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# Analysis of the Implementation of the People's School Program Policy Using the Van Meter Model and the Van Horn Model in Indonesia

**\*Muhammad Giri Ramanda  
Nazaputra Kiemas<sup>1</sup>**

Sriwijaya University,  
Indonesia

**Raniasa Putra<sup>2</sup>**

Sriwijaya University,  
Indonesia

**Katriza Imania<sup>3</sup>**

Sriwijaya University,  
Indonesia

**Muhammad  
Nurbudyanto<sup>4</sup>**

Sriwijaya University,  
Indonesia

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**\*Corresponding authors:**

Muhammad Giri Ramanda Nazaputra Kiemas,  
Sriwijaya University,  
Indonesia. ✉[giri.ramanda@uss.ac.id](mailto:giri.ramanda@uss.ac.id)

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**Abstract**

**Background:** The Indonesian People's School Program (*Sekolah Rakyat*) is an important positive education initiative that focuses on intergenerational poverty in decile 1–2 households. Despite the large state investment and national launch in 2025–2026, the implementation of program governance has still not been fully analyzed in the academic literature.

**Objective:** This study aims to diagnose the readiness of the People's School program in terms of policy norms, resources, interorganizational communication, institutional capacity, socio-political conditions, and implementation attitudes, using the six-variable implementation framework of Van Meter and Van Horn.

**Methods:** This study used a qualitative descriptive approach and systematic document analysis. Primary sources were official government publications, ministerial press releases, and executive orders (2025–2026). Secondary sources were peer-reviewed policy implementation literature. Documents were coded according to the six variables of Van Meter and Van Horn.

**Results:** The analysis showed that despite supportive policy objectives and political conditions, resources posed moderate risks due to inequities in quality and distribution. Interorganizational communication and management attitudes were identified as key barriers, reflecting a lack of coordination and value alignment gaps among frontline practitioners.

**Conclusion:** This study demonstrates that effective policy implementation relies not only on resource availability but also on governance, coordination, and human factors. This research provides theoretical contributions to the study of policy implementation and offers practical recommendations for improving coordination mechanisms, data accuracy, and implementation capabilities. However, this study has limitations due to its reliance on secondary data, and future research should adopt an empirical approach to evaluate the outcomes and long-term impact of implementation in the community.

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## INTRODUCTION

Public policy does not culminate at the formulation stage. This policy only gains great significance when it is applied effectively in the field. Kamarck (2024) sees public policy as an action by government officials to address public problems. Therefore, implementation is an important bridge between normative decision-making and actual social change. Empirically, the education gap in Indonesia underscores this urgency. The 2023 National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) found that only 3.2 percent of children from the poorest group have access to higher education, compared to 42.7 percent for children in the richest quintile (BPS, 2023). In addition, around 9.36 percent of Indonesia's population is still classified as very poor (BPS, 2024), indicating that existing education access policies have not been able to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Van Meter (1975) emphasized that the success of implementation is not only determined by the content of the policy, but also by the state of the implementing organization, resources, communication, and the external environment that influences implementation.

In Indonesia, one of the most important policy challenges in recent years has been breaking the cycle of poverty through formal education. The People's School Program was created in response to the structural barriers faced by children from poor and very poor families in accessing decent, sustainable, and quality education. Through the Ministry of Social Affairs, the government positions the program as a social policy tool that not only provides access to education but also provides more comprehensive welfare interventions, including dormitory facilities, character development, and support to meet the basic needs of students.

The government has officially declared the People's School as a free pesantren for children from poor and very poor families. The program is aimed at families in deciles 1 and 2 of the National Social Database and is intended to be an important strategy to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. At the national implementation stage, the President opened 166 People's Schools on January 12, 2026, while in the 2025/2026 school year, the program already had 159 operational sites with a total of 15,370 students, supported by thousands of teachers and educators.

From a policy science perspective, the People's School program is an interesting case study that demonstrates the relationship between education policy, social policy, and poverty reduction policy. This program requires not only good policy design but also cross-functional implementation capabilities. In the implementation of public policies, the main problem often arises not from the policy objectives, but from how the policies are translated into local administrative and operational actions (Kobak, 2021; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Policy implementation is the process of translating political and administrative decisions into operational actions. Smith (1973) explained that implementation is the process of interaction between ideal policies, implementing organizations, target groups, and environmental factors. DeLeon (2002) emphasize that the study of implementation has evolved from a linear model to a more dynamic approach, as policy implementation is always influenced by negotiations, discretion, and social contexts.

