

Implementation of Local Government Policy on the Provision of Free Education in Manokwari Regency, West Papua Province

Hanas Warpur¹, Nurlinah¹, Suhardiman Syamsu¹

¹Government Science, Hasanuddin University

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Abstract

Introduction: This study examines the implementation of the local government's free education policy in Manokwari Regency, West Papua Province, focusing on communication, resources, implementer disposition, bureaucratic structure, and the factors influencing policy implementation. The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, using interviews, observation, and document analysis involving government officials, school principals, legislators, academics, and parents. The findings reveal that the policy, established through Regent Regulation No. 87 of 2025 and supported by Regional Regulation No. 8 of 2025, has received political and institutional support. Policy implementation is facilitated by government funding, school-level socialization, and the commitment of educational institutions. However, several challenges remain. Communication concerning the scope of free education, particularly in private schools, is not yet fully consistent. Limited operational funding, delayed payments for honorary teachers, and reported parental contributions indicate gaps between policy objectives and implementation practices. Furthermore, coordination concerning institutional authority, financing responsibilities, and complaint mechanisms requires strengthening. The study concludes that the implementation of free education in Manokwari has established an important foundation for expanding educational access, but its effectiveness depends on clearer policy communication, adequate resource allocation, stronger institutional coordination, and consistent monitoring to ensure that educational costs do not become a barrier for students.

Keywords: Free Education Policy; Policy Implementation; Local Government; Educational Access; Manokwari Regency; Edwards III Framework.

1 Introduction

Education is a fundamental instrument for human development, social mobility, and the improvement of community welfare (Romlah et al., 2023; Mitra, 2022; Varghese et al., 2023). Beyond its role in transferring knowledge and skills, education represents a basic right that enables individuals to develop their potential, improve their quality of life, and participate in national development (Romlah et al., 2023; Pang & Chan, 2022). In Indonesia, the provision of education is constitutionally guaranteed under Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution, which establishes the right of every citizen to education and the responsibility of the state to finance basic education. The implementation of educational policies therefore constitutes an essential dimension of public service delivery and government accountability (Prøitz et al., 2023; Mitra, 2022). Contemporary perspectives on public policy emphasize that governmental decisions must be translated into institutional arrangements and practical implementation processes to achieve their intended objectives (Prøitz et al., 2023; Arifa et al., 2025).

Within the Indonesian decentralization framework, local governments play a strategic role in ensuring equitable access to educational services (Sofiani et al., 2024; Arifa et al., 2025). Law No. 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government regulates the distribution of governmental responsibilities, including authority over educational affairs. Furthermore, Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System establishes the government's obligation to provide educational opportunities and support compulsory education. These legal provisions provide the foundation for free education policies intended to reduce financial barriers, improve participation, and strengthen educational equity (Romlah et al., 2023; Fadhil & Sabic-El-Rayess, 2021). However, the effectiveness of such policies depends not only on their regulatory foundations but also on the availability of resources, administrative

coordination, and the capacity of implementing institutions (Sa'adih et al., 2022; Heriyadi et al., 2025; Prøitz et al., 2023).

The implementation of free education remains particularly relevant in regions characterized by geographical diversity, socioeconomic disparities, and unequal access to public services (Heriyadi et al., 2025; Varghese et al., 2023). Previous studies have demonstrated that local educational policies require attention to institutional capacity and the practical experiences of their beneficiaries (Romlah et al., 2023; Zahroh, 2025). Ahmad and Weyai (2021), examining the implementation of free education at SMP Negeri 4 Biak Timur, highlighted the importance of examining policy implementation within specific local educational contexts. Similarly, Tumundo et al. (2023) investigated the implementation of regional government policies concerning free education in North Minahasa Regency, demonstrating the relevance of local government arrangements in the delivery of educational services. Sanda and Gistituati (2023) also examined the implementation of a free education program in Padangsidimpuan City, providing a comparative basis for understanding the implementation of educational financing policies at the regional level. Related studies have also examined the implementation of free education in other Indonesian regions, including Badung Regency, South Tangerang City, North Sulawesi, and Gowa Regency (Mertha et al., 2022; Sa'adih et al., 2022; Tuilan et al., 2024; Hamzah et al., 2021).

In Manokwari Regency, West Papua, the implementation of free education has gained particular importance through Regional Regulation of the Regent of Manokwari No. 87 of 2025 concerning the Implementation of Free Education. The policy is intended to reduce educational expenses for students and their families through full educational financing, partial financing assistance, and educational scholarships. Its implementation also involves the PINTAR program, school equipment assistance, and a reimbursement mechanism for eligible educational expenses. Nevertheless, the policy raises important implementation questions, particularly concerning the distribution of benefits between public and private schools, the availability of local government funding, and the continuation of parental contributions through school committees. These circumstances indicate a potential gap between formal policy commitments and the actual experiences of educational service recipients (Romlah et al., 2023; Zahroh, 2025; Sari & As'ari, 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, policy implementation is influenced by four interconnected dimensions: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure (Sa'adih et al., 2022; Andiarsa et al., 2023; Habsana et al., 2026). Communication concerns the clarity and consistency of policy information, while resources encompass personnel, funding, authority, and supporting facilities. Disposition refers to the commitment and willingness of policy implementers, whereas bureaucratic structure concerns institutional responsibilities, standard operating procedures, and coordination mechanisms. This framework provides an analytical foundation for examining how local governments translate policy provisions into operational practices (Nursilawati et al., 2026; Habsana et al., 2026; Prøitz et al., 2023).

