

Shifts in Public Interest in Private Islamic Educational Institutions: A Study of the Zoning System Policy

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Abstract

In Indonesia, educational reform is increasingly emphasizing the principles of equity and accessibility as fundamental components in enhancing the quality of national human resources. In line with these endeavours, private Islamic educational institutions continue to evolve into a pivotal element of the national education system, catering to a diverse array of socio-religious inclinations and offering unconventional educational pathways. The school zoning policy, as outlined in the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, aims to ensure equitable access to education. However, implementing this system poses significant challenges for educational institutions, especially in attracting new students. This study examines the shift in public interest in private Islamic educational institutions resulting from the policy. A systematic review of 278 articles was conducted, and 17 articles were selected based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. These criteria were meticulously defined and applied in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines, encompassing a wide range of sources from Scopus, Google Scholar, and Lens.org. Existing research suggests that the public has a limited ability to choose schools that align with their children's interests and talents. This impacts learning motivation and satisfaction with the education received. Consequently, private Islamic educational institutions can attract high-quality students by offering curricula that are more responsive to community needs.

Keywords: Public Interest; Private Islamic Education Institutions; Zoning System Policy.

Abstrak

Di Indonesia, reformasi pendidikan semakin menekankan prinsip-prinsip keadilan dan aksesibilitas sebagai komponen fundamental dalam meningkatkan kualitas sumber daya manusia nasional. Sejalan dengan upaya ini, lembaga pendidikan Islam swasta terus berkembang menjadi elemen kunci dalam sistem pendidikan nasional, melayani beragam kecenderungan sosial-religius dan menawarkan jalur pendidikan yang tidak konvensional. Kebijakan zonasi sekolah, sebagaimana diatur dalam peraturan Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, bertujuan untuk memastikan akses yang adil terhadap pendidikan. Namun, implementasi sistem ini menimbulkan tantangan signifikan bagi lembaga pendidikan, terutama dalam menarik siswa baru. Studi ini menganalisis pergeseran minat publik terhadap lembaga pendidikan Islam swasta akibat kebijakan tersebut. Sebuah tinjauan sistematis terhadap 278 artikel dilakukan, dan 17 artikel dipilih berdasarkan kriteria inklusi dan eksklusi yang telah

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ditentukan sebelumnya. Kriteria ini didefinisikan secara teliti dan diterapkan sesuai dengan pedoman PRISMA, mencakup berbagai sumber dari Scopus, Google Scholar, dan Lens.org. Penelitian yang ada menunjukkan bahwa masyarakat memiliki kemampuan terbatas untuk memilih sekolah yang sesuai dengan minat dan bakat anak-anak mereka. Hal ini berdampak pada motivasi belajar dan kepuasan terhadap pendidikan yang diterima. Akibatnya, lembaga pendidikan Islam swasta dapat menarik siswa berkualitas tinggi dengan menawarkan kurikulum yang lebih responsif terhadap kebutuhan komunitas.

Kata kunci: Kepentingan Publik; Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Swasta; Kebijakan Sistem Zonasi.

I. Introduction

The concept of equitable education is predicated on the principles of equality and fairness, signifying that all citizens should possess equal opportunities and rights to access education that is both appropriate and of a high quality. This indicates that all school-age children possess equivalent educational opportunities. As delineated in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, specifically in Articles 5 and 11, paragraphs (1) and (2), respectively (Madjid, 2023; Rasinan et al., 2021). The Ministry of Education and Culture has issued an education policy (Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 17 of 2017) that aims to ensure educational justice. This policy pertains to the admission of new students to kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, and vocational education programs. The policy uses a zoning system for admissions, as outlined in Article 16. Schools must admit prospective students who live within the zone's radius based on the address on the family card (Akhyar, 2024; Chotimah et al., 2023; Marlina et al., 2023; Rasinan et al., 2021).

This policy constitutes a substantial deviation from previous student admission policies regarding eligibility criteria (Hendrik et al., 2024). Historically, the enrollment of new students in public schools was determined by their performance on national examinations (Marlina et al., 2023; Rasinan et al., 2021). This resulted in disparities between schools. The government established elite schools characterized by the enrollment of students with above-average intelligence, access to highly qualified teaching staff, adequate facilities and infrastructure, and comprehensive support services that facilitate learning. These schools are regarded as exemplary models for other educational institutions in various geographical regions (Mashudi, 2019; Rasinan et al., 2021). This system has engendered a societal paradigm in which elite public schools are regarded as the most desirable academic institutions, with students from affluent backgrounds or with high academic achievement often represented. Moreover, the government's strategic focus on elite educational institutions, as articulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture, comes as no surprise. This prioritization includes initiatives such as improving facilities and infrastructure, providing adequate resources, training educators, and facilitating participation in regional, national, and international competitions (Rasinan et al., 2021).

