



Coherence between Regulation and the Implementation of Curriculum Policy in Indonesia: A Document Analysis Study

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the coherence between regulatory frameworks and the implementation of curriculum policy in Indonesia through a qualitative document analysis approach. Curriculum reform in Indonesia has evolved through decentralization, competency-based standards, and outcome-based governance frameworks governance. Despite normative reform goals, implementation disparities indicate inconsistencies within the regulatory architecture This study analysed vertical and horizontal coherence within curriculum regulations and their implications for implementation. Qualitative document analysis reviewed national laws, regulations, decrees, and technical guidelines governing curriculum policy. The analysis focused on identifying alignment in policy objectives, governance mechanisms, accountability structures, and implementation procedures. Findings show goal alignment across regulations, but operational coherence in implementation remains fragmented. Overlapping mandates, inconsistent terminology, and weak coordination create interpretative variability in institutions. This study highlights structural policy coherence as a factor shaping curriculum reform effectiveness. Strengthening policy integration, clarifying procedural guidelines, and harmonizing regulatory instruments are essential to ensure consistent and equitable implementation of curriculum reform across Indonesia's education system. This research contributes to the literature on curriculum policy by emphasizing the structural dimensions of policy coherence as a determinant of reform effectiveness.

Keyword: Curriculum Policy; Regulatory Coherence; Policy Implementation; Document Analysis; Education Governance

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum policy in Indonesia has undergone recurrent reforms over the past two decades, reflecting shifts in governance models, educational standards, and regulatory arrangements within the national education system. Since the decentralization reforms initiated in the early 2000s, curriculum governance in Indonesia has continued to evolve, culminating in the recent introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum as part of broader efforts to improve educational quality. However, empirical studies indicate that regulatory reforms often do not translate consistently into implementation at the levels of schools and higher education institutions (e.g., Widodo, 2021; Anwar, 2022). This misalignment manifested in inconsistencies

between regulatory provisions, implementation guidelines, and institutional practices represents a critical governance challenge in Indonesian curriculum policy.

From a policy sociology perspective, education policy should not be viewed merely as formal regulation but as a set of practices interpreted and enacted by actors across institutional contexts (Ball, 2015), making regulatory coherence a critical factor shaping policy implementation (Ball, 2015). This perspective suggests that regulation is not a fixed and final entity; rather, it remains open to interpretation by implementing actors. Previous studies have predominantly examined curriculum implementation from the perspective of educational actors such as teachers and lecturers



(Priestley et al., 2021), while relatively little attention has been given to the structural coherence of the regulatory frameworks governing such implementation, yet they have not comprehensively compared the coherence between formal regulatory structures and implementation realities through systematic document analysis.

Studies on curriculum reform in Indonesia have tended to focus on human resource readiness and technical implementation challenges (Suyanto & Nugroho, 2020). These studies indicate that implementation barriers are primarily associated with institutional capacity. However, they have not systematically examined whether such obstacles may also stem from inconsistencies or overlapping provisions within regulatory frameworks. This raises an important analytical question regarding whether curriculum regulations are internally coherent and consistently aligned within Indonesia's broader legal and governance framework.

Contemporary policy analysis further emphasizes the importance of vertical and horizontal alignment in regulatory design (Howlett & Cashore, 2014). Vertical alignment concerns consistency across regulatory levels—from national laws and government regulations to ministerial and technical guidelines—while horizontal alignment refers to coordination among institutions responsible for curriculum implementation. Previous research in Indonesian education policy has predominantly examined the impact of policies on instructional practices (Widodo, 2021), without assessing normative coherence among regulatory instruments as a prerequisite for effective implementation.

Research on education reform indicates that curriculum policies in many developing countries are shaped by global discourses on competency-based and outcome-based education (Tikly, 2020), influences that are also evident in Indonesia's recent curriculum reforms. (Tikly, 2020). Indonesia is not exempt from these dynamics, particularly in adopting competency-based and outcome-based education approaches.

Nevertheless, such studies primarily address ideological and political economic dimensions of reform, rather than analyzing the congruence of regulatory documents as binding legal instruments shaping implementation.