Although previous studies have examined free education policies in several Indonesian regions, empirical analysis specifically addressing the implementation of Regent Regulation No. 87 of 2025 in Manokwari remains limited in the materials reviewed. This study addresses that gap by examining the implementation of the regional government's free education policy through the four dimensions proposed by Edwards III. Specifically, it investigates how communication, resources, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structure influence the delivery of free educational services in Manokwari Regency. The study is expected to contribute to public policy implementation literature while providing practical insights for strengthening equitable, accountable, and accessible educational services at the local government level.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the implementation of the local government's free education policy in Manokwari Regency, West Papua Province. The qualitative approach was selected to describe the implementation process, institutional practices, and relationships among the activities involved in delivering free education. The study focused on understanding how the policy was implemented by the Manokwari Regency Education Office and related stakeholders, with particular attention to the conditions and factors influencing its implementation. The descriptive orientation enabled the researcher to examine the phenomenon based on information obtained from the field rather than relying solely on theoretical assumptions.

Research Location and Duration

The research was conducted in Manokwari Regency, West Papua Province, with the primary focus on the implementation of free education through the Manokwari Regency Education Office. Data collection also involved several related institutions and stakeholders, including the Regent of Manokwari, the Manokwari Regency Regional People's Representative Council (DPRK), the Education Office, public and private schools, academics from the Institute of Law and Technology for Papua Development (IHTP) in Manokwari, and parents of students. These locations and participants were selected because they were considered relevant to obtaining information concerning the implementation of the free education policy. The research document describes a research period of three months and also refers to a one-month period for ensuring the accuracy of the data collected.

Research Informants

Informants were selected purposively based on their roles, knowledge, and involvement in the implementation of free education in Manokwari Regency. The selection was not based on random sampling but on the relevance of each informant to the research objectives. The informants consisted of the Regent of Manokwari, the Deputy Chairperson of the Manokwari Regency DPRK, the Head of the Manokwari Regency Education Office, school principals, representatives of the Papua Barat Provincial Parliament, members of the Regional Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia (DPD RI), academics from IHTP Manokwari, and parents or guardians of students. Their perspectives were considered relevant for examining policy implementation from governmental, educational, academic, and community perspectives.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted directly in the field to examine the services provided by the Manokwari Regency Education Office and the implementation of free education-related activities. The observation focused on the actual conditions and practices encountered during the research. Interviews were conducted directly with informants who had relevant knowledge and involvement in the research subject. This technique was used to obtain information about emerging issues, institutional practices, and the experiences of stakeholders in implementing the free education policy. During the interviews, the researcher listened to the informants' explanations and recorded relevant information for further examination. Documentation was used to support the field data through written records, documents, and photographs related to the research object. This technique also served to document the researcher's interactions with relevant informants and collect supporting information concerning the implementation of free education in Manokwari Regency.

Data Sources

This study utilized primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from interviews and information provided by informants concerning the services and implementation of free education at the Manokwari Regency Education Office. These data were subsequently processed by the researcher to support the analysis and formulation of conclusions.

Secondary data were obtained from existing sources, including written documents, publications, articles, legislation, and other legal materials relevant to the implementation of education policy in Manokwari Regency. These sources served as supporting materials for examining the institutional and regulatory context of the research.

Research Focus

The research focused on the implementation of the Manokwari Regency Government's free education policy, particularly its translation into practice by the Education Office and educational institutions. The analytical focus was organized around four dimensions of policy implementation based on George C. Edwards III's framework, namely communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Communication concerned policy transmission, socialization to schools, teachers, parents, and students, as well as the clarity and consistency of information regarding educational rights and financing. Resources covered budget availability, implementing personnel, educational facilities and infrastructure, student and school data, and budget distribution and utilization mechanisms. Disposition examined the commitment of local government and education officials, implementers' understanding of policy objectives, compliance with policy provisions, and schools' responsibility to provide educational services without charges that contradict the policy. Bureaucratic structure focused on the division of

authority, implementation procedures, coordination among organizational units, supervision and evaluation, and reporting and accountability mechanisms. The study also considered the accountability of public services provided by the Manokwari Regency Education Office, particularly in relation to administrative procedures, service requirements, service time, costs, personnel, facilities, information accessibility, complaint mechanisms, supervision, and evaluation.

3. Results

Table 1. Research informants

Code	Informant	Data collection	Date
I-1	Regent of Manokwari	In-depth interview	10 and 12 Sep 2026
I-2	Head of the Manokwari Regency Education Office	In-depth interview	17 Sep 2026
I-3	Principal, public elementary school (SD-1)	In-depth interview	10 and 14 Sep 2026
I-4	Principal, private senior high school (SMA-P)	In-depth interview	14 Sep 2026
I-5	Principal, public junior high school (SMP-A)	Telephone (declined interview)	14 Sep 2026
I-6	Member of the Regional Representative Council (DPD RI), West Papua constituency	In-depth interview	15 Sep 2026
I-7	Member of the West Papua Provincial People's Representative Council	In-depth interview	16 Sep 2026
I-8	Deputy Speaker, Manokwari Regency People's Representative Council (DPRK)	In-depth interview	17 Sep 2026
I-9	Parents of students (several, anonymous)	Informal interviews	13 Sep 2026
I-10	Resident of Waryori Village, Masni District	Informal interview	Sep 2026
FGD-1 to FGD-5	University leaders and lecturers, IHTP Papua	Focus group discussion	Sep 2026

Note: School names are replaced with codes to protect informants and schools identified through anonymous accounts.