This discrepancy inevitably engenders "casualization" and "discrimination" against public schools designated as "non-excellent." This phenomenon engenders a state of injustice and inequality within the societal structure. Consequently, the government has instituted a novel student admission policy that utilizes a zoning system to dismantle the societal paradigm of "favorite" and "non-favorite" schools. This is one strategy for accelerating the equitable distribution of quality education. The zoning system has been shown to provide students with equitable access to educational opportunities, ensuring they receive comparable educational quality (Akhyar, 2024; Rasinan et al., 2021). Minister of Education and Culture Muhadjir Effendy has stated that Japan, a developed country, has already implemented a zoning system. According to the expert above, Japan boasts the most advanced zoning education system, though it required approximately three decades to attain equitable zoning. Japan's current education system is characterized by its high quality and equitable nature (Mashudi, 2019).

Since its initial implementation, the school zoning system in Indonesia has undergone several modifications. Initially established by the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation (Permendikbud) No. 17/2017, the system has undergone several refinements through subsequent amendments. The most recent update is outlined in Permendikbud No. 1/2021. The primary distinction between these regulations concerns the allocation of new student categories, or quotas, within the school zoning system (Hendrik et al., 2024).

The Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia promulgated Regulation Number 1 of 2021 concerning the admission of new students to kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, senior high schools, and vocational high schools. As outlined in Article 12, paragraph (2), the PPDB registration pathways are summarized as follows, as referenced in paragraph (1): Zoning, affirmation, transfer of parents/guardians, and/or achievement must be considered. As outlined in Article 13, the percentage distribution comprises the following: 1) An elementary school zoning pathway comprising a minimum of 70% of the school's capacity, 2) a junior high school zoning pathway comprising a minimum of 50% of the school's capacity, and 3) a high school zoning pathway comprising a minimum of 50% of the school's capacity. The affirmation pathway, as outlined in Article 12, paragraph (2), letter (b), constitutes at least 15% of the school's capacity. Concurrently, the transfer of parents/guardians pathway, as delineated in Article 12, paragraph (2), letter (c), constitutes no more than 5% of the school's capacity. If there is a remaining quota from the registration pathways referenced in paragraphs (1) through (3), the regional government may open an achievement pathway referenced in Article 12, paragraph (2), letter (d) (Permendikbud, 2021). Prospective new students are permitted to select only one of three registration channels for New Student Admissions within a single zone (Devi et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, the admission of new students under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs is subject to regulation in the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Education Number 7022 of 2023 concerning Technical Guidelines for the Admission of New Students to Madrasahs, Chapter II: Procedures for the Admission of New Students to Madrasahs, Section A. General Provisions, Point 5: Madrasah (excluding MAN IC, MAN PK, MAKN, and boarding schools) shall undertake the admission of new students to madrasah through the following channels: a) Regular Channel; b) Achievement Channel; c) Affirmative Action Channel. As outlined in point 5b, the capacity of the achievement channel must be at least 15% of the total capacity accepted. Concurrently, the quota accepted through the affirmative action channel, as referenced in point 5c, is subject to a maximum limit of 15% of the total capacity accepted (Islam, 2023b). The specific technical procedures for the National Selection of New Students for State Islamic High Schools for Gifted Students, State Islamic High Schools with Religious Programs, and State Vocational Islamic High Schools for the 2024/2025 academic year are regulated by the Director General of Islamic Education Decision No. 7021 of 2023 (Islam, 2023a).

Both advantages and disadvantages accompany the implementation of each new regulation. These advantages and disadvantages are experienced by each institution that is already aware of the regulation and has been affected by its implementation. Among the benefits are the equal distribution of new students and the guarantee that prospective students will be accepted at the nearest school, thereby reducing costs. Conversely, the drawbacks include the lack of public autonomy to select the most suitable educational institution for their children, despite the inherent desire among all parents for their children to attend a prestigious school. This regulatory framework effectively curtails the public's autonomy in selecting their preferred educational institutions. Instead, parents are forced to enroll their children in schools according to the prescribed zoning system (Thoha & Ghazali, 2020).

The implementation of the zoning system has raised several issues that warrant serious consideration. The objective of the zoning system is to establish equity and inclusivity in educational access; however, its implementation frequently yields multifaceted consequences (Khoiriyah et al., 2023). Recent issues have raised concerns about aspects of inequality and uncertainty in student placement. Specifically, there is a lack of assurance that every admitted student possesses both superior intelligence and good behavior (Pitaloka & Haryanto, 2024). Some parents have expressed their discontent regarding the modest allocation allocated to the merit-based track, which is a mere 5%. The argument is made that this policy is inequitable because schools prioritize students from designated zones and do not value students' efforts to excel and obtain an education at schools of their choice (Mashudi, 2019).