In classical research, there are two important trends in implementation approaches: top-down and bottom-up. The top-down approach emphasizes consistency of objectives, hierarchical control, and clarity of policy direction from decision-makers to implementers (Sabatier, 2014). In contrast, the bottom-up approach emphasizes the role of field implementers and the importance of policy adaptation to the community (Lipsky, 2010). Buzogány (2024) argue that modern implementation is a combination of these two approaches, where public policy requires strategic direction from the center, but also flexibility at the field level. The Van Meter (1975) model is one of the most widely used implementation models because it identifies six key variables: first, policy standards and objectives; second, resources; third, communication between organizations; fourth, the characteristics of the implementing agencies; fifth, the economic, social, and political environment; and sixth, the disposition of the implementers. According to this model, the success

of implementation is determined by the dynamic interaction between these six variables, making it suitable for the analysis of complex multidisciplinary programs.

Several empirical studies support this framework in related contexts. Analyzed the implementation of social policies in Slovenia by applying the Van Meter (1975) model and found that communication between organizations and implementer attitudes are essential. In the Indonesian context, Khan (2016) shows that social welfare programs often fail not because of weak policy designs, but because of weak capacity in frontline coordination mechanisms, which applies directly to Sekolah Rakyat. Studies of conditional cash transfer programs in Southeast Asia (e.g., the Family of Hope program) have also identified data accuracy, multi-agency coordination, and staff training as barriers to effective implementation (Evans, 2020; Meyers & Nielsen, 2012). Boarding programs face highly complex implementation challenges, requiring simultaneous management of education quality, welfare delivery, and dormitory management, and multifaceted delivery models increase management complexity and the risk of service fragmentation (Sandfort & Moulton, 2014).

## METHOD

The data analysis method was carried out descriptively and analytically using the Van Meter and Van Horn policy implementation model. The data collected were categorized into six model variables to reveal the relationship between policy design and actual implementation. This approach is important because the focus of this article is not on quantitative measurement but on detailing the dynamics of policy implementation. The researchers acknowledge that this study is a secondary literature review and has limitations regarding the availability and timeliness of public information about the program. These findings are only conceptual diagnoses, not empirical measurements.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Policy Standards and Objectives

The first variable of the Van Meter and Van Horn model is the clarity of standards and policy objectives. In the case of Sekolah Rakyat, the policy objectives are relatively clear: to provide children from poor and very poor families with access to quality education free of charge, and to use education to break the cycle of poverty. The government has officially confirmed that this program is designed as free boarding school (pesantren) education for households in the first and second deciles of the Integrated Social Welfare Data (*Data Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial/DTKS*). Therefore, policy objectives are clearly formulated with respect to both the target group and the intended beneficiaries.

This clarity of purpose is a key strength of implementation, giving field implementers a more measurable orientation. However, the challenge lies in accurately reflecting the indicators of "poor and very poor households" in the student selection process. If the target data are invalid or not updated, a well-intentioned policy action can overlook the groups that should be prioritized. Implementation studies have consistently identified the mistargeting of beneficiaries as a primary cause of policy failure, even when objectives are clearly defined in form (Cerna, 2013; Mtetowa, 2012). In the case of Sekolah Rakyat, DTKS—Indonesia's integrated social welfare database—is the main targeting instrument. However, an audit by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) in 2023 found data discrepancies in approximately 21 percent of social assistance recipients nationwide, raising legitimate concerns about the accuracy of beneficiary identification in programs that rely on this database (KPK, 2023). This empirical evidence supports the implementation risks associated with targeting variables and underscores the need for real-time data validation protocols.

### Resources

Resources include budget, facilities, infrastructure, personnel, and administrative

capacity (Flink & Chen, 2021). According to official government information, Sekolah Rakyat is supported through the phased provision of operational locations. The government set a target of 159 operational sites by 2025, with a capacity for 15,370 students, 2,407 teachers, and 4,442 non-teaching support staff. In January 2026, it was announced that 166 Sekolah Rakyat locations would be opened nationwide. This data indicates that considerable national resources have been committed to the program.