Policy design and context

The Regent introduced the free education policy through Regent Regulation (Perbup) No. 87 of 2025 on the Provision of Free Education. The Regent and the DPRK subsequently enacted Regional Regulation (Perda) No. 8 of 2025 to give the policy a stronger legal footing. Branded as the PINTAR Manokwari programme, the policy responds to recurring public complaints about the rising cost of schooling at each enrolment period. It came into full effect in July 2026 and, according to the Regent, applies to every school regardless of status:

"If it applies only to public schools and not to private schools, that is discrimination. So there will be no charges at new student admission. It applies to all students." (I-1, interview, 10 September 2026)

The policy covers 207 schools spread across the regency's nine districts, comprising 137 elementary schools (SD), 45 junior high schools (SMP) and 25 senior high and vocational schools (SMA/SMK). It is designed to benefit Indigenous Papuan (Orang Asli Papua, OAP) and non-OAP students equally. Financing combines five streams: the Special Autonomy (Otsus) Fund for OAP students; the General Allocation Fund (DAU) for non-OAP students; national School Operational Assistance (BOS) for school facilities; the regional budget (APBD), through the PINTAR programme, for uniforms and for scholarships for students from poor households; and a new Manokwari Regional School Operational Assistance (BOSDAMA) intended to complement national BOS. The DPRK approved Rp19 billion for the Education Office to implement the programme. Table 2 summarises the main provisions, and Figure 1 depicts the funding architecture together with the funding gaps reported during fieldwork.

Table 2. Main provisions of the free education policy in Manokwari Regency

Component	Provision	Source
Legal basis	Perbup 87/2025; Perda 8/2025; technical guidelines; Education Office SOP (Perbup 93/2022)	I-1, I-2, I-8
Coverage	SD, SMP and SMA/SMK, public and private: 137 SD, 45 SMP, 25 SMA/SMK	I-1
Target group	All students, OAP and non-OAP	I-1
Exempted costs	School fees, tuition (SPP), registration fees and all other levies	I-1
In-kind support	Uniforms for new students (four sets for SD and SMA, five for SMK)	I-1, I-3, I-4
School committee levies	Routine monthly levies prohibited; fundraising for specific activities allowed by mutual agreement	I-1
Operational funding	BOSDAMA, complementing national BOS	I-1
Funding sources	Otsus (OAP students); DAU (non-OAP students); national BOS (facilities); APBD/PINTAR (uniforms, scholarships)	I-1
Budget	Rp19 billion approved by the DPRK	I-8
Complaint mechanism	Public complaint service through the Education Office (Perda 8/2025, Art. 12)	Document
Prohibitions	Levies without parental consent; binding or coercive levies, gratuities or donations (Art. 13)	Document
Sanctions	Verbal or written warning; temporary or permanent removal from position; suspension or termination of education funding; criminal sanctions for misuse of funds (Art. 18)	Document

Analysis of Perda 8/2025 revealed an important feature of its prohibition clause. Article 13(1) applies only to educators, education personnel and school committees in schools organised by the Regional Government. Point (a) prohibits levies made without the consent of parents or guardians, and point (b) prohibits levies, gratuities or donations that are binding and coercive. Combined with the Regent's own exception for committee fundraising based on mutual agreement, these provisions have two consequences. First, the prohibition does not explicitly extend to private schools, even though the Regent states that the policy covers them. Second, public schools may still collect payments as long as those payments are presented as agreed with parents.

In its design, the Manokwari policy is among the more ambitious local free education initiatives. It extends fee exemptions beyond the nine-year basic education mandate to senior secondary level and, at least in its political framing, to private schools. The latter is in line with Article 31(2) of the 1945 Constitution, which obliges the government to finance basic education, and with Constitutional Court Decision No. 3/PUU-XXII/2024 of 27 May 2025. That decision interpreted the phrase "without charging fees" in Article 34(2) of Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System as obliging central and regional governments to guarantee fee-free basic education in both public and private schools (Mahkamah Konstitusi, 2025). The Perda, however, does not fully carry this intention into its operative provisions. Its prohibition clause is confined to government-run schools, and its test of parental consent departs from the national distinction between levies (*pungutan*) and donations (*sumbangan*). Under Minister of Education and Culture Regulation (Permendikbud) No. 44 of 2012, a levy is a mandatory, binding payment whose amount and timing are fixed, whereas a donation is voluntary, non-binding and not fixed in amount or timing. Permendikbud No. 75 of 2016 on School Committees likewise allows committees to raise donations but not levies. Because the Perda makes consent, rather than the nature of the payment, the decisive test, it allows payments that are fixed in amount and collected monthly, which are levies in the national sense, to be treated as lawful once parents have agreed to them in a meeting. This design gap is central to understanding the implementation findings below.

Implementation of the free education policy

This section examines implementation through Edwards III's (1980) four variables. Table 5 at the end of the section summarises the findings for each variable and indicator.

Communication

Transmission

The Head of the Education Office stated that the policy had been communicated to all school levels, from SD to SMA/SMK, and socialised to schools and the public. An integrity pact prepared by the Education Office and signed by schools across the regency reinforced this socialisation (Figure 2). The principal of SD-1 confirmed this, and the DPRK reported that the Education Office had informed it of the tiered socialisation. Principals then passed the policy on to parents. SMA-P held a meeting with the parents of its 120 new students for the 2026/2027 academic year, and parents at other schools reported being gathered so that the Perda and Perbup could be explained to them. In terms of transmission, the policy therefore reached implementers and target groups through formal channels.