This recent policy shift could constrain the community's access to educational opportunities aligned with their interests and aspirations. This is because it cannot be

guaranteed that prospective students are willing to pursue education at institutions within their zone network. Similarly, educational institutions may encounter challenges in aligning their services with the community's expectations within the confines of their designated network. This dynamic invariably engenders discomfort for both parties. On the one hand, the community may express discontent with the educational institutions available, while academic institutions, in turn, seek students who meet criteria that the surrounding community may not possess. In an ideal scenario, the community would be granted complete autonomy to select the educational institution that best aligns with their preferences. Consequently, academic institutions should be given the prerogative to execute a comprehensive selection process to ensure the enrollment of students who possess the necessary qualifications and aptitudes (Marlina et al., 2023; Thoha & Ghazali, 2020).

The implementation of Permendikbud No. 1 of 2021 has led to a significant increase in enrollment at private Islamic educational institutions, indicating a positive impact. According to multiple school principals, the number of new students enrolled in these institutions has increased. This phenomenon has been observed at institutions such as the Al-Ibrohimiy MTs in Sentol Daya Pragaan, Sumenep, and the Al-Ibrohimi MTs in Galis, Bangkalan (Thoha & Ghazali, 2020).

Concurrently, several public educational institutions are encountering challenges in meeting their student quotas and caps if they continue administering entrance exams at the same level of difficulty as in prior years. Consequently, if they wish to continue attracting a substantial number of new students, they must lower their entrance exam standards. It is noteworthy that certain public educational institutions in specific regions are encountering challenges in enrolling students, despite the absence of selection tests or entrance exams. This phenomenon presents both a multifaceted challenge and an opportunity to enhance Islamic education. Moreover, it fosters competition among Islamic educational institutions, compelling them to strive for excellence in service delivery to attract new students. In this regard, the creativity of schools and madrasah principals is imperative (Thoha & Ghazali, 2020).

Private Islamic educational institutions can attract high-quality students. Previous studies emphasize the importance of curriculum integration in private Islamic schools to enhance competitiveness and build community trust (Rahman & Akbar, 2021; Thoha & Ghazali, 2020). Moreover, growing dissatisfaction among parents regarding zoning regulations has encouraged families to consider private Islamic schools as alternative educational pathways. This situation demands innovation and strategic adaptation from Islamic educational institutions to ensure academic outcomes comparable to public schools (Thoha & Ghazali, 2020).

A review of the extant literature on zoning policies in Indonesia reveals a predominant focus on their impact on educational equity and student distribution. For instance, Mashudi (2019) examined zoning as a mechanism to promote human resource equity in public schools, yet its implications for private Islamic educational institutions were not explored. Concurrently, Hendrik et al. (2024) accentuated the escalating heterogeneity of students in public schools following the implementation of zoning mechanisms. However, their analysis did not delve into parental behavior or the propensity to divert their educational interests toward private institutions. In a similar vein, Akhyar (2024) has examined the efficacy and challenges of zoning policies at the public school level. However, the role of these policies in shaping the competitive dynamics between public schools and private Islamic schools remains unaddressed.

These studies suggest that while zoning policies have been widely examined, limited attention has been given to their consequences for private Islamic educational institutions, particularly regarding parental decision-making, competitiveness, and institutional adaptation strategies.

Therefore, this study aims to address this research gap by systematically analyzing the factors influencing shifts in public interest toward private Islamic schools in the context of zoning policies, as well as the strategies these institutions adopt in response to such policies. By integrating policy analysis, parental preference behavior, and Islamic education competitiveness, this study provides a novel contribution to zoning policy discourse in Indonesia.

II. Research Method

The research design employed the systematic literature review (SLR) method (Mengist et al., 2020). The objective of using this approach is to mitigate bias in the responses to the research inquiries. The research commenced with the identification of pertinent articles on private Islamic educational institutions and the zoning system policy for admitting new students. This was accomplished by using the Scopus database, Google Scholar, and Lens.org. This SLR employs the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) framework to ensure a transparent, structured, and systematic review process (Page et al., 2021). The four stages of this research are identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for publication selection

During the inclusion and exclusion stage, the researchers established criteria for including articles in this study. First, they searched the Scopus database for articles. Second, the articles had to be published in journals between 2019 and 2024. Third, articles were searched for based on their relevance to the research theme. After obtaining articles matching the research theme, researchers conducted a screening to determine

which articles would be analyzed in depth. The following are the inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Articles published in 2019-2024	Before 2019
Journal articles	Book, series of books, chapter in a book

After determining the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the researchers conducted a literature search through Scopus on October 19, 2024, and found 278 documents. As shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Database Sources, Keywords, and Number of Documents

