

Indonesian Student Graduation Policy: An Analysis of Public and Stakeholder Perceptions as a Social Justice Policies Recommendation for Student

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Abstract

The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture issued a policy in the form of Circular Letter Number 14 of 2023 concerning Graduation Activities in Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education Units. This policy is a response from the Ministry of Education to the issue of injustice for underprivileged students. However, the policy has drawn pros and cons from the community because there are ambiguous, indecisive and unspecific wording. As a result, there are still loopholes for schools to be able to carry out graduation activities even though they are not required. This is an important concern considering that the implementation of graduation in Indonesia often involves considerable costs. As a result, the issue of injustice arises for students who do not have sufficient financial capacity, and does not answer the current problems that need to be studied comprehensively. This study aims to look at the perceptions of various actors, including education policy observers, child development and education psychologists, 20 general public, 350 twitter netizens, and 20 parents of students. This research uses qualitative methods through literature studies, interview and open ended survey. The results of this study gave birth to two policy recommendations. The first, graduation still exists with the support of a cross-subsidy program. The second, graduation was changed to a program of provision and motivation for students to continue their further education.

Keywords: Education, Policy, Social Justice

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Introduction

Graduation is a moment that marks an extraordinary achievement in the educational journey, which is greeted with enthusiasm and pride by all parties involved (Charmatz, 2019). Furthermore, Sumartini (2018) defines graduation as the final result of the learning process while attending education at the study table. Graduation is also a tangible proof of students' hard work, dedication, and effort during the education period. In the case of Indonesia, the phenomenon of implementing graduation is not only limited to the university level, but also applied at the basic education level such as in Early Childhood Education (PAUD), Kindergarten (TK), Elementary School (SD), Junior High School (SMP), and Senior High School (Tribunnews.com, 2023). These graduation events are often held with a luxurious concept and require considerable costs (bbc.com, 2023). Furthermore, a lecturer at the Faculty of Psychology, Gadjah Mada University, mentioned that abroad, the term *graduation* is used at all levels of education. However, there is a big difference in the implementation of Indonesian graduations, graduations held abroad tend to take place simply without exaggeration. As in the case of Australia, graduation is held simply without any eating and other lavish celebrations. The essence of graduation activities in Australia is as a place of reflection for children and parents regarding the student's journey during education (Ika, 2023).

Meanwhile in Indonesia, in the implementation of graduation at the kindergarten (TK) to elementary school (SD) level, it is not uncommon to have to spend significant costs, due to the various accommodation needs that must be met to make the graduation activities successful. This becomes too much and burdensome for parents and schools (kabarterdepan.com, 2023). One important aspect is the cost of renting or buying a toga that will be worn at the graduation ceremony. In addition, operational costs for performances or performances are also a factor in the expenses required. Furthermore, building rental and consumption costs also contribute to the amount of costs that must be incurred. The National Coordinator of the Education and Teacher Association (P2G), Satriwan Salim said that the average cost that must be incurred by parents in order to participate in graduation activities at the PAUD-TK level reaches Rp.500,000. Meanwhile, the junior high school-high school level is above Rp.1,000,000. The activity is organized and managed by the school or by the teacher, so graduation becomes an academic obligation (detik.com., 2023).

Kuncup Pertiwi Kindergarten in Kendari is one of the schools that held a graduation ceremony at great expense. The graduation ceremony was held in the main room of the Claro Hotel, Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi, one of the few four-star hotels in Southeast Sulawesi. Parents of students must prepare funds of Rp.500,000 per child to be able to join the graduation activities (kompas.id., 2023). On the other hand, in one of the private high schools in East Jakarta, the school planned a graduation event as well as a *study tour* for class XII students with a fee of 2.5 million per child. The graduation planning reaped pros and cons from parents because they did not agree to the required fees, only about 20 percent of the total parents agreed, so the graduation planning with a budget of 2.5 million was canceled. However, the school continued to celebrate the graduation of students at the school where parents could attend with a fee of IDR 750,000 per child, which was still burdensome for parents (kompas.id., 2023).