However, from an implementation standpoint, the availability of resources must account not only for quantity but also for quality and distribution. Boarding school programs set a higher standard than regular schools, providing not only instruction but also lodging, meals, care, supervision, and other welfare services (Sofwatillah & Anwar, 2025). A deficiency in any of these resource components affects the overall quality of program delivery. Sandfort (2014) affirm that resource adequacy is a necessary condition for successful implementation, but not a sufficient one. A significant resource gap identified in Sekolah Rakyat is the shortage of qualified boarding school supervisors with both educational competence and social welfare orientation. The National Islamic Boarding School Standard (Permendikbud No. 36/2014) requires a ratio of at least one supervisor per 20 dormitory students; yet with 166 locations where the program is expanding rapidly—particularly in remote areas and eastern Indonesia where teacher shortages are most acute—this standard remains difficult to meet (Kemendikbudristek, 2024).

### **Inter-Organizational Communication**

Sekolah Rakyat is not a policy that can be implemented by a single institution alone. Its success is highly dependent on effective multi-sectoral collaboration, which is critical for evaluating the effectiveness of social protection and social security programs in alleviating poverty in rural communities.

The monitoring committee and the joint oversight committee serve to ensure coordination. The use of digital governance tools—including the Integrated Social Welfare Data (DTKS) and the Ministry of Social Affairs' digital monitoring system—is a key technical dimension of this coordination task. The integration of real-time data and information platforms across agencies constitutes important infrastructure for evidence-based monitoring of implementation in geographically dispersed programs (Bozzini & Hunt, 2015). Weak inter-organizational communication generates duplication of authority, operational delays, and inconsistency in policy interpretation among implementing units. Formal, routine, and accountable coordination mechanisms are therefore the primary structural conditions for successful implementation. Currently, no dedicated inter-agency coordination body for Sekolah Rakyat has been officially established by presidential decree.

Coordination takes place through ad hoc inter-agency meetings, but the absence of a permanent coordination office with clear authority, reporting channels, and accountability mechanisms represents a structural gap that may lead to fragmented implementation and program downscaling at the national level if left unaddressed. Comparative analysis with similar programs shows that Brazil's Bolsa Família, which established a dedicated inter-agency coordination committee at the program's outset, achieved substantially more consistent implementation outcomes than comparable programs lacking such architecture (Ainsworth, 2020).

### **Administrative Characteristics**

The characteristics of the implementing body are associated with the bureaucratic structure, separation of powers, organizational capacity, and work culture of the executive branch. Social welfare services, schemes, projects, and programs are becoming increasingly complex. Since it is no longer accepted that any well-intentioned administrator can manage welfare work without specialized preparation, sound administration is vital. It is increasingly recognized that social welfare programs require qualified and trained social welfare personnel to perform their functions efficiently. It is therefore argued that effectively serving the public requires professionalization, as it can enhance the capacity of social welfare personnel to address

the pressing social problems confronting society.

The concept of governance can be applied to a wide range of organizations and situations, both public and private. Public governance is the application of governance principles to the operation of government (Herasymiuk et al., 2020; Rochmansjah, 2019). Regulatory governance constitutes a specific area of public governance and involves the application of governance principles to the exercise of regulatory powers by governments (Kjaer & Vetterlein, 2018). Regulatory governance addresses all stages of the regulatory cycle: problem identification and analysis; regulatory development; implementation and enforcement; review and evaluation; and, finally, reform.

### **Social, Economic, and Political Environmental Conditions**

Providing clarity of mandate for the regulator, ensuring the regulator has the requisite powers that are clearly communicated and understood by relevant stakeholders, and establishing mechanisms for stakeholder engagement are all important considerations. Developing a regulatory body with clarity of mission, strength of powers, and robust mechanisms for engaging with all relevant stakeholder groups helps guard against potential "regulatory capture," whereby the regulator becomes beholden to powerful stakeholder groups. This risk of capture may be more prevalent in fragile contexts, where conflict may have erupted along ethnic or cultural lines or where vested economic interests and well-connected groups risk overpowering the interests of others.

### **Disposition of Implementers**

The disposition of an implementer relates to the acceptance, commitment, and comprehension of a policy's objectives. Implementers are never entirely neutral in the execution of public policy. They interpret policy, prioritize initiatives, and frequently exercise discretion. Field implementers can be a determining factor in whether a policy succeeds or fails (Lipsky, 2010). In the Sekolah Rakyat program, the disposition of implementers is paramount, given that they are working directly with vulnerable children. Implementation is likely to succeed when implementers are caring, professional, and deeply committed to the program's social mission. If, however, implementers neglect social considerations and approach their roles as purely administrative, there is a danger that Sekolah Rakyat will become nothing more than a bureaucratic project rather than a transformative welfare service. Hence, the need to move beyond procedural knowledge into the realm of values: professional ethos, service ethic, and a genuine sense of empathy and commitment to justice for marginalized peoples.

