

## FROM ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY TO RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION: THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL ZONING POLICIES ON STUDENT DIVERSITY

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### Abstract:

Zoning-based New Student Admission is a policy designed to allocate students to schools based on their area of residence. This policy aims to ensure equitable access to education and promote social diversity within the school environment. This paper investigates the impact of the zoning-based New Student Admission system on student diversity in schools. The school zoning policy has the potential to modify the levels and dimensions of student diversity. Schools are required to admit the largest quota of students through the zoning route, resulting in a student body that reflects the composition of the local community. This research is significant because previous studies have primarily focused on administrative and academic aspects. Employing a qualitative methodology, including online focus group discussions (FGDs) as a data collection technique, this study found that schools labeled as "excellent" or "prestigious," particularly those situated in urban centers, reported increased student diversity following the implementation of the school zoning policy. This shift in diversity encompasses not only academic ability but also economic background, ethnicity, regionality, and religion. The study recommends that teachers enhance their capacity to manage student diversity as a consequence of the school zoning system.

### Abstrak:

Penerimaan Peserta Didik Baru berbasis zonasi merupakan kebijakan yang diterapkan untuk mendistribusikan siswa ke sekolah-sekolah berdasarkan wilayah tempat tinggal mereka. Kebijakan ini bertujuan untuk memastikan pemerataan akses pendidikan dan mendorong keberagaman sosial di lingkungan sekolah. Artikel ini mengkaji dampak dari sistem Penerimaan Peserta Didik Baru berbasis zonasi terhadap keragaman siswa di sekolah. Kebijakan zonasi sekolah memberikan peluang untuk mengubah tingkat dan aspek keragaman siswa. Hal ini disebabkan oleh mandat bagi sekolah untuk menerima siswa dengan kuota terbesar dari jalur zonasi, yang berarti komposisi siswa akan mencerminkan komposisi masyarakat yang tinggal di sekitar sekolah. Penelitian ini penting karena penelitian sebelumnya lebih banyak berfokus pada aspek administratif dan akademis. Berdasarkan studi kualitatif yang menggunakan FGD daring sebagai teknik pengumpulan data, studi ini menemukan bahwa sekolah-sekolah yang dilabeli sebagai sekolah unggulan atau favorit dan berlokasi di tengah kota umumnya mengalami peningkatan keberagaman siswa setelah penerapan kebijakan zonasi sekolah. Perubahan keberagaman tersebut tidak hanya terjadi dalam hal kemampuan akademik, tetapi juga dalam hal latar belakang ekonomi, etnisitas atau kedaerahan, dan agama. Rekomendasi dari studi ini

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adalah bahwa guru perlu meningkatkan kapasitas mereka dalam mengelola keragaman siswa sebagai konsekuensi dari adanya sistem zonasi sekolah.

**Keywords:**

School Zoning, Admission, Diversity

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## INTRODUCTION

Since 2017, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (MoEC) has implemented a new policy regarding student admissions in public schools. This policy represents a significant departure from previous admission policies in terms of eligibility criteria. Whereas the former policy primarily evaluated students based on their national test results or scores, the new policy prioritizes the students' residential locations. Consequently, this policy is referred to as the Sistem Penerimaan Peserta Didik Baru berbasis zonasi or PPDB zonasi, which translates to the school-zoning-based admission system (hereinafter referred to as the school zoning system). Under the PPDB zoning system, public schools managed by local governments are mandated to admit prospective students who reside within the designated radius of the nearest school zone (Mujahidah et al., 2024).

The school zoning system has undergone several iterations since its inception. Initially established by Minister of Education and Culture Regulation (Permendikbud) No. 17/2017 in 2017, the system has been refined through successive amendments. The most recent update is encapsulated in Permendikbud No. 1/2021. The principal distinctions among these regulations pertain to the percentage allocation of new student categories, or quotas, within the school zoning pathway.

In essence, the school zoning system aims to ensure equitable access to quality education services. This objective is achieved through the implementation of a new admission system designed to eliminate the "favorite school" status of certain institutions, thereby promoting uniformity across all schools (Kemendikbud, 2018). Embracing this ethos of equalization, schools are compelled to admit new students based on specific criteria and quotas stipulated by regulations issued by the MoEC, primarily focusing on school zoning criteria or the proximity of prospective students' residences to their intended schools.

