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Parents' Perceptions of Zoning-Based Elementary School Admissions: A Structured Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The zoning-based Student Admission Policy (Penerimaan Peserta Didik Baru, PPDB) was introduced to improve geographical access and reduce inequalities among Indonesian schools, yet its implementation has generated mixed responses from parents. This structured qualitative literature review examines parental perceptions, satisfaction and objections, and the effects of zoning on elementary-school choice. The analytical corpus comprised 15 topic-specific scholarly publications issued between 2019 and 2025, supplemented by two official policy and international education reports. Sources were identified through Google Scholar, SINTA, relevant publisher platforms, and official education websites using Indonesian and English search terms. Publications were included when they addressed school admissions, parental perceptions, implementation quality, school choice, or educational equity at the elementary or compulsory-education level. Data were synthesized through deductive-inductive thematic coding. Four themes emerged: perceived benefits of proximity and equitable access; restrictions on parental choice; implementation quality, information, and technical barriers; and contextual inequalities in school quality and family resources. The review's novelty lies in integrating parental perception, public-service satisfaction, and educational-equity perspectives into one conceptual model. The findings indicate that zoning is more likely to receive parental support when school quality is relatively even, procedures are transparent, and families receive accessible and personalized information. Conversely, unequal school quality and weak implementation can convert a formally equitable policy into a source of distrust and strategic behavior. The review contributes a policy-oriented framework for improving communication, complaint handling, digital registration, and quality equalization across schools.

Keywords: educational equity; elementary school; parental perceptions; school choice; student admissions; zoning policy

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INTRODUCTION

Equitable access to high-quality education is a central objective of public education policy. In Indonesia, zoning-based student admissions were introduced to prioritize

applicants who live near public schools, reduce excessive competition for so-called favorite schools, and distribute students more evenly across local education systems. At the elementary-school level, the policy is particularly important because admission decisions shape children's early learning opportunities, travel demands, and family engagement with schools.

The policy nevertheless creates a tension between two legitimate principles. The first is distributive equity, which emphasizes fair access and shorter travel distances. The second is parental choice, which reflects families' expectations regarding school quality, safety, learning environment, and institutional reputation. Indonesian studies consistently report both positive and negative responses. Parents may appreciate proximity and the possibility of reducing school hierarchies, while objecting to restricted choices, unclear information, digital registration problems, and uneven quality among schools (Muammar, 2019; Ningrum et al., 2022; Prestoroika et al., 2022; Werdiningsih, 2023).

International research suggests that geographically based admissions cannot be evaluated only through distance criteria. Catchment areas and market-oriented choice systems may reproduce residential segregation and socioeconomic sorting when neighborhoods and school quality are unequal (Lubienski et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022). Families also differ in access to information, social networks, digital skills, and personalized support. These differences affect their ability to understand admission rules and make strategic choices (Robertson et al., 2022). Consequently, parental perceptions are shaped not only by policy objectives but also by implementation quality and local educational conditions.

Previous Indonesian reviews have largely described the benefits and obstacles of zoning separately. They have not sufficiently integrated three analytical dimensions: how parents interpret the policy, how service quality influences satisfaction and objections, and whether zoning advances substantive educational equity when school quality remains uneven. This unresolved issue constitutes the research gap addressed in the present review.

The novelty of this study lies in developing an integrated synthesis that connects policy design, implementation capacity, family context, parental perceptions, satisfaction, school-choice behavior, and equity outcomes. The review aims to: (1) synthesize parents' positive and negative perceptions of zoning-based PPDB at the elementary-school level; (2) identify the determinants of parental satisfaction and objections; (3) examine how zoning influences school-choice behavior; and (4) formulate theoretical and practical implications for more equitable admission policy.

METHODOLOGY

Review Design

This study used a structured qualitative literature-review design guided by the reporting principles of PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021). The review was not designed as a statistical meta-analysis; instead, it synthesized qualitative and policy-oriented evidence concerning parental perceptions of zoning-based admissions and comparable school-choice arrangements.

Search Strategy and Source Selection

Searches covered publications issued from January 2019 to December 2025. National literature was identified through Google Scholar and SINTA, while international literature was located through Google Scholar and relevant publisher platforms. Official policy documents were obtained from Indonesian education authorities and international organizations. Search terms included combinations of: "persepsi orang tua", "PPDB zonasi", "sekolah dasar", "school admissions", "school zoning", "school catchment areas", "parental perceptions", "school choice", and "educational equity".