Some of the phenomena that have been described are only a small part of many other cases that are not described in Indonesia. The organization of graduation activities often creates an additional financial burden for parents, so it is not uncommon for parents to have to borrow

money from others so that their children can participate in graduation activities (bbc.com 2023). Furthermore, as reported by (kompas.com., 2023), there are parents of students who apply to borrow money by pledging the Motor Vehicle Owner's Book (BPKB) in order to be able to finance administrative needs of Rp.800,000 so that their children can take part in graduation activities at the junior high school (SMA) education level. This decision shows how significant and serious the financial burden that some parents have to face in order to provide a memorable graduation experience for their children.

In response to this problem, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture issued a policy in the form of Circular Letter (SE) No. 14 of 2023 concerning Graduation Activities in Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education Units. However, the policy has attracted public attention because it is considered ambiguous, especially in the first point of the policy which states "Ensure that graduation is not a mandatory activity and the implementation of graduation should not burden parents". The impact is that schools still have the possibility to carry out graduation activities even though it is not mandatory. However, the other side of the impact then creates new problems for some parties.

This is because the tradition of student graduation in Indonesia often requires considerable costs, which in turn has the potential to create a gap in *social justice* for students who are less financially capable. This needs to be a concern of the government considering that *social justice* is related to the fair distribution of society (Rahardjo, 2006). This is in line with Whitcomb's (2010) view that *social justice* is very important in efforts to overcome social, economic and political inequalities that have intellectual roots in a strong progressive tradition. Furthermore, Dworkin (2011) also underlines the importance of integrating *social justice* principles in law to create a more just and equal society.

The importance of emphasizing *social justice* is also an integral part of social economics, as well as efforts to address inequality as a whole. Therefore, social justice is not only related to the moral aspects of social interaction, but also includes the concept of justice as a whole (Bertens, 2000). The principles relating to procedural justice concern the fairness of the process for determining what is fair, regardless of the outcome. Principles relating to redistributive/compensatory justice relate to the determination of punishment and compensation for wrongs, injuries, and losses. In the context of the United States, social justice is also one of the considerations in policy planning, including in the education sector mentioned in the article. The emphasis on social justice reflects an awareness of social inequalities and an attempt to find equitable solutions in society (Young, I. M, 2011).

Furthermore, *social justice* in the context of graduation policies in Indonesia, initially originated from the pros and cons of the community against the wording of policy sentences that contained ambiguity and indecision. As far as the researchers observed, there were several pro and con critics who expressed their agreement and disagreement with this policy. Based on the results of temporary observations on twitter social media, most people feel ambiguity about the editorial of the policy. This shows that there is an understanding of the meaning that must be emphasized by the government so as not to cause the wrong interpretation from the community and ultimately have a negative impact on the continuity of student education. Therefore, community participation and involvement are needed in the formulation of a policy. This is in accordance with Friedman's (1998) opinion that community participation in the policy planning and decision-making process by the government involves essential interactions between citizens and the government. In this context, there is a mutually influential relationship between the policies decided by the

government and the active participation played by the community. Furthermore, Friedman (1998) also considers that the participatory approach is a political process to obtain mutual agreement through negotiation or crowdsourcing activities between all actors (stakeholders). Community participation is either based on independence or institutionalization organized by policy makers as a form of creating common interests.

Based on the *desk study* that researchers have conducted on the issue of graduation policy, both in terms of public perception and issues of injustice that may arise, researchers realize that until now there has been no academic research that deeply examines this phenomenon. Therefore, it is important to investigate in more depth how the public and stakeholders perceive the issue. The aim is to develop better policy recommendations that favor the principles of social justice for students, based on empirical evidence and in-depth analysis of the root causes that arise in the context of the problems that occur.