During its early stages of implementation, the school zoning system faced notable challenges, as documented by various media reports. According to these sources, the

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impacts of the school zoning system were multifaceted. Firstly, there were instances of private schools being deserted, notably in Semarang and Blora, Central (RMOL Jateng, 2019). Secondly, from the perspective of parents, reactions were mixed: while some families perceived benefits, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds gaining access to favored schools traditionally attended by wealthier students, others felt disadvantaged. High-achieving students with excellent national test scores sometimes found themselves unable to secure admission to these preferred schools (Jateng Today, 2019; Radar Surabaya, 2019). Furthermore, there were reports of many high-scoring students failing to gain admission to top-tier schools, such as those in Surabaya, while students with lower national test scores managed to enter prestigious institutions, as observed in Semarang (Jateng Today, 2019; Radar Surabaya, 2019). Additionally, there were instances where classes for students with above-average academic potential were eliminated, particularly in Surabaya (Jawa Pos, 2019). Lastly, difficulties were encountered in meeting the specified quotas for student admissions through the designated school zoning pathways, as evidenced in Cirebon (Pikiran Rakyat, 2019). These challenges highlight the intricate dynamics and diverse outcomes associated with the implementation of the school zoning system within Indonesia's educational framework.

According to the above news reports, one notable impact of the school zoning system is the transformation of student composition within schools. Specifically, favored schools are now required to admit students with lower national test scores. This policy shift has led to increased diversity among students in terms of academic ability within schools. This contrasts with the pre-school zoning era, where student populations tended to be homogeneous based on academic achievement, often reflecting specific socio-economic statuses.

With schools mandated to accept students based on zoning criteria, it is anticipated that the new admission policy will foster broader forms of diversity beyond academic prowess. This diversity encompasses social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, as the student body composition mirrors the diversity of the local community surrounding each school.

The introduction of the school zoning system marks a significant departure in Indonesian educational policy. The implementation of this new admission policy has disrupted established norms and generated controversy and challenges. Therefore, understanding the implications of increased student diversity resulting from the school zoning system is crucial. It prepares schools and educators to effectively manage and leverage the opportunities presented by these changes.

The relationship between school zoning systems and diversity has been extensively studied across various international contexts. In New Zealand, for example, education policies have facilitated access to socially advantaged schools for the urban middle class, often resulting in a correlation between residential and school segregation. This situation underscores how socio-economic differences among schools can influence academic achievement disparities, with schools of higher socio-economic status generally

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achieving better outcomes. Moreover, school segregation in such contexts can exacerbate inequalities beyond academics, impacting access to resources, networks, and information crucial for student development (Thrupp, 2007). Contrastingly, in the United States, school choice admissions systems have been critiqued for perpetuating racial and ethnic segregation rather than promoting integration, highlighting the complex dynamics and unintended consequences of educational policies aimed at enhancing diversity and equity (Roda & Wells, 2013). These insights underscore the importance of carefully examining the impacts of school zoning policies on diversity and equity in educational settings worldwide, informing ongoing discussions and policy formulations in diverse educational landscapes.

Several studies have examined the implementation of the school zoning system in Indonesia. Research conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) in 2017 revealed that schools generally adhered to the school zoning system by prioritizing students residing closer to the school (Puslitjakdikbud, 2017). Furthermore, findings from a study by Purwanti, Irawati, & Adiwisastra (2018) indicated a notable increase in the adoption of the school zoning policy during the 2017/2018 academic year in Bandung City. This increase was evidenced by three main factors: (1) heightened support from local educational policies, particularly from the Bandung City Education Office; (2) enhanced accessibility to education for disadvantaged students, including those from low-income backgrounds; and (3) an expanded number of schools implementing admissions based on student domiciles. These insights underscore the evolving landscape of educational policy in Indonesia and the efforts to promote equitable access to education through the school zoning system.

