



Negotiating Excellence and Equity: Gus Dur Pribumisasi Islam as an Ethical Framework for School Policy

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Abstract:

Educational excellence policies may improve school quality while simultaneously creating differentiated access to educational opportunities. This study examines the construction of the Sekolah Maung policy in West Java and its consistency with the ethical principles of Abdurrahman Wahid Pribumisasi Islam. The study employed a qualitative library research design using a conceptual-philosophical approach and Critical Content Analysis. Data were drawn from official policy documents, the Sekolah Maung blueprint, regulations, Gus Dur original works, and relevant scholarly literature. Data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, supported by source triangulation and referential adequacy. The findings reveal three forms of institutional differentiation: achievement-based admission, standardized performance requirements, and concentrated educational resources in 41 designated schools. Analysis of Gus Dur thought identified three ethical principles: contextual inclusivity, responsibility toward marginalized groups, and sociocultural embeddedness. The study concludes that educational excellence requires alignment with equitable access and social responsibility. The study contributes an Islamic ethical perspective to educational policy analysis and implies the need for transparent admission, equity monitoring, contextual responsiveness, and broader quality improvement across public schools.

INTRODUCTION

Education serves a strategic function not only in improving academic achievement but also in ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all citizens. Although high-performing schools can improve educational quality, institutional clustering based on achievement may create unequal access to resources, qualified teachers, facilities, and learning opportunities (Achmad et al., 2025; Alhumud, 2025; Arman & Suherman, 2026). This issue deserves broader attention because unequal educational quality can reinforce social disparities among different groups. Previous studies indicate that achievement-based selection may advantage students who already possess stronger cultural and economic capital (Feszterová, 2024; Liu et al., 2023). Therefore, efforts to develop high-performing schools need to be grounded in a framework of educational justice so quality enhancement does not occur by excluding vulnerable groups from equitable and meaningful educational opportunities.

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The central societal problem emerges when educational quality policies prioritize competition, selection, and the concentration of resources in particular schools over the equitable distribution of learning opportunities (Obani & Izu-Obani, 2025; Sari et al., 2025). Selection mechanisms that appear administratively neutral can produce unequal outcomes for students from diverse economic, geographical, and cultural backgrounds. From Bourdieu's (1986) perspective, schools can reproduce inequality when cultural capital acquired within families strongly influences academic success (Jin et al., 2025; Stahl & Mu, 2024). Giroux (2020) and Apple (2019) similarly argue that competitive orientations may reinforce educational commodification and the dominance of particular social groups (Akarsu, 2026; Verelst et al., 2025). Accordingly, the problem of education concerns not merely who achieves the highest academic performance, but also who is provided with adequate opportunities to develop their capacities fairly, equally, and with dignity within the national education system.

In West Java, this issue has taken concrete form through the Sekolah Maung (Manusia Unggul) policy, launched for the 2026/2027 academic year. The program aims to revitalize selected senior secondary schools as specialized institutions focused on science, technology, and vocational development while cultivating the Manusa Waluya profile. In its initial implementation, 41 schools were designated as special clusters, with student admission mechanisms eliminating the residence-based pathway and emphasizing academic and non-academic achievement (Kriewaldt et al., 2024; Thamrin, 2026). Approximately 70,000–80,000 junior secondary graduates reportedly could not enter these public schools (Hamiyah et al., 2024; Lane et al., 2024). They were directed to partner private schools (Mulyadi, 2026), raising questions about institutional differentiation, educational access, and social equity within the regional education system.

Previous literature has extensively examined the relationship between high-performing schools, selection mechanisms, and the reproduction of social inequality. Oraini (2026) identifies cultural capital as a crucial mechanism of social reproduction, while Duarte (2023) demonstrates how school choice and competition can intensify institutional segregation. Duarte (2023) criticizes the commercialization of education, whereas Duarte (2023) highlights the relationship between curriculum, knowledge, and dominant social interests. In Indonesia, critiques of high-performing school labeling have likewise emphasized equality of access and distributive justice. These studies provide an important foundation for understanding the risks of educational exclusivity. However, most analyses remain grounded in sociological, public policy, and critical pedagogical frameworks and have not sufficiently incorporated an Islamic-cultural theological perspective into the examination of contemporary educational policies in Indonesia.

