

FEE-FREE EDUCATION IN INDONESIA: A REVIEW OF FIFTEEN-YEARS FEE-FREE EDUCATION LAW AND THE REALITY APPLICATION AND NEEDS IN BANTUL DISTRICT, YOGYAKARTA

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ABSTRACT

Fee-free education has become crucial to global efforts to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals. This policy has been implemented in Indonesia through various programs, including the School Operational Assistance (BOS) and Indonesia Smart Program (PIP), to support underprivileged families. However, there still needs to be more funding that parents must cover to support their children's education. This study aims to evaluate the implementation of fee-free education in Bantul District, Yogyakarta, and explore the financial needs that parents still have to meet. The research employs a qualitative method with an exploratory, descriptive approach. Data were collected through interviews with parents, school principals, and teachers in 16 elementary schools in Bantul. The results indicate that the funds provided by the government through BOS and PIP are insufficient to cover the full education costs, particularly for students with special needs. Parents still face additional fees, such as uniforms, books, and transportation. In conclusion, while the fee-free education policy is in place, increased funding allocation is necessary to ensure that all children, especially those from disadvantaged families, can access quality education without financial burdens.

Keywords: fee-free education, Bantul, BOS, PIP, education for all.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right recognized globally, and efforts to make it accessible to everyone have been a central theme in many international frameworks, including the Education for All (EFA) initiative. EFA was launched by UNESCO in 1990 to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, have access to quality basic education. Countries worldwide have adopted policies to support this movement, with many focusing on fee-free education at the primary level to combat illiteracy and poverty. Fee-free education is a powerful tool to reduce inequality and foster socioeconomic development (UNESCO, 2018). However, implementing such policies in developing countries, including Indonesia, remains a significant challenge due to various economic, social, and infrastructural barriers.

This research focuses on the specific challenges of fee-free education in Bantul District, Yogyakarta, and how the program's implementation can be improved. In Indonesia, the government has made substantial efforts to provide fee-free education by allocating 20% of the national budget to education, as mandated by the Indonesian Constitution. This policy is operationalized through the Bantuan Operasional Sekolah (BOS) and Program Indonesia Pintar (PIP), which aim to cover school operational costs and support disadvantaged students. Despite this, many families still face substantial out-of-pocket expenses for uniforms, books, transportation, and other necessities. The gap between the government's financial support and the actual cost of education creates significant disparities, particularly for low-income families. Therefore, this study seeks to explore how well the fee-free education policy is implemented and identify the areas where additional support is needed.

The concept of fee-free education stems from human capital theory, which argues that investment in education leads to improved economic productivity and individual earnings. (Becker, 1993) education enhances workers' skills, making them more productive and contributing to national economic growth. The theory further suggests that when individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds are provided with education, it creates a more equitable society by increasing their access to better employment opportunities (Hanushek, 2019). Fee-free education policies are designed to eliminate financial barriers to accessing education. In theory, such policies should increase school enrollment and reduce dropout rates, particularly in low-income families (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). However, the effectiveness of these policies depends on adequate government funding, proper implementation, and addressing hidden costs that might still burden families. This theoretical framework helps to analyze the implementation of fee-free education in Indonesia, focusing on the financial gaps that persist despite government interventions.

Several studies have examined the implementation and challenges of fee-free education in developing countries. For instance, (Lucumay & Matete, 2024) conducted a survey of fee-free education in Tanzania, finding that while enrollment rates increased, the quality of education and school infrastructure suffered due to inadequate funding. Similar findings were observed in Malawi, where the abolition of school fees led to overcrowded classrooms and a decline in the quality of instruction (Rabie & Sichone, 2019). In Indonesia, research on BOS and PIP has focused on their effectiveness in reducing the cost burden on families. (Jumanah & Rosita, 2023) explored the implementation of PIP and found that, while it provided essential support to disadvantaged students, many families still struggled with the hidden costs of education, such as uniforms and books. Another study (Silelel, 2017) evaluated the management of BOS funds and found inconsistencies in how schools are allocated and used, leading to disparities in educational quality between regions.

Research (Sulhan, 2019) highlighted the need for a more comprehensive approach to fee-free education, including operational costs and additional financial support for students' everyday educational needs. These studies indicate that while Indonesia has

made significant progress in expanding access to education, there are still substantial challenges in ensuring that all children, particularly those from low-income families, can fully benefit from the country's fee-free education policy. This research aims to evaluate the implementation of the fee-free education policy in Bantul District, Yogyakarta, with the following objectives: To assess the extent to which the fee-free education policy (BOS and PIP) covers the financial needs of students, To identify the hidden costs that parents still need to cover to support their children's education, To analyze the disparities in educational support provided by the fee-free policy among different schools and student groups, To give recommendations for improving the fee-free education policy to ensure more equitable access to quality education.