Research conducted by Pangaribuan & Hariyati (2019) on junior high schools in Gresik Regency, East Java, found that the school zoning system operates effectively, evidenced by the balanced distribution of potential students across the region. Similarly, findings from Azhari & Suryanef (2019) in Padang City indicate that the implementation of the school zoning system has successfully equalized access to and the quality of education. The system has notably reduced the distance between students' homes and schools based on zoning criteria from their respective elementary schools. Moreover, in terms of student quality, the system has fostered diversity by dispersing high-achieving students who were previously concentrated in certain schools. These studies highlight positive outcomes of the school zoning policy in Indonesia, contributing to more equitable educational opportunities and improved student diversity across regions.

The findings from Marini & Utoyo (2019) indicated successful implementation of the school zoning system at SMAN 9 Bandar Lampung and SMAN 14 Bandar Lampung, two public high schools in Lampung City. Concurrently, Purwanti, Irawati, Adiwisastra, & Bektı (2019) highlighted that despite encountering some negative impacts, there was an improvement in target accuracy in the implementation of the school zoning system in 2018 compared to its initial rollout in 2017. These studies underscore both the successes and challenges associated with the school zoning policy in Indonesia, reflecting ongoing efforts to refine and optimize educational access and equity through strategic policy implementation.

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The findings from Bintoro (2018) on the implementation of the school zoning system in Samarinda City revealed significant community turmoil. This unrest stemmed from several factors: inadequate socialization resulting in a lack of understanding of the new system, concerns about the possibility of attending schools outside of their designated zones, and apprehensions regarding uneven educational standards. Similarly, Muammar (2019) on the school zoning system in Mataram City highlighted challenges in elementary schools, including the limited number of favored schools, disparities in educational quality among schools, and insufficient government-led socialization efforts about the school zoning system. In contrast, Adiputra, Karsidi, & Haryono (2019) on the school zoning system at SMAN 2 Sukoharjo, a public high school in Central Java, found that the community faced cultural delays in adapting to the online admission system. These studies collectively underscore the complexities and diverse challenges associated with the implementation of school zoning policies across different regions in Indonesia, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive socialization, equity in educational standards, and community readiness in ensuring effective policy outcomes.

Furthermore, literature on the impact of the school zoning system in Indonesia predominantly examines its effects on academic aspects. Studies such as those conducted by Putri (2022), Nurlailiyah (2019), Khairil Aftar, Ahmad Lahmi, & Rahmi (2021), and Chotimah & Kholil (2022) have identified shifts in student demographics following the implementation of the school zoning system. Specifically, these studies highlight that there has been increased diversity in terms of academic abilities among students. This indicates that the school zoning policy has influenced the composition of student intake, fostering greater variation in academic capacities across Indonesian schools.

The literature reviewed highlights several key themes regarding the school zoning system in Indonesia. Firstly, education policies, particularly the school zoning system, have been associated with social segregation. Without targeted strategies within the school zoning framework, there is a persistent risk of fostering social divisions among educational institutions (Roda & Wells, 2013; Thrupp, 2007). Secondly, despite ongoing challenges identified in various studies (Adiputra et al., 2019; Arifudin, 2007; Azhari & Suryanef, 2019; Bintoro, 2018; Marini & Utoyo, 2019; Muammar, 2019; Pangaribuan & Hariyati, 2019), there have been localized improvements in the implementation of the school zoning system (Purwanti, Irawati, Adiwisastra, & Beki, 2019). Thirdly, while much research has focused on the academic impacts of the school zoning system, there remains a notable gap regarding the conditions of student diversity in schools post-implementation. In addressing this gap, this paper aims to contribute by exploring the increased student diversity as a significant impact of the school zoning system in Indonesian school admissions. By examining how the policy influences the demographic composition of students, particularly in terms of socio-economic background, ethnicity, and academic ability, this study seeks to provide insights into the broader implications of educational policy on social equity and inclusion within Indonesian schools.