These findings are consistent with Machuca (2024), who suggest that the moral ownership of the implementer—the extent to which the implementer understands and internalizes the social mission of the program—is the strongest predictor of implementation quality in well-being-oriented programs. Therefore, structured values-formation programs, codes of conduct for dormitory staff, and regular reflective supervision mechanisms are recommended as key elements of the capacity-development framework for the implementation of Sekolah Rakyat.

### **Discussion**

Based on the analysis of six variables, the following factors are identified as significant in the implementation of the Sekolah Rakyat program. The supporting factors are as follows. First, the direction of national policy is clear and carries strong political legitimacy. Second, the government has demonstrated considerable resource investment through support for numerous operational locations and teaching staff. Third, a targeted and structured program design makes interventions more precisely directed at intended beneficiary groups. Potential obstacles include the accuracy of targeting data, the quality of inter-institutional coordination, the readiness of personnel for boarding school management, the standardization of service quality across regions, and the continuity of supervision following program rollout. An additional challenge is ensuring

that quantitative expansion does not compromise implementation quality. In many public policies, rapid program expansion tends to strain administrative capacity and undermine implementation consistency.

**Table 1.** Evaluation of the implementation of the People's School program based on the framework of 6 variables Van Meter and Van Horn

Variable	Deployment status	Supporting factors	Inhibitors	Policy Implications
1. Policy Standards and Objectives	<b>Support</b>	clear target groups (quantiles 1-2); Strong political legitimacy, free entry obligation	Risk of inaccurate identification of beneficiaries when social databases become obsolete	Improve real-time data validation for beneficiary selection
2. Source	<b>Risky</b>	large-scale state investment; 159-166 operational points; 2,407 teachers were sent	heterogeneity of place quality; Poorly trained dormitory staff, regional gaps	Development of National Quality Standards for the Function of Islamic Boarding Schools and Teacher Capacity
3. Communication between organizations	<b>Braking</b>	The structure of several ministries allows for different fields	There is no special coordinating body. Risks of duplicate permits and guidance deferrals	Establish a special inter-ministerial coordination body with clear authority and accountability
4. Characteristics of the executive body	<b>Risky</b>	The Ministry of Social Services has extensive experience in managing welfare programs	Limited experience in managing education delivery; Bureaucratic rigidity can slow down coordination	Building adaptive institutional capacity through capacity building and interdepartmental training
5. Social, economic and political situation	<b>Support</b>	strong presidential involvement; National Social Data Infrastructure; Digital Monitoring Tools	multidimensional vulnerability of the target family; Socio-cultural barriers in education	Integrating Psychosocial Support and Community Engagement into Program Design
6. Attitude/ Attitude of Players	<b>Braking</b>	The program has a social mission and aims to support vulnerable children	Implementers prioritize administrative compliance over social considerations, and create limited value	Improve practitioner training on service ethics, empathy, and commitment to social justice

Source: The author's analysis is based on the framework of Van Meter (1975) and applied to data from the People's School Program (2025-2026).

### CONCLUSION

This study shows that the implementation of the People's School program is primarily shaped by the interaction of six key variables within the Van Meter and Van Horn models, with policy clarity and political support acting as supporting factors, and inter-organizational communication and the disposition of implementors being the most important obstacles. These findings underscore that successful implementation depends not only on program size and

resource allocation, but also on the quality of governance coordination, data accuracy, and on-site engagement.

Theoretically, this study confirms the relevance of the Van Meter and Van Horn models in complex multidisciplinary social policy analysis, especially in the context of education-based poverty alleviation, and contributes to the literature on policy implementation. The study expands on previous research, emphasizing the central role of communication structures in large-scale welfare programs and highlighting the implementation of values as determinants. From a policy perspective, this research provides practical insights to improve governance design. These include the need for formal inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms, strengthening data verification systems, and building capacity to integrate technical skills and social mission orientation.

However, this study has some limitations. First, the document-based qualitative approach limits its ability to capture real-time field dynamics and changes in implementation across regions. Second, the analysis is based on secondary data sources and may not fully reflect operational challenges at the grassroots level. Therefore, future research is recommended to apply a mixed or field-based empirical approach to validate these findings, examine differences in implementation by region, and validate the long-term impact of the program on educational outcomes and poverty reduction.

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#### CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORS

Author 1 contributed to the conception, methodology and preparation of the manuscript. Author 2 and Author 3 contribute to data analysis and theory development. Author 4 contributed to the final review, editing, and verification. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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