Figure 1. Integrity pact prepared by the Manokwari Regency Education Office for all schools.



Source: fieldwork documentation (2026).

Clarity

The content of the message was not clearly understood. The central ambiguity concerned what exactly was free. The principal of SMA-P supported the policy but questioned its substance:

“We strongly support the free education programme, but as a school we question what exactly is supposed to be free. What is free now is registration at enrolment and school uniforms: four sets for SMA and five for SMK. Those are the only two things we know to be free. For other costs, the government, in this case the Education Office, has given us private schools no explanation.” (I-4, interview, 14 September 2026)

He added that the public takes “free” to mean that everything at school is free, whereas in practice the regulation exempts only enrolment fees and uniforms. FGD participants raised similar concerns. Private schools had not yet received certainty about their position under the policy (FGD-3), and it was unclear whether schools outside the regular structure were covered, namely madrasahs under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, equivalency programmes, full-day schools, special-needs schools (SLB) and non-formal learning groups (FGD-4). FGD-3 warned that such uncertainty could escalate into social conflict, including school blockades (*palang sekolah*), a form of protest in which community members close school premises, and recommended further socialisation of the legal products to schools and communities.

Consistency

Messages differed along the implementation chain. The Regent stressed that the policy applies equally to public and private schools. The Head of the Education Office, by contrast, stated that private schools may still collect fees on the basis of agreement:

“In public schools there are indeed no longer any levies whatsoever on parents; they are required to be completely free of charge. Private schools, on the other hand, still collect fees, because Perbup 87/2025 takes into account agreements between the private school, the school committee and parents on additional contributions.” (I-2, interview, 17 September 2026)

The two actors also differed on who benefits. The Regent described the policy as covering all students, whereas the Education Office stated that the 2026 beneficiaries were first-year students only: grade 1 of SD, grade VII of SMP and grade X of SMA/SMK. The Office said students in other grades were already exempt from fees through BOS, but

did not explain the basis for this arrangement. The principal of SMA-P confirmed that BOSDAMA was provided only for grade X students, leaving open who would support students in grades XI and XII.

Edwards III (1980) argues that implementation requires orders that are not only transmitted but also clear and consistent; unclear or contradictory directives widen implementers' discretion and allow them to interpret the policy according to their own interests or constraints. The Manokwari case fits this pattern. Transmission was adequate, yet the central term of the policy remained undefined, and the Regent and the Education Office sent divergent messages about private schools and eligible grades. Matland's (1995) ambiguity–conflict model helps explain the consequences. The policy combines low conflict, since every informant supported it, with high ambiguity about its means and scope. Under these conditions implementation becomes experimental: outcomes depend largely on local contextual conditions and on the resources available to actors at the point of delivery. This explains why schools operating under the same regulation produced different outcomes, from full compliance at SD-1 to regular monthly contributions at SMA-P. It also suggests that the gap between the political label of “free education” and the narrower legal content of the instrument is itself a source of implementation problems, because it raises public expectations that schools cannot meet with the resources provided.

Resources

Financial resources

On paper, the policy is supported by several funding streams and a Rp19 billion allocation. At school level, however, these resources did not cover operational needs, and the gap was most acute for honorary teachers. At SMA-P, honorary teachers had not been paid for six months at the time of the interview. To address this, the school convened parents and introduced what it calls a diaconal or committee fund, to which parents agreed to contribute Rp100,000 per student per month. Parents at other schools gave similar accounts, adding that levies also paid for facility repairs and that the Education Office had not reimbursed them:

“We parents were gathered by the school to have the Perda and Perbup on free education explained to us. But because of the school's operational needs, we were also told there would be charges to parents to repair the students' toilets, fix the broken fence and pay the honorary teachers.” (I-9, interview, 13 September 2026)

When asked whether the Education Office had reimbursed these payments, the parent answered that it had not. Disbursement was also slow. The Deputy Speaker of the DPRK described cases in which students moving from SD to SMP continued to wear their elementary school uniforms for more than three months because uniform funds had not been disbursed. He urged the Education Office to speed up disbursement and to commission local tailors rather than suppliers outside Manokwari, so that the programme would also support the local economy.

Human Resources

Table 3 summarises the staffing data obtained from the Education Office and the two schools that agreed to be interviewed.

Table 3. Teacher workforce indicators

Level	Indicator	Figure	Source
Regency	Educators and education personnel (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education data)	4,641	I-2
Regency	Civil-servant (PNS) and PPPK teachers	± 2,451	I-2
Regency	Regional honorary teachers (Honda) appointed by Regent's decree	371	I-2
SD-1	Students	698	I-3
SD-1	Civil-servant teachers (all other teachers are honorary)	7	I-3
SMA-P	Total personnel	32	I-4
SMA-P	Civil-servant teachers / Honda teachers / administrative staff	13 / 11 / 5	I-4
SMA-P	Certified teachers	7	I-4
SMA-P	New students, 2026/2027	120	I-4

Note: Regency-level figures come from different datasets and are not directly comparable. PPPK = government employees with work agreements.