The issue of diversity in schools is extensively discussed in studies on multicultural education, which advocates for equal educational opportunities for students from diverse

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social and cultural backgrounds. Multicultural education recognizes that social and cultural factors can significantly influence educational opportunities, often favoring students with certain socio-cultural characteristics over others within a given education system. Additionally, it asserts that educational systems in diverse societies should foster students' understanding of their own culture and that of the broader society, aiming to cultivate mutual respect among students from different backgrounds (Banks, 2014). Moreover, multicultural education emphasizes the importance of challenging hegemony and promoting diversity within educational settings (Suradi, 2018). This perspective is crucial for understanding how the school zoning policy can contribute to achieving the goals of multicultural education. By promoting diversity in schools and facilitating interaction among students from varied backgrounds, the school zoning policy can foster an environment where students learn from one another's cultures and experiences. Ultimately, this contributes to promoting mutual respect and understanding among students, aligning with the broader goals of multicultural education in diverse societies.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The study underlying this paper employed a qualitative research method, utilizing data gathered from online focused group discussions (FGDs) conducted via the Zoom Meeting application. FGDs are a form of qualitative data collection involving group interviews, particularly useful when time constraints limit individual interviews (Lune & Berg, 2017). The FGDs included representatives from 17 public high schools across various regions in Indonesia, encompassing both "favorite" and "non-favorite" status schools. Schools were selected to represent urban, suburban, and rural locations, aiming to capture variation in the impact of the school zoning system on student diversity.

Participants included principals, vice-principals, and subject teachers, who discussed key topics such as the implementation of the school zoning policy, characteristics of the school environment and local community, socio-cultural and economic backgrounds of students, and observed changes in student diversity post-implementation. The study was conducted between June and October 2020, and data analysis was conducted qualitatively, organizing findings into emergent themes using MS Word without specialized software. Given the qualitative nature of the study, it aimed to provide descriptive insights rather than generalizable conclusions, focusing on how the school zoning policy influences student diversity across diverse school settings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Schools: Their Status and Surrounding Communities**

Officially, the quality of Indonesian schools is determined through an accreditation policy overseen by the Badan Akreditasi Nasional Sekolah/Madrasah (BAN-S/M), or National Accreditation Board for School/Madrasah. This independent body evaluates the feasibility of educational programs and units at the primary and secondary levels, referencing the National Education Standards as established by Government Regulation No. 57 of 2021 (Peraturan Pemerintah Republik Indonesia Nomor 57 Tahun 2021

Tentang Standar Nasional Pendidikan). Based on this system, schools are classified as unggul (excellent), symbolized as A; baik (good), symbolized as B; cukup (average), symbolized as C; or tidak terakreditasi (unaccredited).

However, an unofficial classification system, stemming from community perception, also exists alongside the formal accreditation process. This system categorizes schools as either "favorite" (or excellent) or "non-favorite" (non-excellent). The distinction is based on factors such as strong national test scores, high rates of admission to state universities for graduates, and a reputation for outstanding students. Communities tend to view such schools as superior due to their perceived ability to foster student potential and academic achievement.

Out of the 17 schools studied, 10 were categorized as "favorite" schools: SMAN 1 Magelang, SMAN 1 Blora, SMAN 68 Jakarta, SMAN 8 Bandung, SMAN 1 Tanjungpinang, SMAN 1 Batam, SMAN 1 Bekasi, SMAN 1 Depok, SMAN 1 Binjai, and SMAN 1 Medan. The remaining seven were categorized as "non-favorite" schools: SMAN 1 Cepiring (Kendal Regency), SMAN 10 Semarang, SMAN 7 Semarang, SMAN 7 Makassar, SMAN 1 Payung (South Bangka Regency), SMAN 4 Bogor, and SMAN 1 Baros (Serang Regency).

In terms of location, the favorite schools are typically situated in city centers, while non-favorite schools are generally found in suburban areas. These differences in location are not merely geographical; they also reflect the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the surrounding communities. The tables below provide a comparative overview of the socio-economic and cultural contexts of the studied schools. Table 1 details the neighborhoods around schools classified as "favorite," while Table 2 focuses on the neighborhoods surrounding those classified as "non-favorite."