Moreover, research on educational governance indicates that policy effectiveness is strongly influenced by regulatory clarity and coordination mechanisms among actors (OECD, 2020). These findings suggest that ambiguous norms may generate varied interpretations in practice. In Indonesia, studies on the Merdeka Curriculum, for instance, report that high levels of flexibility have resulted in disparities in implementation (Anwar, 2022). However, these studies have not examined whether such flexibility is systematically embedded within regulatory design or is instead a consequence of weak policy coherence.

The document analysis approach as a qualitative method offers a valuable opportunity to critically and systematically examine policy texts (Bowen, 2009). Although this method has been employed in various education policy studies, its application in assessing the coherence of curriculum regulations in Indonesia remains limited. Most prior research has relied primarily on interviews or surveys (Rahmawati & Suryadi, 2021), thereby leaving the textual and normative dimensions of regulatory frameworks insufficiently explored.

Based on this comparative review, a significant research gap can be identified. Previous studies have primarily concentrated on practical implementation, actor perceptions, or the political dynamics of curriculum reform. In contrast, research specifically examining the coherence between formal regulatory frameworks and policy implementation through systematic document analysis remains scarce. Yet within a rule-of-law context, regulatory frameworks constitute the foundation of policy legitimacy and operational direction in education governance.

Therefore, this study addresses this gap by qualitatively analyzing curriculum policy documents to assess the coherence of policy



objectives, regulatory mandates, and implementation mechanisms. In doing so, this research aims not only to enrich the literature on curriculum policy in Indonesia, but also to contribute conceptually to understanding the importance of regulatory coherence as a prerequisite for successful education policy implementation.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative document analysis design to examine the coherence of Indonesian curriculum regulations, focusing on national laws, government regulations, ministerial decrees, and technical guidelines issued between major curriculum reforms. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to interpret the normative structures, regulatory logic, and governance relationships embedded within curriculum policy documents, aiming to explore meanings, structures, and normative alignments embedded within policy texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative inquiry enables an in-depth understanding of complex policy phenomena by situating regulatory documents within their socio-political and institutional contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the field of education policy research, qualitative methods are particularly suitable for analyzing how policy intentions are constructed and communicated through official documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The central method applied in this research was qualitative document analysis. Document analysis is recognized as a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating both printed and electronic materials in order to elicit meaning and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). In policy studies, documents are not treated merely as static records, but as socially constructed texts reflecting ideological positions, institutional priorities, and governance mechanisms (Prior, 2003). The study examined key regulatory instruments governing curriculum policy in Indonesia, including national education laws, government regulations, ministerial regulations,

and technical implementation guidelines relevant to curriculum reform. Documents were purposively selected based on three criteria: regulatory authority within the national education system, direct relevance to curriculum governance, and formal applicability to curriculum implementation (Patton, 2015).

The analytical framework integrated qualitative content analysis to identify patterns within regulatory texts and critical policy analysis to interpret the normative and governance implications of those patterns. Qualitative content analysis was utilized to identify patterns of alignment, consistency, and divergence across regulatory texts (Schreier, 2012). The coding process examined textual provisions related to curriculum objectives, governance structures, implementation authority, and evaluation standards across regulatory documents. The coding process followed an inductive-deductive logic, allowing categories to emerge from the data while also being informed by theoretical constructs of policy coherence and governance alignment (Miles et al., 2014). Through iterative reading and categorization, the study assessed vertical coherence across hierarchical regulatory levels and horizontal coherence among institutions responsible for curriculum implementation.

To strengthen analytical rigor, the study employed critical policy analysis to examine normative assumptions, power relations, and governance narratives embedded in regulatory texts, which emphasize examining the normative assumptions, power relations, and discursive constructions embedded within policy texts (Taylor, 1997). This perspective enabled the researcher to move beyond descriptive comparison and critically interrogate whether regulatory coherence was substantively embedded or merely procedurally articulated. In this regard, policies were interpreted not only as technical guidelines but as instruments of governance that shape institutional behavior and educational practice (Ball, 2015).