Although the regency-level datasets cannot be compared directly, the gap between them suggests that a large share of the education workforce is employed outside both the civil service and the Honda scheme. School-level data illustrate this dependence. SD-1 has 698 students but only seven civil-servant teachers, roughly one for every 100 students; certified honorary teachers, Honda teachers and school-appointed honorary teachers carry the rest of the teaching load. At SMA-P, 13 of 32 personnel are civil servants and 11 are Honda teachers, and the school pays the remainder itself. Pay depends on certification status. The government pays certified teachers, whereas non-certified honorary teachers are paid either from BOS (SD-1) or directly by the school (SMA-P), which also gives them a transport allowance.

Informants outside the bureaucracy regarded this as the core resource problem of the policy. FGD-1 argued that the policy eases costs for families while leaving honorary teachers' welfare unguaranteed, and asked who would pay any honorary teachers that schools recruit. The DPD RI member (I-6) pointed to schools' dependence on honorary teachers resulting from the shortage of civil-servant (ASN) teachers. He stressed that free education must be accompanied by an adequate financing scheme so that schools can pay non-ASN teachers, and noted that complex certification procedures burden teachers. The Deputy Speaker of the DPRK stated that the central government prohibits the regency from recruiting new honorary teachers and that schools must report any teacher they hire to the Education Office. He also warned against admitting students beyond capacity:

"To address the problem, schools must admit students in line with the number of teachers and the capacity of their classrooms. Do not accept more students than the teachers and classrooms can handle, because that is where the burden on schools comes from." (I-8, interview, 17 September 2026)

Information Resources

The Regent instructed the Education Office to collect data on all schools, including students, facilities and teachers, in preparation for July 2026. The DPD RI member emphasised the need for data synchronisation so that funds reach the right recipients, and the DPRK noted that recipient data must match actual enrolment and that the allocation would be adjusted to the number of enrolled students and the regency's fiscal capacity.

The resource findings reveal the core mechanism behind the persistence of levies. The policy abolished fees but did not replace the revenue those fees had financed, chiefly the pay of non-civil-servant teachers and routine facility maintenance. Because BOSDAMA was limited to first-year students and national BOS is limited in amount and governed by use restrictions, the cost of honorary teachers was not eliminated but shifted back to parents under a new label. Edwards III (1980) notes that without adequate staff and funds, even a clearly communicated policy cannot be carried out. In Manokwari the resource deficit is compounded by a structural constraint. Law No. 20 of 2023 on the State Civil Apparatus prohibits government agencies from appointing new non-civil-servant personnel, and the DPRK reported that the regency is therefore barred from recruiting honorary teachers. Yet with roughly one civil-servant teacher per 100 students at SD-1, schools cannot function without them. The result is a regulatory bind in which schools cannot formally hire honorary teachers, the regency cannot formally pay them, and parents end up financing them informally. A free education policy whose unit cost does not include these teachers is therefore likely to reproduce levies, however strictly they are prohibited.

Disposition

Commitment at the top

The Regent showed strong commitment to the policy and to its inclusive design:

"As the technical agency running the programme, the Education Office has been instructed to register all schools, including students, facilities and teachers at every level, so that they are included in the free education scheme and implementation in July 2026 faces no obstacles. This programme is not only for Indigenous Papuan students. I said limiting it that way was not acceptable, because in education everyone has the same rights." (I-1, interview, 12 September 2026)

The DPRK showed similar support. It enacted the Perda, approved the budget and urged the Education Office to disburse funds without delay.

The Education Office: formal commitment and reliance on complaints

The Education Office supported the policy formally, but its assessment of compliance depended on whether complaints were received:

“If any parent is charged, the Office will firmly evaluate the school, and public schools in particular will face strict action as regulated in the Perda. But so far the Office has not received any complaints from the public.” (I-2, interview, 17 September 2026)

When presented with the field findings, the Head of the Education Office reiterated that SD and SMP schools collected no levies and that all schools are prohibited from collecting them.

School principals: support combined with adaptive practices

The principal of SD-1 reported full compliance and said that the school committee no longer collects contributions: “At our school we do not charge any student anything. From registration to providing uniforms, everything has been funded by the government through the Regent’s policy.” (I-3, interview, 10 September 2026)

The principal of SMA-P also supported the policy but described the monthly contribution as a parents’ initiative rather than a school demand. The school applies it as a cross-subsidy: orphans and children of teachers from the school foundation (YPK) are exempt, and where two siblings are enrolled only one pays. He presented this arrangement as a way to keep serving students despite regulatory gaps:

“What we question is the regulation, because it is unlike others. For us, what comes first is serving the young generation of Papua through our school. There is a regulation supporting free education, but our school still faces many limitations. The principle of educating children for their future remains our priority.” (I-4, interview, 14 September 2026)

The principal of SMP-A, a leading public junior high school with more than 1,000 students, declined to take part without giving a reason: “Please contact another school that can provide information for your research” (I-5, telephone, 14 September 2026). SMP-A was among the schools at which parents reported levies.

Levies in practice

Although the Education Office maintained that no levies were being collected, informal interviews with parents in randomly selected schools found that levies persisted across school levels and across public and private schools (Table 4). Several parents asked not to be named because their children were still enrolled at the schools concerned.