Table 1. Literature selection criteria

Criterion	Included	Excluded
Publication type	Peer-reviewed articles, relevant scholarly chapters, and official policy reports	News items, opinion pieces, unpublished assignments, and promotional materials
Time period	2019-2025 for the topic-specific analytical corpus	Sources outside the period, except foundational methodological or theoretical references
Educational level	Elementary or compulsory-school admission and directly comparable school-choice systems	Higher-education admissions without relevance to school zoning
Topical relevance	Parental perceptions, satisfaction, implementation, school choice, access, segregation, or equity	Studies without a direct connection to admission policy or family decision-making
Availability and quality	Accessible full text with identifiable methods, evidence, or policy analysis	Duplicated, incomplete, or methodologically opaque records

Screening, Appraisal, and Synthesis

Screening was conducted in four stages: identification, duplicate removal, title-and-abstract screening, and full-text eligibility assessment. The final analytical corpus consisted of 15 topic-specific scholarly publications and two policy or international reports. Because search-result rankings on Google Scholar can change over time, the review reports the retained corpus rather than treating platform hit counts as stable indicators.

Each publication was appraised according to topical relevance, methodological clarity, transparency of evidence, and direct contribution to the research questions. Sources with insufficient information or only indirect relevance were excluded. Data were coded using a combined deductive-inductive thematic procedure adapted from Braun and Clarke (2021). Initial deductive codes reflected the review questions: perceived benefits, objections, satisfaction, implementation, school choice, and equity. Inductive coding was then used to identify contextual factors emerging across the studies. The codes were consolidated into four themes and compared across national and international contexts.

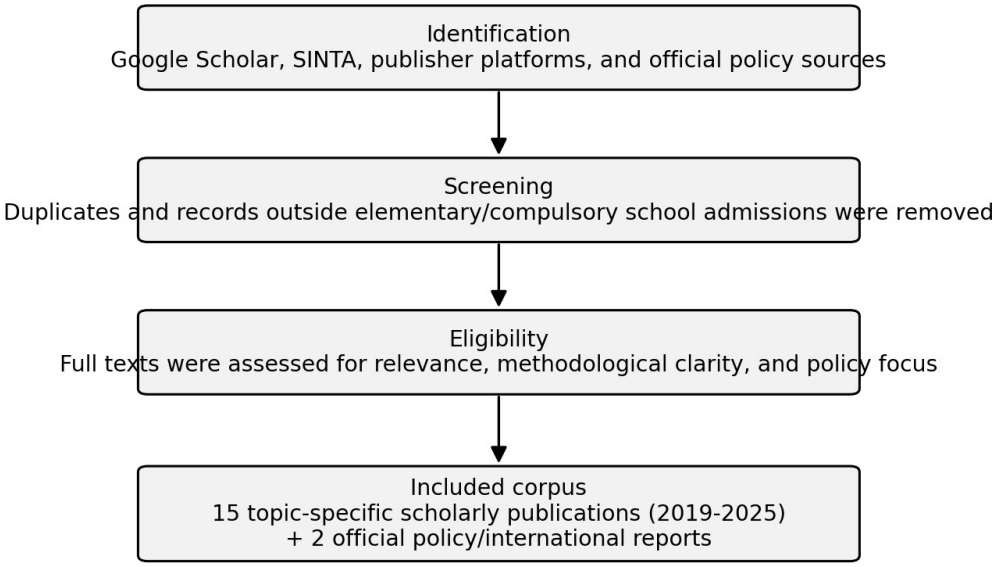


Figure 1. Structured literature-review selection procedure.

RESULTS

The synthesis produced four interrelated themes. The first two represent the principal benefits and objections reported by parents. The third concerns the quality of policy implementation as a public service. The fourth explains why perceptions differ among locations and social groups.

Table 2. Comparative synthesis of representative literature

Study	Context or focus	Principal evidence	Theme
Muammar (2019)	Elementary-school PPDB in Mataram	Limited understanding, technical obstacles, and weak socialization reduced acceptance.	Implementation
Wianti (2019)	Elementary-school admission service	Administrative and technical service quality influenced user experience.	Service satisfaction
Handani & Frinaldi (2020)	Zoning implementation in Padang	Compliance and public acceptance depended on implementation and communication.	Implementation
Azizah & Untari (2021)	Public and private elementary schools	Schools adapted promotion and recruitment strategies under zoning.	Choice behavior
Ningrum et al. (2022)	Parents' perspectives	Parents recognized equity and proximity benefits but reported restricted choice.	Benefits and objections
Prestoroika et al. (2022)	Elementary-school zoning in Pontianak	Transparency, readiness, and technical processes remained implementation challenges.	Implementation
Salim & Nora (2022)	Elementary-school admissions in Matur	Zoning reduced favorite-school stigma but shifted parents toward pragmatic local choices.	Choice behavior
Putra et al. (2023)	Public-service implementation in Badung	Information clarity and service procedures shaped satisfaction.	Service satisfaction