**Table 1.** Neighborhoods around favorite schools

<b>School</b>	<b>Neighborhoods</b>
SMAN 1 Magelang	Located in the city center, surrounded by communities of middle to upper economic status
SMAN 1 Blora	Predominantly populated by middle to lower-class individuals
SMAN 68 Jakarta	Located in the city center, close to densely populated areas
SMAN 8 Bandung	Surrounded by a community with middle to upper economic status
SMAN 1 Tanjungpinang	Located in a socio-economically diverse neighborhood
SMAN 1 Batam	Located in a socio-economically diverse neighborhood
SMAN 1 Bekasi	Located in a socio-economically diverse neighborhood
SMAN 1 Depok	Located in a socio-economically diverse neighborhood
SMAN 1 Binjai	Located in a socio-economically diverse neighborhood
SMAN 1 Medan	Located in a socio-economically diverse neighborhood

*Source:* primary data by author

Table 1 reveals that the studied "favorite" schools are generally located in

socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods. This is unsurprising, as many of these schools are situated in city centers, often flanked by both densely populated and affluent residential areas. However, some schools identify their neighborhoods as relatively homogeneous. For instance, SMAN 1 Magelang is located in the city center, surrounded by a community predominantly of middle to upper economic status. Conversely, SMAN 1 Blora reports being surrounded by individuals of primarily middle to lower economic status.

**Tabel 2.** Neighborhoods around non-favorite schools

<b>School</b>	<b>Neighborhoods</b>
SMAN 1 Cepiring	Located on the outskirts of the city, surrounded by a community of middle to lower economic status
SMAN 10 Semarang	Located in a residential area, but bordered by industrial and rural areas
SMAN 7 Semarang	Located on the outskirts of the city, surrounded by a community of middle to lower economic status
SMAN 7 Makassar	Located on the outskirts of the city, surrounded by a socio-economically diverse community with a predominantly lower-middle economic status
SMAN 1 Payung	Located in a rural area, surrounded by a community of middle to lower economic status
SMAN 4 Bogor	Located on the outskirts of the city, surrounded by a community of middle to lower economic status
SMAN 1 Baros	Located on the outskirts of the city, surrounded by a community of middle to lower economic status

*Source:* primary data by author

Table 2 reveals that most "non-favorite" schools are situated in suburban or rural areas and are surrounded by communities of predominantly lower-middle economic status. However, some schools, such as SMAN 7 Makassar, identify their surrounding communities as socially diverse, with migrants from East Nusa Tenggara living alongside the local Bugis and Makassarese populations. This suggests that geographical location, particularly distance from urban centers, influences public perception of school status. Schools in suburban or rural areas are often viewed as less desirable than those located in city centers.

### **Aspects of Student Diversity Post School Zoning System**

The implementation of the school zoning system altered the level of heterogeneity, particularly in several schools labeled as "favorite." These schools became spaces for increased diversity from various social groups as they were required to accept more students from their surrounding neighborhoods.

Essentially, the school zoning system impacted diversity issues in almost all schools, although the degree and nature of the emerging diversity varied. The aspects of



diversity that arose included academic ability, socioeconomic background, religion, and ethnicity. Tables 3 and 4 provide detailed information on these aspects of student diversity following the implementation of the school zoning system.

**Table 3.** Changes in student diversity in favorite schools following the Implementation of School Zoning

School	Student Diversity
SMAN 1 Magelang	Academic, economy
SMAN 1 Blora	Academic, economy
SMAN 68 Jakarta	Academic, economy
SMAN 8 Bandung	Academic, economy
SMAN 1 Tanjungpinang	Academic, economy
SMAN 1 Batam	Academic, economy
SMAN 1 Bekasi	Academic, economy
SMAN 1 Depok	Academic, economy
SMAN 1 Binjai	Academic
SMAN 1 Medan	Academic, religion, ethnicity

*Source:* primary data by author

Table 3 illustrates the aspects of student diversity observed in "favorite" schools after the implementation of the school zoning system. Notably, academic ability emerged as a common aspect of diversity across all schools. Regarding this, the Principal of SMAN 1 Blora stated:

"In the beginning, before [school] zoning, [our students] were smart kids, clever kids. However, after this [school] zoning, inevitably there is diversity; that is [the presence of] children who are academically lacking-whose learning motivation is rather low."