Studies of educational policy in West Java have also highlighted disparities in access and the concentration of educational facilities within selected institutions. (Darmawan & Rizqullah, 2026) argues that standardized selection for favored schools may create geographical inequalities in access, while (Oraini, 2026) links the concentration of premium facilities to the potential marginalization of socially vulnerable groups. UNESCO (2026) further identifies performance-based tracking as a mechanism that can contribute to educational segregation (Norman et al., 2022; Obani & Izu-Obani, 2025). Nevertheless, previous research has not specifically examined Sekolah Maung through Abdurrahman Wahid's concept of

the Indigenization of Islam (Pribumisasi Islam). This limitation is significant because educational policy evaluation should not be confined to efficiency and achievement outcomes but should also consider human dignity, social justice, and responsiveness to disadvantaged communities within Indonesia's diverse sociocultural context.

This study's novelty lies in using Gus Dur concept of the Indigenization of Islam as an ethical lens to examine high-performing school policies in the local context of West Java. Pribumisasi Islam positions Islamic values in dialogue with social and cultural realities while maintaining a commitment to universal human dignity. This perspective enables Sekolah Maung to be examined not merely through academic achievement, selection efficiency, or global competitiveness, but also through the principles of *al-insaniyyah* (humanity) and *al-'adalah* (social justice). The study's state of the art emerges from integrating scholarship on educational segregation, critiques of school elitism, and Nusantara Islamic thought within a single analytical framework. This approach is important for developing an educational policy orientation that pursues institutional quality and social inclusiveness in contemporary Indonesia.

Against this background, this study examines how Sekolah Maung is constructed in official policy documents and the extent to which that construction aligns with the principles of Gus Dur Indigenization of Islam. The study advances the argument that quality improvement through school selection and institutional clustering may create educational exclusivity when it is not accompanied by mechanisms for equitable distribution and the protection of vulnerable groups. Conversely, high-performing school policies may contribute to more equitable quality improvement when they pursue academic excellence alongside principles of humanity, social justice, and public responsibility. Accordingly, this study aims to deconstruct the elitist discourse embedded in the Sekolah Maung policy and propose an ethical reorientation that connects academic excellence with the broader mandate of inclusive, equitable, and socially responsive education in West Java.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative research design based on library research, grounded in a conceptual-philosophical approach and Critical Content Analysis (Bakr et al., 2025; Haq, 2025). This design was selected because the study did not focus on collecting field data through interviews or observations, but instead on an in-depth examination of policy documents and intellectual texts relevant to educational justice. The research setting was defined as West Java Province, particularly in the context of the Sekolah Maung policy on providing high-achieving education and educational access. This setting was selected because the regional policy documents are directly relevant to the study's focus: examining the construction of justice, excellence, and access within educational regulations and assessing their alignment with principles of social justice. The research data consisted of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included official regulations, policy drafts, academic manuscripts, the Sekolah Maung blueprint, and original works by Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) on the indigenization of Islam, cosmopolitanism, and social justice. Secondary sources comprised reputable scholarly journal articles, nationally accredited journals, academic books, and

official government documents and websites relevant to educational policy and inclusivity.

Data were collected through documentary research, including identifying, selecting, recording, and organizing documents relevant to the research focus. Documents were obtained from official sources and academic publications by considering who issued or authored them, what their substantive content addressed, when they were published or used, where they were issued and within what policy context, why they were relevant to the research problem, and how their contents constructed the concepts of justice, excellence, and educational access. The criteria of relevance, source authority, connection to the Sekolah Maung policy, and consistency with Gus Dur conceptual framework guided the data collection process. Data analysis was conducted systematically through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data condensation, the data were selected, focused, simplified, and categorized according to themes such as justice, elitism, excellence, access, inclusivity, and humanity. The condensed data were then presented in an analytical matrix that juxtaposed the policy's substantive dimensions with the ethical concepts derived from Gus Dur thought. The verification stage involved examining consistency across documents and confronting the policy's normative claims with the principles of social justice and emancipatory values articulated in Gus Dur intellectual works.

Data trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation, persistent observation, referential adequacy, and consistency checking of interpretations. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing regulations, academic manuscripts, policy blueprints, Gus Dur original works, scholarly articles, and official government documents to ensure that interpretations were not based on a single type of source. Persistent observation involved repeated and careful reading of the documents and examination of the conceptual contexts surrounding the key terms used in the analysis. Referential adequacy was maintained by relying on relevant academic sources and official documents that could be traced and verified. Furthermore, interpretive verification involved comparing findings across sources and reviewing relationships among data categories, conceptual arguments, and research conclusions. Through these procedures, the *Critical Content Analysis* aimed to produce systematic, traceable interpretations supported by adequate documentary evidence to examine the construction of justice and educational access within the Sekolah Maung policy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Sekolah Maung Regulation and Indications of Institutional Segregation

The analysis of the Sekolah Maung blueprint and official regulations issued by the West Java Provincial Education Office identified several regulatory provisions that differentiate the program from conventional student admission and school resource allocation mechanisms. One prominent distinction concerns the student admission pathway. The policy documents state that admission to the designated Sekolah Maung cluster would not employ the domicile-based pathway but would instead rely on academic and non-academic achievement pathways. This provision indicates a shift from geographically oriented admission toward

achievement-based selection, thereby establishing different access criteria between Sekolah Maung and other public schools (Kriewaldt et al., 2024; Moshtari & Safarpour, 2024).