Table 4. Levies reported during fieldwork

School	Level and status	Area	Reported amount	Stated purpose or basis	Source
SD-2	Public elementary	Urban Manokwari	Rp20,000 per student	Not specified	I-9
SMP-A, SMP-B and other public junior high schools	Public junior high	Urban Manokwari	Around Rp50,000 per student (varies)	Not specified	I-9
SMA-P	Private senior high	Urban Manokwari	Rp50,000 per student (parents); Rp100,000 per month (principal)	Honorary teachers’ pay; “diaconal/committee fund” agreed with parents	I-9, I-4
Several SMA/SMK	Senior secondary	Urban Manokwari	Not specified	Not specified	I-9
SMA/SMK in Prafi, Masni and Sidey	Senior secondary	Peri-urban and transmigration areas	Rp50,000–100,000 per student	Agreed by school committee, school and parents	Local informants, I-10
Private SD, SMP and SMA/SMK	Private	Regency-wide	Not specified	Agreed by parents and school committee	I-2, I-9

Note: Amounts are as reported by informants and could not be verified against school financial records. A resident of Waryori Village in the Masni transmigration area (I-10) likewise stated that, despite the Perbup, schools undeniably still collect contributions to meet their needs.

Incentives

Perda 8/2025 provides a complaint channel (Art. 12) and graduated sanctions (Art. 18), but both depend on complaints being filed. No informant reported that any sanction had been imposed since the policy took effect. Edwards III (1980) treats disposition as implementers' willingness to carry out a policy as intended. The findings suggest that willingness was not the main problem, since all implementers expressed support. What varied was their capacity to comply, and principals bridged the gap between willingness and capacity through adaptive practices. Lipsky's (1980) account of street-level bureaucracy is useful here: faced with chronic shortfalls of resources, front-line workers develop routines that reconcile official goals with what is practically possible. Principals in Manokwari did the same. They kept schools running by recasting fixed monthly payments as parent-initiated contributions, softening them through exemptions for orphans and siblings, and legitimising them through committee meetings. These practices are better understood as coping with an unfunded mandate than as simple non-compliance, yet they hollow out the policy's core promise.

The Education Office's stance can be understood through McCubbins and Schwartz's (1984) distinction between police-patrol and fire-alarm oversight. Rather than actively auditing schools, the Office relies on complaints from parents, which is a fire-alarm model. Such oversight works only when those affected are able and willing to sound the alarm. In Manokwari, parents were reluctant to be identified because their children remained enrolled, and many had formally agreed to the payments, which under Article 13 of the Perda removes the legal basis for a complaint. The absence of complaints reported by both the Education Office and the DPRK is therefore better interpreted as a product of the monitoring design than as evidence of compliance. The refusal of one public school principal to be interviewed further indicates that the issue is sensitive at school level, even though no sanctions had been imposed.

Bureaucratic structure

Standard operating procedures

According to the Head of the Education Office, implementation follows the Perda, the Perbup, technical guidelines and the Office's SOP. The SOP she cited, however, is Perbup 93/2022, a general regulation on the tasks and functions of education affairs that predates the policy. Informants did not describe any procedure specific to the policy, such as procedures for monitoring levies, verifying recipients or setting disbursement timelines.

Fragmentation of authority

Authority over senior secondary education is unsettled. Under Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government, SMA/SMK falls under the province, and regencies manage only early childhood, elementary and junior secondary education. In Papua, however, Law No. 2 of 2021, the second amendment to the Papua Special Autonomy Law, and Government Regulation (PP) No. 106 of 2021 transferred the management of SMA/SMK to regencies from 2023. The regency therefore now finances SMA/SMK under the free education policy while the transfer itself is being questioned. The member of the West Papua Provincial Parliament explained:

"The authority over SMA/SMK now lies with the regency because it is regulated in PP 106 under the Papua Special Autonomy Law. But going forward we will propose to the Governor of West Papua that this authority be evaluated, so that if it burdens the regencies, it is returned to the province." (I-7, interview, 16 September 2026)

He reported that the provincial Education Office is coordinating with the Governor to open cross-Papua discussions on PP 106/2021, that the province plans to engage the Steering Agency for Accelerated Special Autonomy Development in Papua (BP3OKP) and the Executive Committee for the same purpose, and that the province is targeting the return of SMA/SMK authority during 2026, possibly through a limited amendment.

Fragmentation also appears elsewhere. Funding streams (Otsus, DAU, BOS, BOSDAMA and APBD) each carry different eligibility rules. It is unclear whether schools outside the Education Office's regular structure are covered (FGD-4). FGD-2 recommended reading the policy against both Law 23/2014 and the Special Autonomy Law, and FGD-5 recommended taking relevant Constitutional Court decisions into account. Oversight is spread across the Education Office's complaint service, the DPRK's supervisory function and the Ombudsman. The DPRK, like the Education Office, reported receiving no complaints and encouraged the public to report levies:

“If schools impose levies, please complain to the government. You can even complain to the DPRK, and to the Ombudsman, so that we can deal with it together.” (I-8, interview, 17 September 2026)

At the national level, the DPD RI member reported that central guidance was still being prepared:

“I have coordinated with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Through the Secretary-General, I was told that the central government is currently evaluating these policies and will issue technical guidelines to the regions, so that the steps taken by regional heads are clear and measurable.” (I-6, interview, 15 September 2026)