The next prevalent aspect of diversity observed was socioeconomic background. Additionally, one school noted changes in the religious and ethnic composition of its student body. A teacher at SMAN 68 Jakarta described an increase in the number of students from low-income families at his school after the implementation of the zoning policy, as indicated by the possession of KJP (Kartu Jakarta Pintar, a card signifying eligibility for scholarships targeted towards low-income students). He stated:

"Interestingly, previously, KJP [holders] at [SMAN] 68 was in the range of 20 or less; but for this year, after [the implementation] of zoning-based student admissions, there are 132 students [of KJP holders]."

SMAN 1 Medan acknowledged changes in the religious and ethnic characteristics of its student body. A teacher at SMAN 1 Medan noted that before the implementation of the school zoning system, the school had never enrolled students from the Tamil community, who are adherents of Sikhism. However, after the implementation, the school accepted Tamil students through the zoning pathway, as the Tamil community resides within the designated zoning area of SMAN 1 Medan. The Vice Principal of SMAN 1 Medan stated:

“Within 500 meters of the school, there are a Tamil [communities]. [For] decades, the students of Tamil descent—who are Hindus—never got into SMAN 1 [Medan]. Because of ... two factors: first, the academic ability is indeed below average; second, the financial capability is low. ... But ... it turns out that after [the school] zoning, many of them entered [SMAN 1 Medan].”

**Table 4.** Student diversity change in non-favorite schools post school zoning implementation

School	Student Diversity
SMAN 1 Cepiring	None
SMAN 10 Semarang	None
SMAN 7 Semarang	None
SMAN 7 Makassar	Religion, ethnicity
SMAN 1 Payung	Academic
SMAN 4 Bogor	None
SMAN 1 Baros	Academic

*Source:* primary data by author

Table 4 presents the aspects of student diversity in "non-favorite" schools following the implementation of the school zoning system. The table reveals that most of these schools did not experience any significant impact on student diversity due to the zoning policy. This is understandable given that these schools are not typically the preferred choice for junior high school graduates in their respective areas. Additionally, their locations in suburban or rural areas often mean that the student body primarily consists of local residents, with little change in student intake before or after the zoning implementation. This is exemplified by the statement of the Principal of SMAN 1 Cepiring:

“... Regarding [the changes in] the diversity of academic [abilities] [among students], for us it is not felt. ... SMAN 1 Cepiring is used to accepting students who are academically middle to lower class.”

The exceptions to this trend are SMAN 7 Makassar, SMAN 1 Payung in South Bangka Regency, and SMAN 1 Baros in Serang Regency. SMAN 7 Makassar reported changes in the ethnic and religious composition of its student body due to the zoning policy. The school had to accept Catholic students from non-native families originating from East Nusa Tenggara who reside within the school's zoning area. Prior to the zoning implementation, the school was predominantly composed of students from the Bugis and Makassar ethnic groups, who are primarily Muslim. A representative of SMAN 7 Makassar explained:

“Before there was [school] zoning, our students mostly came from Bugis-Makassar and were Muslim; but now it is multi-religious.”

Meanwhile, SMAN 1 Payung reported changes in the academic characteristics of their students. As the only public school in Payung Sub-district, SMAN 1 Payung serves as the primary educational institution for junior high school graduates from nine

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surrounding villages. Before the implementation of the school zoning system, SMAN 1 Payung could "select" new students based on specific grade standards. However, after the implementation, the school was required to allocate quotas to prospective students who registered through the zoning pathway, regardless of their academic performance. A teacher representing SMAN 1 Payung explained:

“Before [the implementation of] the [school] zoning policy, we used the score standard [in] accepting [new] students, ... but after [the implementation of] the [school] zoning system, we don't use the score standard anymore. So, both students with below average academic [ability] and [students] with high academic [ability] can enter here (this school).”

SMAN 1 Baros acknowledged changes in the academic composition of its students, shifting towards greater homogeneity. Before the school zoning system, SMAN 1 Baros accepted students with relatively higher initial academic abilities from the broader Pandeglang Regency area, as it is located on the border between Serang Regency and Pandeglang Regency. However, after the implementation, SMAN 1 Baros primarily admits students from its own zoning area, where the surrounding community has a lower-middle socioeconomic status, often correlating with lower initial academic abilities in school-age children. A math teacher from SMAN 1 Baros participating in the FGD described the situation:

“[Post-zoning], what we feel is missing from our students is ... academic [ability variation]. ... We see [that post-zoning] students have the same academic ability.”