Research Methods

This research uses qualitative research methods. Qualitative research will understand thoroughly and deeply about the reality of the object of research (Creswell & Wanqing, 2009). In an effort to get an overview of the phenomena related to social justice in the implementation of graduation activities, researchers used the following data collection techniques:

- a. **Literature Study.** Researchers observed various aspects related to the implementation of policies issued by the government. Observations were made on various websites, twitter social media and news articles to obtain accurate data and information about how the graduation policy had an impact on the pros and cons of the community. In this observation, researchers recorded various relevant events, occurrences, and interactions to be further analysed.

The researcher conducted a literature study using secondary data from texts, archives, literature, twitter mass media, and the internet, as well as laws and regulations related to education in Indonesia. This data collection method involved the study and analysis of relevant literature. The literature study validated research data from interviews and focus group discussion notes to help interpret the texts.

- b. **Interview & Open Ended Survey.** The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with various relevant informants who are related and able to provide in-depth information related to the topic under study. To determine the informants, the researcher categorised them into four main categories, namely: Parents of students, the general public, education policy observers, and psychologists who have expertise in the field of education policy and have direct experience in the context of education policy. Within the category of informants from parents, we also categorised informants based on various professions and income levels. The results of the classification can be found in Graph 1. Parents with an income of >4,000,000 are 40%, 1,000,000-1,500,000 are 20%, 1,500,000-2,000,000 are 15%, then parents with an income of 2,000,000-2,500,000 and 3,000,000-4,000,000 are 10% each, the remaining 5% earn 500,000-1,000,000.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis and discussion in this study are based on two main complementary theories, namely the theory of *social justice* by Dworkin (2011) and policy evaluation by William Dunn (2018). The theory of social justice serves as a foundation in understanding how a policy can contribute to creating a more just and equitable social environment. By considering the principles of social justice, policy recommendations can be designed to address social inequalities and provide benefits to the entire community, especially students in the context of graduation policies. Meanwhile, policy evaluation theory helps in measuring the impact of the proposed policy over various time spans. By utilizing policy evaluation tools, this research provides a better understanding of how the implementation of policy recommendations will affect society in the short, medium and long term. The merging of the two theories ultimately aims to formulate policy recommendations that not only have social and ethical relevance within the framework of social justice, but can also be efficiently measured and evaluated over various timescales. This step is crucial in ensuring that the proposed policy can provide sustainable benefits to society.

Social Justice

In the context of social justice issues for students as an implication of the graduation policy through Circular Letter (SE) No. 14 of 2023 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, researchers adopted Dworkin's theory (2011) as a representation of the concept of social justice in this study. The selection of Dworkin's theory as a representation of social justice provides a strong foundation to measure the extent to which the graduation policy is able to accommodate social justice values for students. By focusing on equality, freedom, fair distribution, and non-discrimination, the graduation policy should be able to create an inclusive school environment and provide opportunities for all students to celebrate their successful academic achievements without unfair restrictions or discrimination. Social justice indicators according to Dworkin consist of 4 aspects, including: Equal opportunity, protection of basic freedoms, fair distribution of resources, and non-discrimination.

Overall, social justice in the context of Indonesia's graduation policy illustrates a number of imbalances that affect various aspects, ranging from equal opportunities to the protection of basic freedoms. The policy creates inequality in its implementation, where students from higher economic backgrounds tend to benefit more than those from lower economic families.

Policy Evaluation

Researchers adopted the policy evaluation theory by William Dunn (2018) as a critical step in the public policy process that helps governments, organizations, and communities to understand the impact of graduation policies by outlining several important dimensions that need to be considered in policy evaluation. The choice of policy evaluation theory as a representation of the assessment of public policy provides a solid foundation for assessing the extent to which the graduation policy has achieved its objectives. Some important dimensions that need to be considered in policy evaluation include: effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and accuracy.