A second pattern emerged from the academic selection requirements. The technical provisions require prospective students to submit an academic potential test (TPA) administered by a psychologist and to meet specified requirements based on report-card results from their previous schools (Floris et al., 2024; Superi & Naqshbandi, 2022). These requirements introduce standardized selection mechanisms that emphasize measurable academic and non-academic indicators. From an access perspective, the provisions suggest that admission is structured around predetermined performance criteria rather than students' residential proximity to the school. The findings therefore indicate differentiated admission rules within the public school system, with Sekolah Maung operating through a selection framework distinct from the domicile-based mechanism.

The analysis also identified differentiation in educational resource allocation. The policy documents specify additional support through the Regional Education Operational Assistance (Bantuan Operasional Pendidikan Daerah/BOPD) to strengthen learning facilities in the 41 designated Sekolah Maung institutions (Aminah et al., 2024; Ismail et al., 2026). Concentrating additional resources in a limited number of schools creates institutional distinctions in infrastructure and operational support. Together, differentiated admission criteria, standardized performance requirements, and concentrated additional educational resources constitute three interconnected dimensions of institutional differentiation. These findings suggest that the Sekolah Maung policy constructs a distinct institutional category within the public education system, characterized by selective student admission and differentiated resource provision. The discussion section further examines the implications of this institutional differentiation for educational equity and social inclusion.

Three Ethical Principles in Gus Dur Indigenization of Islam

An analysis of Abdurrahman Wahid's writings on the Indigenization of Islam (Pribumisasi Islam) identified three interconnected ethical principles relevant to governing public institutions, including educational institutions: the first concerns inclusivity and contextual accommodation. Wahid's writings emphasize accommodating social and cultural diversity within local contexts rather than imposing a uniform model without considering the conditions of the communities concerned (R. Wahid, 2024; S. Wahid et al., 2025). In public education, this principle situates institutional policies within the broader social and cultural circumstances in which schools operate. The finding indicates that educational arrangements can be examined not only in terms of administrative efficiency or standardized performance, but also in relation to their capacity to recognize diverse local conditions and needs.

The second principle concerns the social responsibility of public institutions toward marginalized groups. Wahid's thought highlights the concept of *al-mustad'afin*, referring to groups experiencing social marginalization or structural disadvantage. His writings associate the role of public institutions with

efforts to address social inequality and challenge forms of social organization characterized by what he describes as a "distorted social structure". This principle provides an analytical basis for examining whether educational policies create opportunities that are accessible to groups with different socioeconomic and social positions. In this framework, public education is understood not solely as a mechanism for distributing educational opportunities according to individual achievement, but also as an institution situated within broader structures of social inequality.

The third principle concerns contextuality and sociocultural embeddedness in educational policy. The analysis indicates that Wahid's conception of *Pribumisasi Islam* emphasizes relating institutional practices to the lived realities, cultural conditions, and social needs of local communities. Applied to education, this principle highlights the importance of considering sociocultural context in formulating and implementing school policies (Abubakar et al., 2023; Rochim & Khayati, 2023). Taken together, the three principles inclusivity and contextual accommodation, social responsibility toward marginalized groups, and sociocultural embeddedness form a conceptual framework for examining the ethical dimensions of public educational policy. In this study, these principles are then used as analytical categories to examine the extent to which the *Sekolah Maung* policy aligns with broader considerations of educational justice and social inclusion.

Discussion

The finding that *Sekolah Maung* uses achievement-based admission rather than domicile-based selection aligns with literature showing that selective school systems can produce differentiated educational opportunities. Bourdieu's framework explains that educational institutions may reward forms of cultural capital unevenly distributed across socioeconomic groups, thereby contributing to social reproduction (Inesia-Forde, 2024; Lohmeyer & Threadgold, 2023). Empirical research similarly shows that selective admissions can favor applicants who possess culturally valued forms of capital, even when selection procedures appear formally neutral. This finding extends the literature by showing how institutional differentiation is embedded directly in policy provisions. Thus, the issue is not selection alone, but how selection interacts with unequal social resources and creates differentiated pathways within public education.