Database	Keywords	Total
Scopus	School zoning system	34
Google scholar	Dampak kebijakan sistem zonasi terhadap lembaga pendidikan Islam	100
Lens.org	School zoning system	144
Total Documents		278

Screening and eligibility assessment for data analysis

The article findings in the Scopus database were screened as needed. Relevant articles were included, while irrelevant articles were excluded. The screened articles were matched with their titles, abstracts, and keywords. After discarding the same theme, the selected articles were entered into the Mendeley application and saved in Research Information System (RIS) format. The next step was entering the VOSviewer application to map the initial network of linkages. To strengthen the argument of the relevant research, an initial analysis of the thematic associations of the articles used in this study was conducted through the VOSviewer application. Figure 1 illustrates this

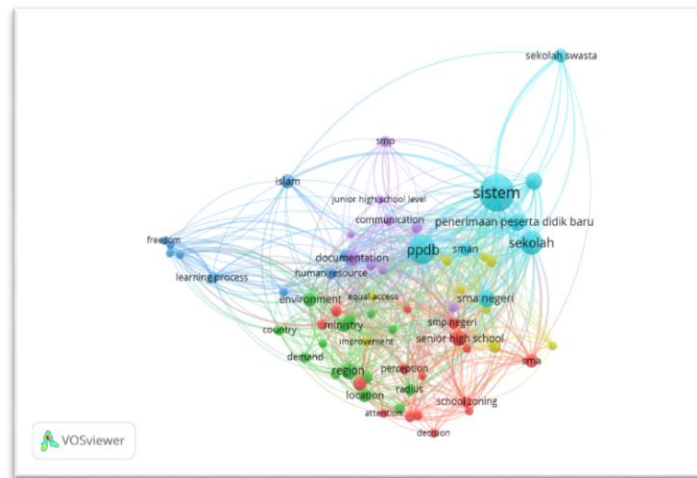


Figure 1. Results of Shifting Public Interest in Private Islamic Educational Institutions: A Study of the Zoning System Policy.

Figure 1 clearly shows that the keyword "zoning system" is at the center of the word network. This suggests that the zoning policy is the primary factor influencing people's choice of educational institutions. However, factors such as academic quality, location, and individual preferences also remain essential considerations.

Quality assessment

To enhance methodological rigor, a quality assessment procedure was applied to all included studies. The appraisal instruments employed in this study were adapted from the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Checklist and the CASP Qualitative Checklist. These instruments were selected because they prioritize several key aspects of research methodology, including the clarity of research objectives, the appropriateness of the methodology, transparency in data collection and analysis, the credibility and reliability of findings, and the relevance of the findings to zoning policy and the Islamic education context. Each article was evaluated using a standardized rubric, and only studies that met the minimum quality threshold were included in the analysis. This approach ensured that the synthesized findings were based on trustworthy and methodologically sound evidence.

PRISMA flowchart

Articles were carefully selected to ensure quality and relevance. Articles were thoroughly reviewed from title to conclusion to understand the context holistically. The collected data were analyzed according to the research focus and presented systematically to produce valid and meaningful findings, as shown in Figure 2.

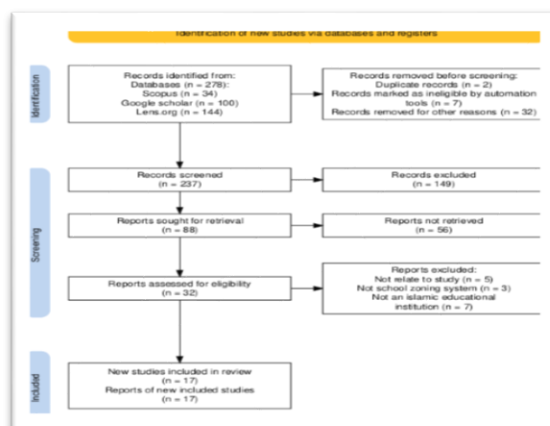


Figure 2. PRISMA flowchart on shifts in public sentiment toward private Islamic educational institutions: a study of the zoning system policy

III. Result and Discussion

A. Research findings

This section will address the research question (RQ). A total of 278 articles were included in the search. The data were selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Then, 32 articles were chosen for further analysis of the shift in public interest in private Islamic educational institutions, particularly the zoning system policy. The Quality Assessment (QA) included 17 relevant journal articles, grouped by the development platform and approach used to address the research question. The following articles are eligible to address the research question.:

Table 3. Eligible Data Mapping

No	Name	Year	Title	Journal
1	Abd. Madjid	2023	Dinamika Kebijakan Sistem Zonasi Pendidikan di Indonesia	JIPSI: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan dan Sains Islam Interdisipiner
2	Ahmad Mashudi	2019	Kebijakan PPDB Sistem Zonasi SMA/SMK dalam Mendorong Pemerataan Kualitas Sumberdaya Manusia di Jawa Timur	Nidhomul Haq: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam
3	Aisyah Bela Pitaloka, Budi Haryanto	2024	Sistem Zonasi dan Sekolah Favorit (Pergeseran Profil Sekolah Favorit Pasca Sistem Zonasi)	Jurnal PAI Raden Fatah

4	Anissa Nurul Chotimah, Jemima Fathima Pasha, Muhammad Sufyan Rabbani	2023	Polemik Sistem Zonasi PPDB dalam Mewujudkan Pemerataan Pendidikan	Jurnal Pendidikan, Bahasa dan Budaya(JPBB)
5	Danial Rahman, Abu Rizal Akbar	2021	Problematika Yang Dihadapi Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Sebagai Tantangan Dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Pendidikan	Nazzama Journal Of Management Education
6	Herman Hendrik, Mikka W. Nurrochsyam, Romeyn P. Putra, Yunita Murdiyaningrum	2024	From Academic Proficiency To Religious Affiliation: The Impact Of School Zoning Policies On Student Diversity	Lentera Pendidikan : Jurnal Ilmu Tarbiyah dan Keguruan
7	Mahpudin	2020	Hak Warganegara Yang Terampas: Polemik Kebijakan Sistem Zonasi dalam Pendidikan Indonesia	Jurnal Transformative
8	Marsanda Claudia Parameswara, Mochammad Fahmi Iskandar, Riski Fauzi Amelia	2022	Pengaruh Kebijakan Sistem Zonasi bagi Sekolah dalam Penerimaan Peserta Didik Baru	Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai
9	Mauhibur Rokhman, Fadly Usman, Fatimah Usman, Azman Bin Haji Kassim, Muslihun	2023	Consideration of Parents in Choosing Islamic Schools in the Digital Era	Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam
10	Mohammad Thoha, H. A. Gazali	2020	Dampak Penerapan Sistem Zonasi dalam Penerimaan Peserta Didik Baru terhadap Lembaga Pendidikan Islam di Madura	Tadris: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam
11	Mustika Devi, Suyatno, Sukirman	2022	School Branding Strategy In Facing The Impact Of the Zoning System	International Journal of Educational Management and Innovation
12	Najmy Hanifah, Istikomah I	2022	Branding Sekolah Swasta Dalam Menghadapi Kebijakan Zonasi	Jurnal Idaarah

13	Nisa Afrinauly Nabila, Suwadi, Yunaldi	2023	Lembaga Pendidikan Islam Terpadu Menciptakan Competitive Advantage: Studi Kasus Di Sekolah Dasar	Al-Fikra: Jurnal Ilmiah Keislaman
14	Rita Prima Bendriyanti, Suwarni, Mukrimah, Silvy Sondary Gadzali, Riyanti Susiloningtyas	2022	Competitive Education Marketing Management in Integrated Islamic Education Institutions: Islamic Education Interests in Modern Society	Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education (AJIE)
15	Wasilah, Muslimah	2023	Fenomena Kemunculan Sekolah "Elit" Islam di Indonesia (Analisis Aspek Manfaat dan Mudharat)	Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kewirausahaan
16	Yundri Akhyar	2024	Implementasi Sistem Zonasi Pada Program Penerimaan Peserta Dididik Baru (PPDB): Studi Kasus SMAN 2 Pekanbaru	Jurnal Edusiana : Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan
17	Zuhri, Sugiyo, Ahmad Dardiri Hasyim, Rosidin	2023	Islamic Private High School Development Strategy For Increasing Global Competence	PENAMAS Journal of Religion and Society

RQ1: What Factors Influence the shift in public sentiment toward private Islamic educational institutions as a result of the zoning system policy?

1. Public Schools are Unable to Meet the Needs of Student

The implementation of Permendikbud Number 1 of 2021 has caused many problems, particularly because the community considers the regulation highly detrimental. Students are limited in their ability to choose schools that meet their needs, even though not all schools can accommodate students' diverse interests and talents. The zoning system seems to ignore students' diverse interests, talents, and inclinations (Thoha & Ghazali, 2020).

This zoning system has the potential to prevent students from receiving a quality education that aligns with their interests and talents. This is due to several factors, including a mismatch between students' interests and the programs of study offered by schools in their zone. Additionally, not all schools in the zone are able to provide adequate educational services (Parameswara et al., 2022). Additionally, the zoning system limits students' freedom to choose their preferred school (Parameswara et al., 2022).

One of the most apparent consequences of implementing the zoning system is the wide range of academic abilities among students in a single class. This is due to the policy that prohibits schools from setting academic standards or selecting prospective students. Consequently, each school's student body becomes more reflective of the surrounding community, which is inherently diverse (Hendrik et al., 2024).