Study	Context or focus	Principal evidence	Theme
Saadah et al. (2023)	Admission policy and education quality	Uneven school quality limited the equity effects of admissions reform.	Educational equity
Werdiningsih (2023)	Parents and schools	Perceptions varied with understanding, local school quality, and implementation experience.	Contextual variation
Robertson et al. (2022)	Underserved families navigating school enrollment	Personalized support and trusted relationships were more useful than impersonal information dashboards.	Information equity
Perry et al. (2022); Lubienski et al. (2022)	International school-choice and segregation literature	Geography and market mechanisms can reproduce social sorting when access and school quality are unequal.	Structural equity

Theme 1: Perceived Benefits of Proximity and Equitable Access

Positive parental perceptions were generally associated with shorter travel distances, lower transportation burdens, safer daily mobility, and the possibility of weakening the hierarchy between favorite and non-favorite schools. Parents who interpreted zoning as a mechanism for widening access were more likely to accept the policy, especially when a nearby public school was regarded as adequate. Salim and Nora (2022) and Ningrum et al. (2022) indicate that proximity can become a practical benefit and encourage families to reconsider the assumption that educational quality is concentrated only in a small number of schools.

Theme 2: Restrictions on Choice and Perceived Unfairness

Negative perceptions emerged when residence-based priority prevented parents from accessing schools they considered academically stronger, safer, or better aligned with their children's needs. Under these conditions, zoning was interpreted as a restriction rather than an equity mechanism. The problem was particularly visible in areas where school quality remained uneven. Parents could formally receive access to a nearby school while perceiving that their substantive access to high-quality education had declined (Khodijah, 2025; Saadah et al., 2023). International literature reinforces this concern: geographically organized admissions may reproduce residential and socioeconomic segregation when school resources and neighborhoods are unequal (Lubienski et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022).

Theme 3: Implementation Quality, Information, and Public Trust

Parental satisfaction was strongly linked to the quality of admission services. Clear rules, accurate distance calculations, accessible registration systems, timely announcements, transparent selection results, and responsive complaint mechanisms increased confidence in the process. Conversely, inconsistent information, technical failures, and inadequate socialization produced confusion and objections (Muammar, 2019; Prestoroika et al., 2022; Putra et al., 2023; Wianti, 2019). Robertson et al. (2022) show that information equity requires more than digital dashboards: underserved families often need personalized explanations and trusted human support. This insight is relevant to PPDB because differences in digital literacy and administrative knowledge can transform a formally uniform procedure into an unequal experience.

Theme 4: Contextual Sources of Variation

The reviewed evidence indicates that parental perceptions differ because families evaluate the same policy from different educational and social positions. Expectations regarding school reputation, previous enrollment experiences, transportation conditions, digital access, social networks, and the local distribution of school quality all influence

interpretation. Parents living near well-resourced schools may perceive zoning as convenient and fair, while those assigned to less-resourced schools may experience it as coercive. Perception is therefore not simply an individual attitude; it is an evaluation of policy design through concrete local conditions.