Based on the findings presented above, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the aspects of student diversity following the implementation of the school zoning system. These conclusions are summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Aspects of Student Diversity Post School Zoning Implementation

<b>Aspects of Diversity</b>	<b>Description</b>
Academic ability	Before the implementation of the school zoning system, schools labeled as "favorite" were predominantly composed of students with above-average academic abilities. However, following the implementation, there was a significant increase in the diversity of initial academic abilities among students in these schools.
Economic background	Before the implementation of the school zoning system, some "favorite" schools were predominantly composed of students from middle to upper-class backgrounds. Following the implementation, these schools experienced a broader representation of socioeconomic backgrounds among their students, leading to increased socioeconomic

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	diversity.
Religion	Before the implementation of the school zoning system, some schools had never enrolled students from certain religious minority communities. This was often due to these students not meeting the academic requirements or having lower national test scores. However, following the implementation, students from religious minority communities gained access to their nearest school, regardless of their academic performance or test scores.
Ethnicity or regionality	Before the implementation of the school zoning system, certain ethnic minorities were often excluded from attending schools in their local communities due to academic barriers. However, after the implementation, these ethnic minorities gained access to schools in their vicinity through the zoning pathway, regardless of their prior academic performance.

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*Source:* primary data by author

As illustrated in the discussion of the school communities, the four aspects of student diversity following the implementation of the school zoning system appear to be contingent upon the characteristics of the areas where schools are located. In some areas with homogeneous populations, these aspects may be less pronounced. However, in schools situated at the intersection of diverse social categories and groups, these aspects can significantly impact student diversity. These four aspects highlight the contextual nature of diversity, aligning with the sociological foundation underlying the zoning policy, which seeks to address educational inequalities and gaps between regions. The zoning policy aims to reduce these disparities by ensuring equitable access to quality schools for students from various social and economic backgrounds within their own communities (Mashudi, 2019). While some schools may experience similar changes in diversity, others may only exhibit specific aspects highlighted above. A detailed examination of the dynamics of student diversity following the implementation of the school zoning system will be presented in the following analysis.

### ***Academic Aspect***

The diversity in student academic ability is the most frequently observed impact of the school zoning system implementation. All "favorite" schools participating in this study reported increased diversity in academic ability among their students after the implementation of the zoning policy. This is understandable, as the policy prevented schools from setting academic standards or selecting prospective students, as they had

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done previously. Consequently, the student body became more reflective of the surrounding communities, which are inherently diverse.

Interestingly, two "non-favorite" schools, SMAN 1 Baros and SMAN 1 Payung, also noted changes in the academic aspect of their students after the implementation. While SMAN 1 Baros observed increased homogeneity among its students, SMAN 1 Payung reported greater heterogeneity.

### ***Economic Aspect***

The economic dimension emerged as a significant form of diversity in many of the targeted public high schools. From the schools' perspective, the economic dimension primarily refers to the income level and profession of the students' parents. The schools that acknowledged a change in economic diversity after the implementation of the school zoning system were SMAN 68 Jakarta, SMAN 8 Bandung, SMAN 1 Tanjungpinang, SMAN 1 Batam, SMAN 1 Bekasi, and SMAN 1 Depok.

Based on the interviewees' perspectives, the most notable change following the implementation was the broadened access for students from middle to lower-income backgrounds, as determined by parental income and occupation. The zoning system enabled students with lower economic status to attend schools in their vicinity, particularly those that previously had intense academic competition and primarily catered to the upper-middle class.

### ***Ethnicity or Regional Origin***

The implementation of the school zoning system also broadened opportunities for students from diverse ethnic backgrounds to enroll in their local schools. This phenomenon occurred primarily in areas with heterogeneous populations. The public high schools that experienced notable changes in the ethnic composition of their student bodies due to the zoning system were SMAN 1 Medan and SMAN 7 Makassar.