This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on fee-free education by comprehensively analyzing the financial gaps still in Indonesia's educational system. The findings will help policymakers and educational stakeholders understand where additional resources and interventions are needed to support disadvantaged families fully. Furthermore, this study will highlight the need for greater transparency and efficiency in allocating BOS and PIP funds, particularly in rural areas like Bantul District, where economic challenges are more pronounced. Please focus on the gaps identified between the theoretical framework of fee-free education and its practical implementation in the Bantul District. While the government's policies aim to make education accessible to all, the reality for many families differs.

The research will explore how hidden costs, such as uniforms, transportation, and additional school supplies, continue to burden low-income families, undermining the policy's effectiveness. Furthermore, the disparities between small and large schools regarding BOS fund allocation will be analyzed to understand how these financial limitations impact the quality of education provided. In line with previous studies, this research will suggest that fee-free education policies must be re-evaluated and expanded to cover more hidden costs associated with schooling. Recommendations will include increasing PIP fund allocation, improving BOS fund usage transparency, and implementing targeted interventions for schools with smaller student populations.

Research Method

This research is a qualitative study with a descriptive approach, aiming to explore and deeply understand the implementation of a fee-free education policy in Bantul District, Yogyakarta. The study focuses on aspects of the School Operational Assistance (BOS) and Indonesia Smart Program (PIP) policies and their impact on the community, particularly families with low economic conditions. Through this approach, the research seeks to reveal the challenges and gaps in implementing the fee-free education policy and how families, schools, and the government interact to address these challenges. The research was conducted in Bantul District, Yogyakarta, an education city with a long-standing implementation of the fee-free education policy for over a decade. Bantul was selected as the research location due to its diverse demographic, economic, and educational infrastructure characteristics, which can

represent the complexity of education policy implementation in Indonesia in general. The study was conducted from January to March 2023, involving various stakeholders in the education sector, such as parents, teachers, school principals, and local government officials.

Location and Subjects of the Study

The research was conducted in 16 elementary schools spread across all sub-districts in Bantul District. Each sub-district was represented by two schools, consisting of public and private schools. The schools were selected based on the variation in the number of students and the different characteristics of government-run and privately managed schools, with the expectation that they would provide a more comprehensive picture of the implementation of the fee-free education policy in the area. Additionally, the study included inclusive schools that serve students with special needs, considering the importance of access to education for all, including those with disabilities. The study subjects were divided into several key groups: parents, teachers, school principals, and relevant officials from the local education office. The parents involved in the study had children in the 1st and 6th grades of elementary school.

These grades were chosen because they represent the beginning and end of primary education, where the educational needs and expenses tend to be higher. By involving parents from these grades, the research can provide insights into the variation in educational needs throughout the primary school years. Teachers and principals were selected as study subjects because they directly interact with implementing the BOS and PIP policies. As school budget managers, principals deeply understand the use of BOS and PIP funds and the challenges faced in meeting the educational standards set by the government. Meanwhile, teachers are critical subjects as they understand how the fee-free education policy affects schools' teaching and learning process.

Research Instruments

The research instruments used in this study include in-depth interviews and open-ended questionnaires. In-depth interviews were conducted with school principals, teachers, and education office officials to gather information about the implementation of the BOS and PIP policies and the challenges faced in achieving the goals of the fee-free education policy. The interview technique was chosen because it provides rich and in-depth data regarding the experiences and perceptions of the stakeholders involved. Open-ended questionnaires were used to collect data from parents. These questionnaires were designed to identify how much parents spend to support their children's education beyond the BOS and PIP funds.

The questionnaire covers expenses for uniforms, books, shoes, transportation, and additional costs such as tutoring or therapy for children with special needs. The questions were open-ended to allow respondents to provide detailed information specific to their situation. In addition to interviews and questionnaires, this study also employed participatory observation. Observations were conducted in several schools that served as research sites to directly observe the physical conditions and

infrastructure of the schools, the facilities available, and the teaching and learning process. This method aimed to complement the qualitative data from interviews and questionnaires and provide a more comprehensive picture of the field situation.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study was conducted in several stages. The first stage involved distributing questionnaires to parents in the 16 elementary schools selected as research sites. The questionnaires were distributed directly, with the involvement of teachers and school staff, to facilitate the parents' completion of the questionnaires. Once the questionnaires were filled out, the collected data were verified and analyzed to identify spending patterns faced by parents in supporting their children's education.