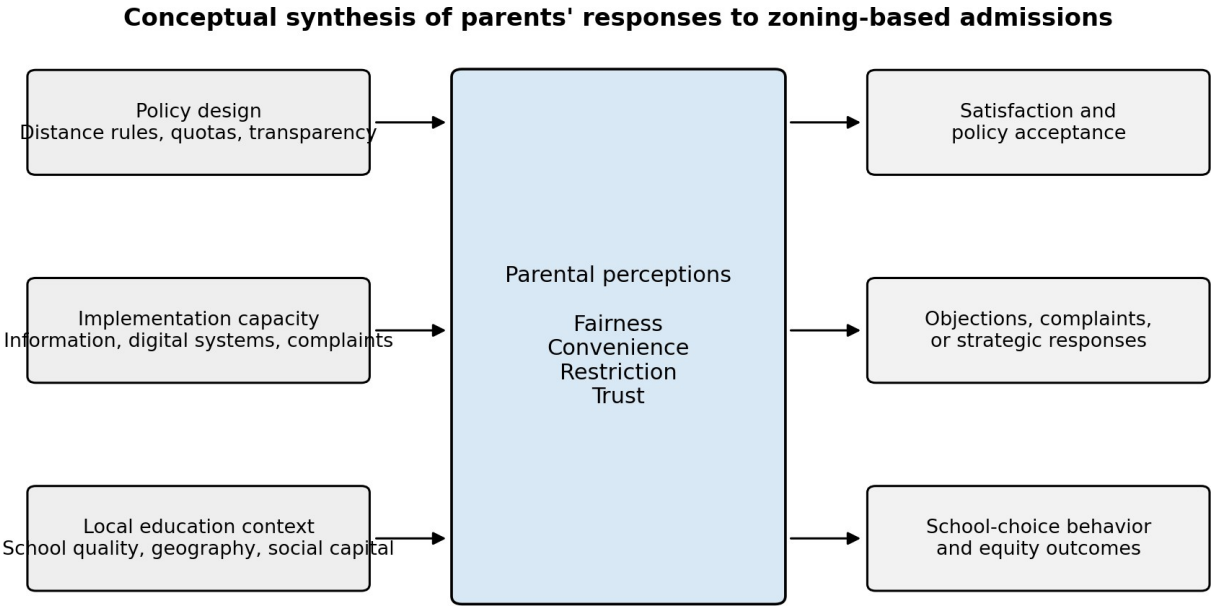


Figure 2. Conceptual model linking policy design, implementation, parental perceptions, and educational-equity outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The synthesis confirms that parental responses to zoning-based PPDB cannot be reduced to simple support or rejection. Parents often support the stated objective of equitable access while simultaneously objecting to the mechanisms used to achieve it. This apparent contradiction becomes understandable when formal equality is distinguished from substantive equity. A uniform distance criterion may treat applicants consistently, but it does not guarantee equivalent educational opportunity when school quality varies significantly across zones.

The findings extend previous Indonesian studies by showing that parental satisfaction operates as an intermediate mechanism between policy implementation and policy acceptance. Information clarity, procedural transparency, technical reliability, and complaint resolution shape whether parents interpret zoning as a legitimate public service. Weak implementation can therefore undermine even a defensible policy objective. This finding also explains why studies conducted in different locations report different levels of support: local government capacity and the quality of schools available within each zone vary considerably.

International comparison further clarifies the structural risk of residence-based admissions. Perry et al. (2022) and Lubienski et al. (2022) argue that school assignment and choice mechanisms interact with residential patterns and institutional competition. When advantaged families possess better information, mobility, or strategic resources, admission

systems can generate new forms of sorting rather than eliminate inequality. The Indonesian evidence on limited socialization and technical barriers reflects a similar information asymmetry, although the institutional context differs.

The review's theoretical contribution is an integrated framework connecting three bodies of scholarship. First, perception theory explains how parents select and interpret policy information. Second, public-service satisfaction emphasizes the gap between expectations and implementation experience. Third, educational-equity theory examines whether geographic access produces meaningful access to comparable educational quality. Together, these perspectives demonstrate that parental perception is both an attitudinal outcome and an indicator of how policy is experienced in practice.

For policymakers, the findings imply that zoning should be implemented as part of a broader school-quality equalization strategy. Improving admission algorithms without addressing teacher distribution, facilities, learning support, and public confidence will not resolve parental objections. Local governments should publish accessible zoning maps, provide multilingual and non-digital assistance, standardize complaint procedures, audit distance and domicile verification, and disclose school-capacity information. Schools should communicate program quality and support families before and during registration. These measures can reduce misinformation and discourage strategic or manipulative responses.

The review also suggests that policy evaluation should include parental trust, perceived procedural fairness, travel burden, successful placement, complaint resolution, and changes in school segregation. These indicators provide a more complete assessment than enrollment quotas alone. A policy may achieve numerical proximity while failing to improve trust or substantive educational opportunity.

CONCLUSION

This structured review shows that parents' perceptions of zoning-based elementary-school admissions are shaped by the interaction of policy objectives, implementation quality, family resources, and local inequalities in school quality. Parents generally recognize the benefits of shorter travel distances and wider geographic access, but objections become dominant when zoning limits access to preferred schools, information is unclear, digital systems are unreliable, or nearby schools are perceived as unequal in quality. The review contributes an integrated conceptual framework linking policy design and implementation to parental perceptions, satisfaction, school-choice behavior, public trust, and educational-equity outcomes.

Practically, the policy requires coordinated improvements in school quality, communication, registration systems, transparency, and complaint handling. Government agencies should treat parental perceptions as evidence for policy evaluation rather than merely as resistance to reform. Schools should provide accessible assistance and demonstrate the quality of educational provision within each zone.

The review is limited by the predominance of Indonesian literature, reliance on publicly accessible sources, the absence of statistical meta-analysis, and possible variation in admission regulations across years and regions. Future studies should conduct multi-site surveys and

interviews with parents, compare urban and rural contexts, examine differences by socioeconomic status and digital literacy, and evaluate whether zoning changes segregation, travel time, learning outcomes, and trust over time. Comparative research with catchment-area and controlled-choice systems in other countries would further strengthen the evidence base for equitable school admissions.

AI Declaration

The author acknowledges the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in supporting the preparation of this manuscript. The author remains fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the research and its findings.

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