Akhyar (2024) argued that some students felt they were not a good fit for the school they were accepted into due to the zoning system. These students think that the school does not align with their expectations or support their academic and non-academic development. This can reduce students' motivation to learn because their learning environment lacks inspiration. Additionally, students who do not choose their own school may feel less connected to the school community, which can negatively impact their engagement and achievement.

Thoha and Chazali (2020) argued that zoning system regulations limit students' freedom to choose schools, thereby reducing their motivation to learn. Akhyar (2024) noted that this policy also limits students' choices, particularly those of high-achieving students who wish to attend popular schools outside their residential zone. These students felt that the zoning system hindered their potential, and they argued that students should have the freedom to choose schools based on their interests and abilities rather than residential distance.

Additionally, outstanding students living outside the destination school's zone are also constrained from getting into their desired school. The zoning system, which prioritizes age and residential zone, reduces the likelihood that outstanding students will be accepted. The achievement system quota, which is smaller than the zoning system, further exacerbates this situation (Chotimah et al., 2023). Even high-achieving students constrained by distance cannot enroll in their dream schools. This clearly violates citizens' constitutional right to choose their education (Mahpudin, 2020). However, this policy also has negative consequences. Accepting students with below-average achievement can hinder the achievement of learning objectives in the class).

2. The Loss of Quality in Top-Tier/ Favorite Schools in Public Schools.

The decline in the number of high-achieving students at top schools since the implementation of the zoning system has sparked concern among teachers and parents. Some teachers have noticed that outstanding students are moving to schools outside the zone, which negatively affects the school's academic quality. Parents of high-achieving students also expressed similar concerns. They are concerned that the zoning system restricts their children's access to excellent public school programs (Pitaloka & Haryanto, 2024).

The zoning system policy limits high-achieving students' ability to enroll in their preferred schools outside their zone of residence, even if they perform well on the

National Exam (Parameswara et al., 2022). Pitaloka and Haryanto (2024) observed that the decline in the number of exceptional students has diminished pride in popular schools. Students and teachers reported that the school's identity had changed, affecting motivation to learn and the overall school climate.

Wasilah and Muslimah (2022) observed a surge in public interest in enrolling children in private Islamic schools, particularly the more prestigious ones. Several factors, including declining public confidence in the quality of education in public schools, rigorous student selection processes in private Islamic schools, and the high quality of education personnel and curricula in these schools, drive this trend. Complete facilities are also an attraction. Academically, students from superior private Islamic schools have a competitive advantage over those from public schools. This advantage is due not only to high-quality inputs but also to an effective learning process that produces high-quality graduates (Wasilah & Muslimah, 2022).

A school can be considered superior if it has a special focus on developing science and technology through innovative learning methods. Professional management is also key to an educational institution's success. Excellent private Islamic schools have similar characteristics but emphasize religious values. The main goal of education in these schools is to produce intelligent graduates with noble character (Wasilah & Muslimah, 2022). Additionally, Rahman and Akbar point out that private Islamic schools have an advantage when it comes to religious education. The greater quantity of religious material in these schools enables students to receive a more comprehensive moral education (Rahman & Akbar, 2021).

Therefore, many parents choose superior private Islamic schools because of their good reputation and perceived higher quality. They hope these schools will provide their children with the resources necessary to succeed in the future (Mashudi, 2019). Implementing the zoning system has eliminated the "favorite school" label in public schools (Madjid, 2023).

3. Declining Discipline

Implementing the zoning system has brought significant changes to school dynamics. Some teachers have noted that shifting students between zones affects classroom interaction and supervision, making it challenging to monitor student behavior. Additionally, the diverse backgrounds of students from different zones demand flexibility from teachers in implementing learning strategies (Pitaloka & Haryanto, 2024).

Pitaloka and Haryanto (2024) also noted that the zoning system makes it increasingly challenging for teachers and school staff to supervise and guide students. This is due to the greater diversity of student personalities and attitudes. On the other hand, the zoning system also impacts students' motivation to learn. Parameswara et al. argue that students' inability to choose their dream school reduces their motivation to learn

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(Parameswara et al., 2022). Furthermore, Madjid (2023) explains that a zoning system that prioritizes distance over academic ability can foster diversity in the classroom. This requires teachers to be creative in designing effective learning environments for all students.

RQ: What Strategies do Private Islamic Educational Institutions use in Response to Zoning Policies?

1. Improving School Performance

A school's performance reflects the quality of its human resources in achieving educational goals. A quality school produces competent graduates who meet community expectations. School performance greatly influences community satisfaction with educational services (Devi et al., 2022).