Furthermore, in terms of policy evaluation, overall the graduation policy has not achieved the expected effectiveness, and its efficiency has not been optimal, especially in overcoming the problem of high graduation costs for parents. The policy is also inadequate in meeting the

needs of the community as a whole. Then, in terms of psychology, the priority of implementing graduation activities at the education level from kindergarten to high school is not considered urgent, so a wiser and firmer policy is needed to overcome this situation. Furthermore, from the perspective of education policy observers, the clausal flexibility in the graduation policy through the Ministry of Education and Research Circular Letter is designed to maintain a balance of diverse interests, but has implications for the limited firm commitment of the government. Therefore, firmness is needed in the implementation of the policy. Next, in terms of Twitter analysis, the community considers that the graduation policy is still ambiguous and requires a change to a strict ban on graduation activities to address existing inequality issues.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the perceptions of these various stakeholders, the conclusion emphasizes the need for improvements in the graduation policy to achieve more equitable and effective social justice goals. Therefore, researchers recommend four new policy alternatives that can be implemented in the future, namely: Policy/Program of cross-subsidy for underprivileged students, Policy/Program of learning reflection and evaluation during schooling, and Policy/Program of debriefing and providing motivation to continue the next level of education.

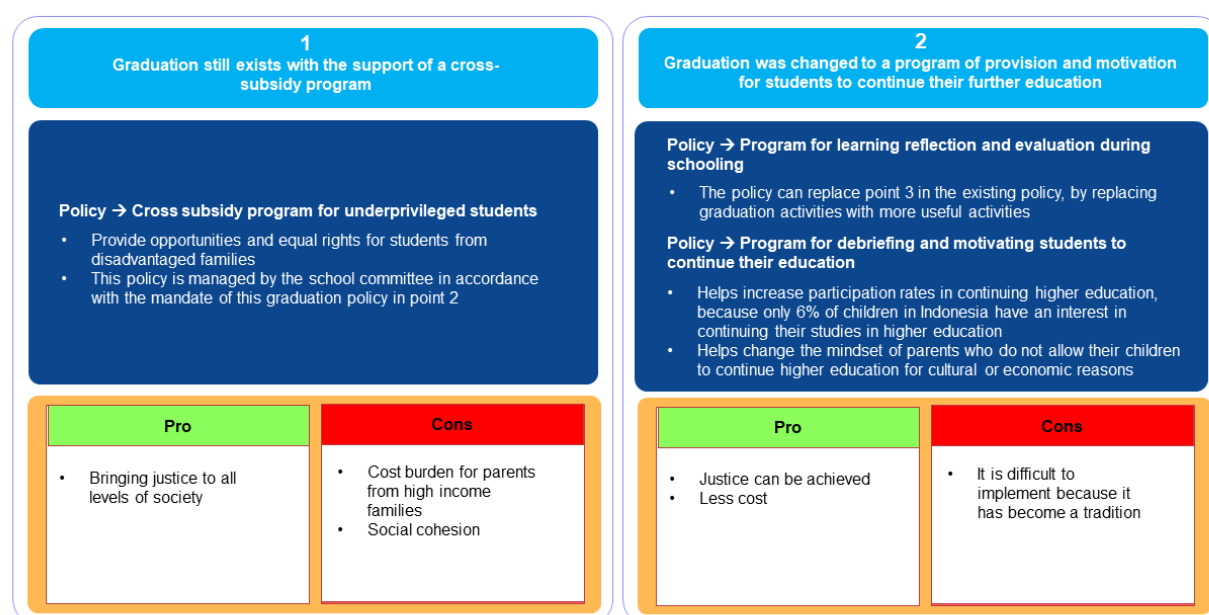


Figure 1. Policy Recommendation Visualization
Source: Processed by Researchers (2023)

First, Graduation still exists with the support of a cross-subsidy program, the cross-subsidy policy/program is intended to provide opportunities and equal rights for students from underprivileged families. Additionally, this program can teach students to empathize with their peers' difficulties, cultivate empathy within students, and teach children the meaning of equal rights. Furthermore, this strengthens the relationship between parents of students, who previously tended to compete with each other. This policy will be managed by the school committee in accordance with the mandate of the graduation policy in point 2, where "this graduation activity must involve the school committee, parents of students, or the students themselves."