The second stage involved in-depth interviews with school principals, teachers, and education office officials. Interviews were conducted in person using a prepared interview guide. Each interview lasted 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted face-to-face at the schools or the education office. The interview results were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The third stage was participatory observation conducted by the researchers in several schools selected as research sites. These observations aimed to complement the data from interviews and questionnaires and to provide a visual representation of the real conditions in the schools that might not be revealed through interviews or questionnaires. Detailed notes were taken during the observations, including photographs for visual analysis.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaires, interviews, and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. This technique was employed to identify key themes emerging from the data, such as challenges in implementing the BOS and PIP policies, additional expenses that parents must bear, and disparities in educational funding. Data from the questionnaires were analyzed by grouping responses based on spending patterns and demographic differences, such as income level and the number of children. The interviews and observation data were analyzed qualitatively to understand how the BOS and PIP policies were implemented in the field and the challenges schools face in achieving national educational standards.

The interview data were coded to identify common patterns in the perceptions of school principals, teachers, and government officials regarding the effectiveness of the fee-free education policy. Once the main themes were identified, the data from various sources were compared and verified using triangulation. This technique was employed to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data collected from multiple sources. Triangulation was performed by comparing the results of the questionnaires, interviews, and observations and matching them with secondary data, such as government reports on implementing the BOS and PIP policies in Bantul District.

Result and Discussion

Education for All can be achieved if there are funds to provide education, especially in elementary school. The government of Indonesia has provided funds for supporting education, and it is calculated by a needs-based approach by determining the number of students in each geographical area (Wicaksono, 2022). In Indonesia, there are two ways of funding: directly to the school and to students or households (Wicaksono, 2022) (Park & Savelyeva, 2022). The funds are transferred to the school directly. They will facilitate education in the school, such as books, school stationery for teachers to teach, public facilities for teachers, staff, and students, and Indonesian events such as Independence Day and religious celebrations. The second one is the fund that the students receive by using a card that has some valuable money; every level of education will have a different amount of money that the government gives to them according to the needs of each level (Wicaksono, 2022), the pursue of the card is to support the parents in buying school appliances for their children. These two ways of supporting education in Indonesia are helping the country to reach EFA, but is it true that the student can get free education from all of the funding that the government of Indonesia has given? Below are the data we get from the school and the government.

The Funds from the Government

The government of Indonesia is supporting the global movement of EFA. Indonesia supports the movement by making a policy about free education using BOS (School Operational Funds). BOS is distributed to all the schools in Indonesia. Every place has a different amount of BOS funds; it is according to the needs and wealth of each district and region; each district will have a different amount according to the counting of effort, adequacy, and progressivity (Wicaksono, 2022) (Baker et al., 2020). According to Neraca Pendidikan (2021) and the Education Ministry of Indonesia, Kabupaten Bantul receives Rp. 900,000 per student in a school is based on the national budget for education, and then the regional budget for education gives Rp. 450,000,- until Rp. 550,000 per student, depending on the school and the student number usual. From the same data, in Bantul, 41.306 students in elementary school receive annual private funds using a KIP (Kartu Indonesia Pintar/Indonesian Smart Card). Each student at the elementary level receives Rp. 400,000,- per student per year. The private fund card for each student is only given to some but to the ones who need help and are categorized as poor and needy in the region. If we can see from the table, below is the table for the school funding in Bantul region, Yogyakarta, Indonesia:

Table 1. For the School Funding in the Bantul Region

| National Budget | Regional Budget | KIP |
|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Rp. 900,000,-/ student | Rp. 500,000,-/student | Rp. 400,000/student |

*KIP is not counted for all the students. *Regional budget is the average range amount of the fund.

The Actual Fund

Bantul Regency is one region in Yogyakarta that announced all school is child-friendly school there; the region also announced they prepared funds for education not only from the national budget but also from the regional budget they have to support the education system and school operational in the region since 2009, the amount of money that the region gives is helping the student to have good facilities in the school (Kompas, 2009). Therefore, the research is held in Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta. Sixteen schools are being researched, private and public schools.