Wibowo defines quality as a dynamic state of meeting or exceeding expectations. In the context of education, quality encompasses all aspects, including inputs (e.g., students and teachers), learning processes, outputs (graduates), and outcomes (long-term impacts). A quality school will earn the public's trust (Devi et al., 2022). Nabila et al., (2023) added that school quality is a results-oriented system. This is reflected in student performance, the quality of the learning process, and the ability of graduates to compete in society. The quality of learning is reflected in students' achievements and their ability to apply their knowledge. To this end, schools must provide comprehensive learning modules with worksheets and leverage information technology to support different learning styles (Devi et al., 2022).

Private Islamic schools are committed to producing graduates who are academically intelligent and have noble morals. To this end, the school integrates national standards with Islamic values. The strategies implemented include: 1) an integrated curriculum that combines the national curriculum with religious education, 2) integration of religious values that embed religious values in the entire learning process, 3) integrated teaching materials that ensure teaching materials support learning activities, and 4) collaboration with parents that involves parents in the child's education process. Through these strategies, private Islamic schools aim to produce graduates who are academically intelligent and have noble morals. (Nabila et al., 2023). A school's success depends on several factors, including the quality of its teachers and facilities, and the quality of its incoming students (Mahpudin, 2020).

One way to improve the quality of education is to enhance the performance of teachers and staff. Good performance positively impacts the learning process and the achievement of school goals. Regular performance evaluations can help identify problems and find solutions (Devi et al., 2022).

In addition, improving the quality of school services is essential for success. High-quality services increase community satisfaction, particularly among parents. When

choosing a school, parents consider factors such as the quality of education, curriculum relevance, student achievement, innovative learning approaches, educational support, and school reputation (Rokhman et al., 2023).

Teachers play a central role in the learning process. High-quality teaching directly contributes to students achieving their learning objectives. Competent teachers can create an inspiring and conducive learning environment, which increases students' motivation and interest in learning. Therefore, prioritizing teacher competency development is a strategic step toward improving the overall quality of education (Rokhman et al., 2023). To ensure optimal service quality, schools must periodically evaluate teacher and employee performance. These evaluations are not only assessments, but also forums where teachers and employees can provide input and find solutions to problems. Thus, the quality of services provided to students and parents can continuously improve (Devi et al., 2022).

High-quality education is a long-term investment for a country. Developed countries demonstrate that superior human resources can determine success, even if a country has limited natural resources (Mashudi, 2019). In order to produce qualified graduates who can compete in the global era, a student-centered learning process is necessary. Interactive, inspiring, and challenging learning encourages students to actively learn, develop creativity, and build confidence. This learning approach is expected to produce excellent graduates who are ready to face future challenges (Rahman & Akbar, 2021).

2. Innovation in School Promotion

To overcome the threat posed by the zoning system to private Islamic educational institutions, it is crucial to innovate school promotion strategies continually. According to Devi et al., promotion involves disseminating information and persuading prospective students to choose a specific institution (Devi et al., 2022). The first step is to develop a strategic plan that considers consumer needs. For example, schools can attract prospective students by designing a curriculum that aligns with the community's needs and has a clear vision (Zuhri et al., 2023). Additionally, building strong branding is important so that schools can differentiate themselves from competitors. One way to achieve this is through an attractive and unique educational design (Najmy Hanifah & Istikomah Istikomah, 2022). Effective marketing practices are equally important. As Bendriyanti et al. explain, marketing encompasses not only profit, but also customer satisfaction and stakeholder responsibility (Bendriyanti et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the word "branding" comes from the word "brand," which also means "brand." A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or combination of these elements that is intended to identify and distinguish the products or services of a person or seller. In education, branding is becoming increasingly crucial for distinguishing one institution from another (Najmy Hanifah & Istikomah Istikomah, 2022).

Before promoting themselves, educational institutions need to strengthen their foundations by building a positive image and ensuring service quality. Selecting the appropriate promotional media is also essential for effectively reaching the target audience (Devi et al., 2022). In other words, integrated branding and marketing will make educational institutions more recognizable and appealing to the public.

Managers of Islamic educational institutions continue to innovate and strive for improvement. In general, managing an educational institution is similar to managing a business organization because both must adapt to the demands of their stakeholders (Bendriyanti et al., 2022). Building strong branding and doing effective marketing are two keys to success.

According to Najmy Hanifah and Istikomah, private Islamic schools commonly use four branding strategies: identity branding, personality branding, positioning branding, and communication branding. Identity branding showcases a school's unique characteristics, while personality branding aims to create an appealing image. Positioning branding helps schools differentiate themselves from competitors. Communication branding involves working with various parties to strengthen the school's image (Najmy Hanifah & Istikomah Istikomah, 2022).