This recommendation suggests maintaining the tradition of graduation with the support of a cross-subsidy program. The positive effect is achieving fairness in celebrating academic achievements for all segments of society. However, on the other hand, there are several negative impacts to consider. First, families with high incomes may feel burdened by additional costs that may arise from this subsidy program. Additionally, social cohesion may also be affected by differences in treatment between high and low-income groups.

Second, Graduation was changed to a program of provision and motivation for students to continue their further education. The concept of graduation underwent a transformation, evolving into a program aimed at providing support and motivation for students to pursue further education. This shift signifies a departure from merely celebrating the completion of a phase of education towards actively encouraging and facilitating ongoing academic endeavors. The revised approach emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and personal development beyond the traditional confines of graduation ceremonies. In detail, the Graduation Policy Recommendations which are converted into a provision and motivation program for students to continue their education further are as follows:

The policy/program of reflection on learning and evaluation throughout schooling.

This policy/program can replace point 1 in the existing policy by transforming graduation activities into more beneficial events. This aims to address the perception of the community and parents of students who feel that the current graduation ceremonies are wasteful and merely serve as a platform for parents to showcase their status, thereby discriminating against certain groups. The previous graduation activities seemed forced, leaving less affluent parents with no choice but to follow the majority.

The policy/program of preparation and motivation provision for continuing to the next level of education.

This policy/program can help increase the participation rate in higher education, as only 6% of children in Indonesia have an interest in continuing their education at the higher education level (Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration, 2023). The provision and motivation provided are not only aimed at students but can also help change the mindset of parents who do not allow their children to pursue higher education due to cultural or economic reasons. Schools can also conduct socialization on government scholarships and assist parents in registering their children for these scholarships.

This recommendation suggests changing the concept of graduation into a program that provides support and motivation for students to continue their education. The positive effect is creating equal access to education and reducing the financial burden that students and their families may face. However, this recommendation also presents several challenges, particularly in its implementation. Transforming the tradition of graduation into a new program may be difficult due to resistance from those who uphold old traditions and also because adjustments are needed within the existing education system.

Nevertheless, it is hoped that these policies can create equitable benefits for all parties so that social justice can be realized at all levels of society.

Research Limitations

This research encountered several limitations throughout the study. Firstly, gathering qualitative data from multiple informants through an open-ended survey posed challenges in

ensuring depth and consistency in responses. Additionally, the exploration of social justice aspects and policy evaluation remained somewhat limited, lacking comprehensiveness in their analysis. Moreover, the availability of informants was restricted, potentially impacting the diversity and breadth of perspectives considered in the study. These limitations warrant acknowledgment and may suggest areas for further refinement or expansion in future research endeavors.

Research Future Agenda

For future research agendas, it is recommended to delve deeper by conducting more extensive interviews or focus group discussions involving a broader and more diverse range of informants, aiming to gather richer qualitative data. Moreover, expanding the scope of exploration into social justice and policy evaluation to encompass a wider spectrum of perspectives and factors would be beneficial. Additionally, enhancing the number and diversity of informants is essential to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the issues under investigation. These strategies would contribute to a more thorough and nuanced analysis, enabling a deeper insight into the subject matter.

Conclusion

Indonesia's graduation policy demonstrates imbalances that lead to disparities in various aspects, especially in educational opportunities and protection of fundamental freedoms. The policy's implementation tends to favor students from higher economic backgrounds, while those from lower-income families feel disadvantaged. Evaluations indicate that the policy has not been effective or efficient in addressing the high costs of graduation. Psychologically, the urgency of implementing graduation activities from kindergarten to high school levels is not considered, and policy flexibility suggests a lack of government commitment. The public also believes that the graduation policy needs to be tightened to address existing uncertainties and inequalities. Therefore, researcher gave birth to two policy recommendations. The first, graduation still exists with the support of a cross-subsidy program. The second, graduation was changed to a program of provision and motivation for students to continue their further education.

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