Edwards III (1980) identifies standard operating procedures and fragmentation as the two structural features that shape implementation, and both were weak points in Manokwari. The only SOP cited predates the policy, so key operational tasks, including calculating unit costs, verifying recipients, scheduling disbursement and auditing school finances, have not been routinised. Fragmentation is high and has specific roots in Papua’s asymmetric decentralisation. Special autonomy gives the regency additional resources and authority, including over senior secondary education, but it also places on the regency responsibilities that elsewhere in Indonesia belong to the province. While the province seeks to reclaim SMA/SMK authority, the regency is financing a level of education whose long-term administrative status is uncertain. The ethnic basis of funding eligibility, with Otsus for OAP students and DAU for non-OAP students, adds a further layer of complexity, because each school’s allocation depends on accurate disaggregated data, which is precisely the data synchronisation problem raised by the DPD member. National follow-up has also been incomplete. The Ministry had yet to issue technical guidelines to the regions, and civil society monitors reported in May 2026 that central and regional governments had not yet implemented the Constitutional Court decision on free basic education in private schools (Attar, 2026). Regional policies such as Manokwari’s are therefore being implemented ahead of, and without the support of, a national financing framework.

Table 5. Summary of implementation findings by Edwards III variable

Variable	Indicator	Key findings	Researchers’ assessment
Communication	Transmission	Socialised to all school levels; integrity pact signed; parent meetings held	Adequate
	Clarity	“Free” means enrolment and uniforms in practice; coverage of private and non-regular schools unclear	Weak
	Consistency	Regent and Education Office differ on private schools and on which grades benefit	Weak
Resources	Budget	Rp19 billion and several funding streams; BOSDAMA for first-year students only; honorary teachers unpaid; uniforms delayed	Insufficient
	Staff	Shortage of ASN teachers; heavy reliance on honorary teachers; ban on new honorary hires	Insufficient
	Information	Registration of schools ordered; data synchronisation still needed	Partial
Disposition	Commitment	Strong from the Regent and DPRK; principals supportive	Strong at the top
	Implementer behaviour	Levies recast as voluntary; levies denied by the Office; one principal declined to participate	Adaptive and defensive
	Incentives	Sanctions exist but depend on complaints; none reported as imposed	Not operational
Bureaucratic structure	SOP	General SOP (Perbup 93/2022); no procedures specific to the policy described	Weak
	Fragmentation	Contested SMA/SMK authority; several funding streams; unclear coverage of non-regular schools; dispersed oversight	High

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Table 6 sets out the factors that support and inhibit the implementation of Perbup 87/2025, together with the supporting evidence, the related Edwards III variable and the informants who raised them.

Table 6. Supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of Perbup 87/2025

Factor	Evidence	Related variable	Source
Supporting factors			
Political commitment of the Regent and support from the DPRK	Perbup followed by Perda; Rp19 billion approved; Regent's order to register all schools	Disposition	I-1, I-8
Legal framework with prohibitions, a complaint channel and sanctions	Perda 8/2025, Arts. 12, 13 and 18	Bureaucratic structure	Documents, I-2
Diversified funding, including Special Autonomy	Otsus, DAU, BOS and BOSDAMA; special authority in education under PP 106/2021, Art. 4(3)	Resources	I-1, I-6
Broad stakeholder acceptance	All informants supported the policy; parents willing to contribute to schools	Disposition	All informants
Socialisation and integrity pact	Tiered socialisation to schools; integrity pact signed	Communication	I-2, I-3, I-8
Inclusive design	Covers OAP and non-OAP students, and public and private schools	Disposition	I-1
National-level attention	Ministry evaluating regional free education policies and preparing technical guidelines	Bureaucratic structure	I-6
Inhibiting factors			
Narrow and ambiguous definition of "free"	Only enrolment and uniforms in practice; BOSDAMA for first-year students only	Communication, Resources	I-2, I-4
Inconsistent messages across levels	Regent and Education Office differ on whether private schools may charge fees	Communication	I-1, I-2
Gap in the prohibition clause	Art. 13 covers only regional-government schools and only levies made without parental consent	Bureaucratic structure	Documents
Insufficient and delayed operational funding	Honorary teachers unpaid for six months; uniforms delayed more than three months; facilities repaired through levies	Resources	I-4, I-8, I-9
Dependence on honorary teachers	About one civil-servant teacher per 100 students at SD-1; ban on recruiting new honorary teachers	Resources	I-2, I-3, I-6, I-8, FGD-1
Passive, complaint-based monitoring	No complaints received by the Office or the DPRK despite levies; parents afraid to report	Disposition, Bureaucratic structure	I-2, I-8, I-9
Fragmented authority and coverage	SMA/SMK authority under review; coverage of madrasahs, SLB and equivalency programmes unclear	Bureaucratic structure	I-7, FGD-2, FGD-4
Enrolment beyond capacity and unsynchronised data	Schools admitting beyond teacher and classroom capacity; recipient data not matched to enrolment	Resources	I-6, I-8

Table 6 reveals a clear asymmetry. Most supporting factors operate at the level of policy adoption: political will, legal instruments, budget approval and stakeholder acceptance. Most inhibiting factors operate at the level of delivery: unit costs, staffing, disbursement, procedures and monitoring. In Edwards III's terms, the policy is strong on

disposition and formal communication but weak on resources and bureaucratic structure. The weaknesses in the latter two variables also feed back into the former. Resource gaps produce the adaptive practices described under disposition, and design ambiguity produces the inconsistent messages described under communication. The four variables therefore interact rather than operate independently, as Edwards III (1980) anticipated.

