate or adapt to other contexts.

Discussion

Research findings indicate that education policies at the city/district level in West Java Province still face various obstacles related to policy networks. Disparities in access and quality of education between regions reflect the unequal distribution of resources and capacity among actors. This aligns with Rhodes' (1997) view that effective policy networks are characterized by a relatively balanced distribution of resources and influence among actors. When some actors, particularly those in remote areas, have limited resources, the effectiveness of policy networks is hampered. Local governments need to establish or strengthen education network forums involving education offices, schools, teachers, NGOs, parents, and the private sector. These forums serve as formal collaborative spaces for the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of education policies. Institutionalizing network forums will improve coordination, expand actor participation, and strengthen policy legitimacy.

Limited collaboration between actors indicates that the structure of education networks remains sectoral and partial. According to Marsh and Rhodes (1992), overly sectoral policy networks limit the flow of information, coordination, and collective learning. In the context of education, weak networks between local governments, teachers, NGOs, educational institutions, and communities hinder policy innovation and the development of learning practices that adapt to local needs. The capacity of human resources, including teachers, educators, and NGOs, must be improved through training, mentoring, and technical guidance related to educational innovation, policy analysis, and school management. Ansell and Gash (2008) emphasize that the capabilities of actors in a network directly influence the effectiveness of collaboration and policy innovation.

Varied human resource capacity, particularly the skills of teachers and non-governmental actors, reinforces inequalities in policy networks. The policy network perspective emphasizes the importance of actors having access to information, analytical skills, and resources to contribute significantly to the policy process. This limited capacity

has implications for the low effectiveness of education policy implementation. Education networks need to be supported by transparent, participatory, and sustainable collaboration mechanisms. The policy formulation process must involve network actors from the planning stage to the evaluation stage, with clear and regular communication channels.

Furthermore, rigid regulatory and bureaucratic barriers limit the flexibility of policy networks in responding to local education challenges. Ansell and Gash (2008) emphasize that successful collaboration within policy networks depends heavily on trust, openness, and participatory mechanisms that enable innovation and shared learning. The lack of collaborative evaluation and shared learning mechanisms in West Java indicates that education policy networks are not yet functioning optimally as a means of information exchange and innovation. Complex bureaucratic procedures hinder innovation and flexibility in education policy. Simplifying regulations and strengthening the legal framework to support the involvement of non-governmental actors will expand the space for participation and encourage network-based policy innovation.

Overall, the research findings confirm that the effectiveness of education policies at the regional level is significantly influenced by the quality of policy networks. Inclusive, collaborative, and sustainable networks enable resource exchange, coordination, and policy innovation that is responsive to local needs. Mechanisms for joint evaluation, reflection on practices, and exchange of best practices should be implemented regularly. This collective learning will enhance the effectiveness of policy networks, strengthen collaboration between actors, and encourage educational innovation that is adaptive to local needs.

5. CONCLUSION

This study shows that policy networks play a significant role in education policy at the city/district level in West Java Province. However, the effectiveness of these networks is still limited by unequal distribution of resources, weak collaboration between actors, limited human resource capacity, regulatory barriers, and a lack of collaborative learning mechanisms. As a result, educational policy innovation and coordination between actors are not optimal, so that the quality of policies and equitable access to education still face obstacles. The results of this study confirm that increasing the effectiveness of education policies is highly dependent on the quality of policy networks, particularly collaborative relationships between local governments, educational institutions, teachers, NGOs, communities, and the private sector. Strengthening policy networks through collaborative forums, increasing actor capacity, simplifying regulations, sustainable collaborative mechanisms, and institutionalizing collaborative learning are important steps to encourage more participatory, innovative, and responsive education policies to local needs.

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