School branding generates interest and creates added value, distinguishing one school from another. In other words, branding is not just about selling the name or location; it's also about showcasing the school's identity and the benefits students will receive (Nabila et al., 2023). In today's global era, marketing has evolved from traditional methods, such as brochures and banners, to digital technologies (Zuhri et al., 2023).

Some schools develop diverse marketing strategies, such as creating brochures and banners, hosting school fairs, advertising on the radio, and utilizing digital platforms. However, effective marketing focuses not only on promotion but also on meeting the community's needs and expectations (Zuhri et al., 2023). According to Rahman and Akbar (2021), educational institutions, particularly Islamic ones, must demonstrate their quality and adhere to established standards. Additionally, these institutions need quality programs planned and managed by professional human resources.

B. Discussion

The Government's Responsibility for Improving the Zoning System

The education zoning system in Indonesia has become a significant topic of debate, particularly in the effort to achieve educational equality. According to Muhadjir Effendy, the zoning system aims to: 1) guarantee equal access to educational services, 2) strengthen the relationship between schools and families, 3) eliminate exclusivity and discrimination in schools, 4) support teacher performance evaluations, 5) create heterogeneous student environments, and 6) assist local governments with education management (Pitaloka & Haryanto, 2024). As a developed country, Japan was the first to implement a similar zoning system (Mashudi, 2019).

Unequal Quality of Education: Despite the zoning system, the quality of education in each school in Japan is relatively consistent (Huangfu, 2024). In Indonesia, the zoning system often results in significant differences in educational quality across regions. Urban schools typically have better facilities and resources than rural schools, which can lead to educational inequity (Ananda et al., 2023; Nuraeni et al., 2024). This is due to the unequal distribution of academic resources and facilities, which do not compare to those in Japan.

Access to Resources: Japan has a robust educational infrastructure and provides adequate financial support to all schools (Huangfu, 2024). Many schools in remote or less developed areas of Indonesia do not have equal access to educational resources, such as books, technology, and qualified teachers. This creates greater disparities in education. Without adequate financial support, these schools will struggle to improve their educational quality (Ananda et al., 2023).

Community and Parental Involvement: In Japan, parents and communities are highly involved in their children's education (Huangfu, 2024). In Indonesia, the government should involve communities and parents in planning and implementing zoning policies. Involving parents and communities can help ensure that these policies better suit local needs and gain greater community support (Ananda et al., 2023).

Flexibility in School Selection: Indonesia's zoning system limits students' school choices, which can lead to dissatisfaction and a lack of motivation to learn (Parameswara et al., 2022). Although Japan has a zoning system, it also allows students to choose schools based on their interests and talents. This creates a better learning environment that suits students' needs (Huangfu, 2024).

Inconsistent Policies: Indonesia's zoning policies often change, which can confuse parents and students (Sulistiyosari et al., 2023). Japan's education policy is more stable and well-planned, allowing all parties to understand and follow the rules (Huangfu, 2024). An effective system requires consistency in education policy.

Education dichotomy: The regulations, techniques, and policies related to admitting new learners should be formulated by the education policymakers (the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia) to align with the National Education Standards (BSNP) and share a common vision and mission. These regulations should also be simple, flexible, and humanistic to be applicable in schools and madrasahs (Khoiriyah et al., 2023).

IV. Conclusion

This study reveals that zoning policy significantly affects the shift in public interest toward private Islamic educational institutions. This is due to several factors: the inability of public schools to meet students' needs, the decline in quality of public schools, and the decline in student discipline. In the face of zoning policies, strategies undertaken by private Islamic education institutions to attract new students include improving school

performance and innovating ways to promote themselves. By improving their quality and image, these institutions can capitalize on this shift in public interest and become the first choice for parents seeking a higher-quality education for their children.

To ensure that zoning policies achieve educational equity while maintaining school quality, several practical policy recommendations are proposed. First, the government should review and refine zoning mechanisms, particularly in regions with limited school options. This should be done by incorporating flexible zoning criteria that balance equity with parental choice. Secondly, systematic efforts are required to enhance the quality of public education. These efforts should include teacher capacity development, school-based management reform, and investment in facilities and digital learning infrastructure. Thirdly, transparent and accountable student admission procedures must be consistently enforced to uphold fairness and public trust.

Moreover, private Islamic educational institutions must continue to enhance academic quality, character-building programs, and technology integration to maintain competitiveness in the evolving education landscape. Collaboration between public and private educational institutions, local governments, and Islamic education authorities is also necessary to expand access, share best practices, and jointly develop community-based education initiatives. It is imperative to enhance public awareness and parental literacy regarding zoning regulations to facilitate informed school-choice decisions. The implementation of these strategies could improve the effectiveness of zoning policies in Indonesia. By facilitating equitable access to educational resources, these policies can contribute to the enhancement of education quality on a broader scale.

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