Two supporting factors deserve particular attention because they could be used more effectively. First, special autonomy provides the regency with a legal basis and additional fiscal space for education that most Indonesian regencies lack. The DPD member pointed out that PP 106/2021 grants special authority in education, and the Otsus Fund is already one of the policy's financing sources. Second, parents' evident willingness to contribute, although currently channelled into informal levies, indicates strong community ownership of schools. This willingness could be formalised through transparent and genuinely voluntary donation mechanisms consistent with Permendikbud 75/2016.

Policy implications

The findings point to four implications for the regency government. First, "free" should be defined through a per-student unit cost that includes the pay of honorary teachers and routine maintenance, and BOSDAMA should be extended to all grades rather than first-year students only. Second, Article 13 of Perda 8/2025 should be harmonised with Constitutional Court Decision No. 3/PUU-XXII/2024 by extending its coverage to private basic education schools and by replacing the consent test with the national distinction between levies and donations. Third, monitoring should shift from a fire-alarm to a police-patrol model, through periodic audits of school finances and anonymous complaint channels that protect parents from repercussions. Fourth, the status of SMA/SMK authority should be settled with the provincial government so that the regency can plan senior secondary financing over the medium term.

Overall, the free education policy in Manokwari has been formally adopted, legally reinforced and widely communicated, but it has been implemented only partly. It has made enrolment and uniforms free of charge, while operational costs, especially honorary teachers' pay and facility maintenance, continue to be passed on to parents through levies described as voluntary or agreed. The prohibition clause in Perda 8/2025 permits this arrangement, and the Education Office's complaint-based monitoring, combined with parents' reluctance to report, keeps these practices largely outside formal oversight.

5. Conclusion

The implementation of the free education policy in Manokwari Regency represents the Local Government fulfilling its responsibility to guarantee the public's right to education. This policy is carried out by the Manokwari Regency Education Office in collaboration with educational institutions by providing financial and operational support, thereby alleviating the cost burden borne by students and their parents or guardians. The policy's implementation must be evaluated based on the alignment between policy provisions, planning, budgeting, execution, and the benefits received by the community. From a communication perspective, implementing free education requires clear and continuous information dissemination from the Local Government and the Education Office to school principals, teachers, education personnel, students, and parents or guardians. Clarity regarding objectives, targets, funding mechanisms, and the nature of the free education services is crucial for ensuring the policy is implemented consistently across educational institutions.

Regarding resources, the success of free education is heavily influenced by the availability of budget, human resources, educational facilities and infrastructure, and administrative support. These resources are essential to ensure the policy does not remain merely an administrative requirement but translates into tangible educational services that benefit the community. Regarding the disposition or attitude of implementers, commitment is required from the Local Government, the Education Office, school principals, teachers, and all those involved in executing the policy to carry out free education in accordance with established goals. Implementer commitment is vital because the free education policy demands coordination, accountability, transparency, and a focus on the best interests of the students. Regarding bureaucratic structure, the implementation of free education requires a clear division of tasks, authority, procedures, and oversight mechanisms among the Local Government, the Education Office, and educational institutions. A clear bureaucratic structure helps prevent overlapping authority and enhances the effectiveness of policy implementation and supervision. Thus, the implementation of the free education policy in Manokwari Regency is determined not only by the existence of the policy and budgetary support but also by

communication, resources, the commitment of implementers, and bureaucratic structures. These factors must operate in an integrated manner to ensure that the goals of free education namely, providing broader access to education and alleviating the burden on the community are achieved optimally. The local government needs to pay attention to the factors that facilitate and hinder the implementation of the free education policy. Facilitating factors include the policy framework, budgetary support, local government institutional capacity, and the involvement of educational institutions and the community. Meanwhile, hindering factors may include limited budgets or resources, the state of facilities and infrastructure, suboptimal coordination and communication, as well as the geographical conditions and regional characteristics of Manokwari Regency, which can affect the equitable distribution of educational services.

Suggestion

The Manokwari Regency Regional Government needs to strengthen its commitment to implementing free education by providing and allocating a budget that is adequate, well-targeted, transparent, and sustainable, ensuring the policy is executed optimally without placing a financial burden on students or their parents/guardians. The Manokwari Regency Education Office needs to improve coordination and communication with all educational institutions regarding the implementation mechanisms of the free education policy. Information concerning students' rights, funding structures, budget utilization, and the obligations of each party must be communicated clearly and openly. Regarding resources, the Regional Government and the Education Office need to enhance the availability of teaching and educational staff, infrastructure, and learning support facilities, particularly in schools facing resource limitations. Equitable distribution of educational resources must be prioritized to ensure that the free education policy focuses not only on fee waivers but also on guaranteeing the quality of educational services. School principals and educators are expected to implement the free education policy in accordance with prevailing regulations and to enhance transparency and accountability in managing educational aid or budgets. Schools must also ensure that students receive educational services without discrimination based on economic status or other backgrounds. The community and parents/guardians are encouraged to play an active role in overseeing the implementation of the free education policy, including reporting information or lodging complaints regarding any levies or practices that contravene the policy's regulations. Regarding oversight, the Regional Government and the Education Office need to strengthen periodic monitoring and evaluation of the free education policy's implementation across all educational institutions. The results of this monitoring can serve as a basis for addressing implementation weaknesses and ensuring that budget utilization aligns with the program's objectives. Future researchers are advised to conduct more in-depth research on the effectiveness of the free education policy, specifically by examining its impact on access to education, dropout rates, the quality of educational services, the economic burden on parents or guardians, and educational equity between urban areas and areas with limited access in Manokwari Regency.

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