The difference between both schools is that private schools will get national and regional funding, and they need to provide salaries for their teachers, whereas, for public schools, the teachers contracted by the country will be given by the government itself. Hence, the budget they get focuses on the school facilities, eight national education standards, and some staff. From the research, the questions about the school fund are according to the eight national education standards: content standard, process standard, facilities, scoring, managing, funding, staff and teachers, and output (Khoiriyah et al., 2023). All the standards are believed to be the foundation for improving the quality of education in Indonesia (Raharjo, 2014). From the eight standards, the amount of money given to the school is around Rp. 1,400,000,- per student annually.

Every school manages the money differently; the total amount of the fund is also different, depending on the total of students in each school. A school we visited has only 60 students; therefore, the school will only receive Rp. 84,000,000,- per year, divided into twelve months; per month, they receive Rp. 7,000,000,- (it is around USD 467/month). This amount of money must be used to provide the eight standards the government encourages the school to give them. This money must be divided into 60 students, some teachers' and staff's salaries, and school facilities. If we focus only on the students, each student will only have Rp. 116,700,-. (around USD 7). Each student must have a chair, table, and school facilities such as a marker, board, chalk, learning media, etc.

There are eight medium schools, with 80-120 students, which is even bigger, and the school receives Rp. 112,000,000,- until Rp. 168,000,000,- (USD 7467 – USD 11200); if we count it monthly, the medium school receives Rp. 9,333,000 until Rp. 14,000,000,- (USD 622 – USD 933). The rest are big schools with more budget as they have around 140 – 200 students. Thus, they receive around Rp. 196,000,000,- until Rp. 280,000,000,- (USD 13000 – USD 18600) per year. Accordingly, each month, the big school receives Rp. 16,333,000,- until Rp. 23,333,000 (USD 1088 – USD 1555). Amount of funds the schools most of the time, the big school has no problem in doing the budget. Still, small schools have many problems and even need to put away the other standards to run the school and provide more facilities for the children; this will come up in the problem section.

The funds that the government of Indonesia gives are not only given to the school but also to the student's card, which each student receives Rp. 400,000,- (USD 26) for elementary students annually. We also asked some parents need to support the children to go to school, for children to go to school they need to be provided for their physical

needs (Hale, Hannum, & Espelage, 2010); this is the most important thing that will help the student to be able to go to school, those physical needs that are coming up in the questionnaires are food, school uniform, shoes, transportation. Other than physical needs, the children also need some school supplies and additional knowledge or therapy if they have special needs, such as school appliances, therapy or additional tuition, books, etc. These questionnaires are given to 600 parents. Below is the average amount of money the student spends each month or year in every school.

Table 2. The average amount of money the Student Spends each Month or Year in Every School

| Informa tion School Name | Yearly | | | | Monthly | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | Unifor m | Shoes | School applian ces | Books | Food | Therap y/ Tuition | Transport ation | Others |
| SDN SK | Rp307, 471 | Rp189, 074 | Rp208, 162 | Rp176, 290 | Rp462, 324 | Rp302, 800 | Rp198,583 | Rp244,3 75 |
| SDN BD | Rp462, 402 | Rp211, 889 | Rp202, 000 | Rp154, 022 | Rp109, 467 | Rp913, 889 | Rp128,267 | Rp289,0 63 |
| SD BM | Rp647, 500 | Rp377, 778 | Rp300. 333 | Rp317, 619 | Rp207, 667 | Rp714, 440 | Rp512,308 | Rp2,141, 000 |
| SDN BT | Rp510, 486 | Rp217, 643 | Rp285, 308 | Rp268, 135 | Rp293, 448 | Rp653, 328 | Rp154,286 | Rp456,2 59 |
| SDN PY | Rp284, 813 | Rp193, 841 | Rp196, 108 | Rp179, 983 | Rp348, 879 | Rp288, 912 | Rp176,400 | Rp246,0 00 |
| SDN KP | Rp365, 158 | Rp238, 726 | Rp298, 874 | Rp238, 589 | Rp291, 316 | Rp534, 453 | Rp106,053 | Rp66,63 2 |
| SDN BJ | Rp.342, 250 | Rp202, 750 | Rp210, 000 | Rp198, 750 | Rp366, 900 | Rp275, 500 | Rp108,500 | Rp154,0 00 |
| SDN BN | Rp271, 898 | Rp226, 700 | Rp178, 584 | Rp122, 900 | Rp361, 560 | Rp217, 800 | Rp 74,800 | Rp 115,920 |
| SDN TG | Rp 384,809 | Rp223, 511 | Rp247, 043 | Rp200, 064 | Rp 425,149 | Rp 338,277 | Rp 88,404 | Rp 177,191 |
| SDN NG | Rp 324,058 | Rp205, 435 | Rp194, 217 | Rp134, 384 | Rp 277,855 | Rp 266,333 | Rp 72,101 | Rp 83,188 |
| SDN KD | Rp 359,891 | Rp184, 870 | Rp250, 391 | Rp168, 804 | Rp 352,261 | Rp 246,196 | Rp 50,261 | Rp 48,222 |
| SDN JB | Rp 403,149 | Rp226, 015 | Rp195, 746 | Rp232, 761 | Rp 313,896 | Rp 323,791 | Rp 76,343 | Rp 59,051 |
| SDN GM | Rp 449,333 | Rp293, 333 | Rp262, 833 | Rp158, 000 | Rp 395,100 | Rp 361,000 | Rp 212,333 | Rp 123,667 |
| SDN JS | Rp 451,080 | Rp202, 600 | Rp240, 160 | Rp210, 239 | Rp313, 060 | Rp 307,143 | Rp 240,160 | Rp 447,842 |
| SDN PM | Rp 407,959 | Rp273, 200 | Rp263, 100 | Rp201, 196 | Rp330, 860 | Rp 353,980 | Rp 178,452 | Rp 336,879 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|------------|---------|
| SDN PN | Rp418, | Rp181, | Rp248, | Rp207, | Rp385, | Rp | Rp 235,273 | Rp |
| | 333 | 875 | 265 | 463 | 294 | 326,250 | | 253,455 |