However, for most other schools, the ethnic aspect was not significantly affected by the zoning system. This could be attributed to either the homogeneity of the surrounding community or other contextual factors. It is important to note that, for the purposes of this study, ethnicity or regionality refers solely to the ethnic origin or birth region of the students. It does not encompass more complex interpretations related to sub-tribes, clans, minority issues, "native vs. non-native" distinctions, or similar categories.

### ***Religious Aspect***

The implementation of the school zoning system has facilitated increased interaction among students from diverse religious backgrounds within the same classrooms. Consequently, changes in the religious composition of the student body have become more likely. Based on the findings, SMAN 1 Medan and SMAN 7 Makassar explicitly identified the impact of the zoning system on religious diversity within their schools.

Notably, even in schools with relatively homogeneous religious populations, the issue of interreligious relations among students has emerged as a point of concern. Based

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on field observations, the schools' perspective on the religious aspect remains primarily focused on the overall composition of religious affiliations within the student body. The religions in question are generally limited to the main recognized religions, with less attention paid to the variations and diversity in religious expressions, or beliefs.

### **School Zoning, Student Diversity, and Multicultural Education**

The preceding analysis demonstrates the dynamic shifts in student diversity following the implementation of the school zoning system. The findings underscore that diversity is not merely a theoretical concept but an empirical reality in Indonesian society. The composition of students after the zoning implementation reflects the diversity present within the communities surrounding the schools. By highlighting these findings, this paper goes beyond the administrative aspects of the school zoning system, unlike previous studies such as those by Adiputra, Karsidi, & Haryono (2019), Arifuddin, Sari, Susanto, & Sayekti (2019), Azhari & Suryanef (2019), Bintoro (2018), (Marini & Utoyo, 2019), Muammar (2019), and Pangaribuan & Hariyati (2019).

Accordingly, the school zoning policy faces challenges that extend beyond its primary objective of creating educational equity. The school zoning system directly or indirectly intersects with efforts to manage student diversity in schools, where the nation's future generations are educated. This intersection ideally supports the development of a young generation capable of coexisting in a diverse society. In this context, the arguments of Roda & Wells (2013) and Thrupp (2007) become relevant, as they highlight the potential for social segregation between educational institutions in the absence of specific strategies within the zoning system. Additionally, the diversity fostered by the school zoning system has the potential to dismantle hegemony and dominance of certain social groups or categories, as suggested by Suradi (2018).

In this context, where various conflicts or disputes related to diversity (religious, ethnic, or socioeconomic) are prevalent, schools can potentially serve as crucial learning spaces for understanding and navigating the realities of diversity that students and teachers encounter daily. Schools can play a pivotal role in contextualizing national philosophies, values, knowledge, and practices encapsulated in the motto "Unity in Diversity." This can expand the potential of schools beyond academic achievement and cognitive skill development, transforming them into spaces that educate individuals to contribute to relationships grounded in the principles of multiculturalism. By doing so, schools can contribute to the realization of multicultural education, which aims to foster interaction among individuals from diverse backgrounds, nurturing mutual understanding and respect (Banks, 2014).

### **CONCLUSION**

The preceding analysis demonstrates that the implementation of the school zoning system has led to both persistence and changes in student diversity within schools. While some schools experienced changes that resulted in greater homogeneity, others witnessed increased heterogeneity. Schools that did not perceive any significant changes

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in diversity were typically "non-favorite" schools located in suburban areas. Similarly, one school reported a shift towards homogeneity. In contrast, "favorite" schools situated in city centers generally reported an increase in student diversity. These changes in diversity were observed across various aspects, including academic ability, socioeconomic background, religion, and ethnicity or regionality. These findings underscore the potential for schools to act as agents of social integration.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that schools and teachers receive assistance and facilitation to enhance their capacity to manage student diversity. This support should emphasize materials and training on the nature of student diversity, its impact on learning environments, and effective management strategies at both the school and classroom levels. Furthermore, collaboration with civil society organizations experienced in diversity management in education, particularly non-academic aspects, would be beneficial.

This study's novelty lies in its examination of the impact of the school zoning policy on student diversity during the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research should build upon these findings by exploring a wider range of cases to gain a deeper understanding of the broader implications of the policy on student diversity and to identify effective strategies that schools can employ to navigate these changes.

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