The concentration of additional resources in 41 designated schools also corresponds with scholarship on school choice and institutional competition, which identifies resource concentration and status differentiation as important dimensions of educational stratification (Chen et al., 2024; Riquelme et al., 2026). Research on selective schooling indicates that schools may use admissions processes to strengthen institutional status, producing differences in student composition and educational outcomes. The present study adds a policy-document perspective by showing that differentiation occurs simultaneously through admission criteria, performance requirements, and resource allocation. However, the findings do not establish that resource concentration necessarily

produces segregation in every context (Rahmawati et al., 2025; Rahmayanti et al., 2026). Rather, they identify institutional conditions through which differentiation may emerge. This distinction strengthens the theoretical interpretation by connecting policy design with mechanisms of educational stratification.

The three principles derived from Gus Dur *Pribumisasi Islam* provide a complementary perspective to predominantly sociological explanations of educational inequality. Existing scholarship describes *Pribumisasi Islam* as an approach that connects Islamic values with local cultural realities while maintaining substantive ethical commitments, including humanity, pluralism, and social justice (Fuadi et al., 2024; Saputra, 2026). The present study translates these ideas into three analytical principles: contextual inclusivity, responsibility toward marginalized groups, and sociocultural embeddedness. The theoretical implication is that educational justice can be examined through an ethical-cultural framework alongside established theories of cultural reproduction and institutional stratification. This expands the analytical vocabulary for studying Indonesian educational policy by bringing Islamic intellectual traditions into dialogue with critical sociology and education policy research.

Practically, the findings suggest that high-performing school policies require institutional safeguards alongside selective quality-enhancement mechanisms (Achmad et al., 2025; Mursid et al., 2026; Putri & Prianthara, 2026). Admission systems could incorporate transparent criteria, publicly available eligibility information, and mechanisms for monitoring participation across socioeconomic and geographical groups. Resource differentiation could also be paired with broader strategies to strengthen the quality of non-designated public schools, reducing excessive institutional disparities (Baharun et al., 2025; Rozi et al., 2026). These implications are consistent with evidence that school systems can reproduce inequality when access to advantaged educational environments is unevenly distributed. From the perspective of Gus Dur thought, policy implementation should also remain responsive to local social and cultural conditions rather than treating educational excellence as a purely standardized outcome.

This study's principal contribution is connecting policy analysis of selective schooling with an ethical reading of *Pribumisasi Islam*. Previous scholarship has largely explained educational stratification through cultural capital, school choice, competition, or critical pedagogy. In contrast, studies of Gus Dur have predominantly examined his ideas in relation to pluralism, democracy, religion, and social ethics. By bringing these strands together, the study proposes a conceptual bridge between educational equity and Indonesian Islamic intellectual thought. The findings indicate that institutional quality and social inclusion need not be treated as analytically separate objectives (Darina & Baharun, 2025; Suro & Anggraeni, 2024). Instead, educational excellence can be evaluated alongside questions of access, contextual responsiveness, and institutional responsibility, providing a framework for further comparative research on selective public-school policies in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Sekolah Maung policy constructs educational excellence through differentiated admission criteria, performance-based selection, and concentrated resource allocation, creating institutional distinctions that require careful consideration from the perspective of educational equity. The key lesson is that improving school quality should not be separated from the responsibility to maintain inclusive access, contextual responsiveness, and protection for socially disadvantaged groups. The study's scholarly contribution lies in bringing Gus Dur Pribumisasi Islam into dialogue with critical scholarship on educational stratification, thereby offering an ethical-cultural framework for examining selective public-school policies in Indonesia. However, the study is limited by its reliance on documentary sources and its focus on a single regional policy context; it therefore does not capture implementation experiences among students, teachers, families, or policymakers. Future research should incorporate empirical fieldwork and cross-regional comparative studies to examine how differentiated school policies affect access, participation, and educational experiences. Practically, policymakers should strengthen transparency, monitor equity implications, and ensure that broader strategies for equitable educational provision accompany quality-enhancement initiatives.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no financial, personal, institutional, or professional conflicts of interest that could influence this study or its publication.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

In preparing this manuscript, the author used several AI-assisted technologies, including ChatGPT, Gemini, AI-supported translation applications, and Grammarly, primarily for language refinement, translation, grammatical correction, sentence restructuring, and improved manuscript organization. These tools were used solely to facilitate the writing process and did not determine the research design, analytical interpretation, or scholarly conclusions. The author subsequently reviewed, revised, and verified all AI-assisted outputs against relevant sources and research evidence. The author assumes full responsibility for the manuscript's accuracy, originality, academic integrity, ethical compliance, and overall scientific quality.

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