The data above shows us how the parents' funds are more than the money the student receives from the government. This also indicates that the money the parents need to give the children to support their education is costly. The card the student gets is only for some students; it is for the family that is categorized as disadvantaged, which means the disadvantaged get less than 50% of the amount they need to pay to support their children's pursuit of education.

Discussion

When we see the data on the fields, it shows us how the school manages the funds from BOS that can help them to provide the school's needs to achieve a good outcome from the process they have in facilitating the whole process by using the funds from the government. The fund is enough if there are more than 100 students in a school. It helps the school provide the best facilities. If it has fewer than 100 students, it's difficult for the school to maintain the funds well and achieve the eight national education standards. The schools truly get the amount that the government promises to give from the data we get. In the process of doing it according to standard, it is quite hard, for example, some schools have a small amount of money due to the small total of students they have, they might need more money to give facilities, to make a good outcome from the school and to provide good learning media for the students, they also need more money in getting a person to give more knowledge to the teachers, to provide the good qualities of staffs and teachers. In some medium schools, the school may achieve all the standards, but for the staff and teachers' development, they can't use the government funds as this is quite limited. Therefore, they use the government facilities only to develop teachers and staff.

The funds are given to the big schools, and it is enough for them to fulfill the eight national education standards, and it can provide most of them. On the field, another problem of Dana BOS is also cannot be used for the school building renovation as it has another fund from the government; the problem on the field is every time the school gives a proposal for school renovation, years are not answered, and they need to use dana BOS by taking from another fund plan for the renovation. The consequence is that the data used for the school fund could be more accurate. Another problem is that the government's funding shares with KIP are not truly enough for the st, especially for some with needle needs who need therapy or other tuition they need to attend—the amount of Rp. 400,000,- per student annually is not enough if we compare it to the actual amount the parents spend to support their children's education. Therefore, the poor and needy still need to gain more money to help their children's education.

Conclusion

In Indonesia, BOS provides facilities and funding for learning support, from admitting a new student to the final assessment or examination (Hidayat & Suryono, 2014)

(Maria, 2021). Indonesia made a constitution to support EFA in having fee-free education, using BOS, and 20% of the government's income to be allocated to education. The school will use the funds to help them provide the best education for all students in the education system. BOS is also one way Indwayssia pursues EFA, purposive to make making achievable, at least at the primary level. In the field, the data shows that BOS helps some schools and some do not. This happens because the number of students affects the amount of funds they receive, and the amount of funds will affect how much they need to spend on the facilities.

The more facilities, the more money they need. On the other hand, the small school (with students less than 100) will not be able to achieve more facilities than the big school. They can run the school with the funds they receive, but they need more facilities for the students with a small amount of funds as the total of students is also small. The medium school (with a total of students around 100-120) can provide some facilities and activities outside of academic activities. Still, they need more time to give the training to teachers outside of government training and development. Overall, the students can follow some activities that they are interested in. In the big school (with a total of students more than 120), the students have facilities for activities outside academic learning, and the teachers have the facilities to develop their teaching skills outside the government program; the school media, such as books, are also provided well for all the students in the big school.

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