Data analysis followed a structured multi-stage procedure including document mapping,



thematic coding, and cross-regulatory comparison. First, all selected documents were organized chronologically and hierarchically to map the regulatory architecture. Second, textual segments relevant to curriculum design, implementation authority, and accountability mechanisms were coded and categorized. Third, cross-document comparison was conducted to assess consistency, redundancy, and potential contradictions. This comparative strategy aligns with qualitative comparative approaches that seek to uncover structural patterns across policy texts (Yin, 2018). Analytical memos were developed throughout the process to record emerging interpretations and ensure reflexivity, a key element in qualitative rigor (Nowell et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, dependability, and confirm ability strategies applied during document selection, coding procedures, and interpretation of regulatory texts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the documents and triangulation across multiple regulatory sources. Dependability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail documenting coding decisions and analytical procedures. Confirm ability was strengthened through reflexive journaling to minimize researcher bias and ensure that interpretations were grounded in textual evidence. While qualitative document analysis does not aim for statistical generalization, it enables analytical generalization by linking findings to broader theoretical constructs of policy coherence and governance effectiveness (Yin, 2018).

By employing a qualitative document analysis approach supported by critical policy analysis, this study provides a systematic and theoretically informed examination of the coherence between regulatory frameworks and curriculum policy implementation in Indonesia. The methodological design allows for a nuanced understanding of how regulatory texts function as both legal instruments and governance mechanisms shaping curriculum practice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings reveal that regulatory coherence within Indonesian curriculum policy is characterized by partial alignment in policy objectives but significant gaps in procedural guidance, institutional mandates, and coordination mechanisms across regulatory documents. Through systematic document analysis of national laws, government regulations, ministerial decrees, and technical guidelines, two dominant patterns emerged from the analysis: (1) consistent articulation of policy objectives across regulatory levels, and (2) fragmented operational provisions governing implementation procedures and institutional responsibilities. This dual pattern suggests that while macro-level intentions appear consistent across documents, meso- and micro-level provisions demonstrate varying degrees of ambiguity and overlap.

At the normative level, regulatory documents consistently emphasize competency-based education, learner-centered pedagogy, and institutional autonomy. These principles are aligned with global education reform discourses that prioritize flexibility and outcome orientation (OECD, 2020; Tikly, 2020). The consistency of policy objectives across hierarchical regulations indicates vertical alignment in the formulation of curriculum goals within national regulatory documents. This pattern is evident in Indonesian curriculum regulations, where several policy documents employ similar formulations emphasizing competency development and learner-centered education (Ball, 2015). However, consistent articulation at the rhetorical level does not necessarily translate into coherent operational design. As Howlett and Cashore (2014) argue, vertical coherence requires not only consistent goals but also integrated policy instruments across levels of governance.

The analysis indicates that national regulations provide general curriculum principles, whereas technical guidelines frequently allow interpretative flexibility without explicitly defining institutional responsibilities or coordination mechanism. This flexibility reflects a governance



shift toward decentralized implementation, consistent with global policy trends promoting school and university autonomy (Priestley et al., 2021). Yet the absence of detailed coordination mechanisms across regulatory layers contributes to horizontal incoherence. For example, documents regulating curriculum standards, quality assurance, and institutional evaluation occasionally employ different terminologies and procedural references when defining curriculum implementation responsibilities. Such discrepancies create interpretative burdens for implementing institutions, echoing findings by Widodo (2021), who noted variability in institutional responses to curriculum reform.

Furthermore, the results indicate that regulatory coherence is uneven across policy domains. Provisions concerning curriculum objectives and graduate competencies demonstrate relatively high consistency, whereas guidelines governing assessment systems, credit allocation, and interdisciplinary learning pathways contain provisions that assign partially overlapping responsibilities to multiple regulatory instruments. This pattern aligns with research suggesting that reform efforts often prioritize symbolic alignment of goals while leaving technical harmonization underdeveloped (Taylor, 1997). Such overlapping mandates may create conditions that allow institutions to interpret regulatory requirements differently during curriculum implementation, interpreting regulations in ways that align with their administrative capacity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The document analysis also uncovers tensions between regulatory standardization and institutional autonomy. While higher-level regulations emphasize flexibility and contextual adaptation, subordinate regulations frequently reintroduce prescriptive elements through detailed procedural instructions. This regulatory oscillation reflects tensions between institutional autonomy and procedural control within the Indonesian curriculum governance framework (Ball, 2015). Such tensions have been identified in other educational contexts, where decentralization

reforms coexist with intensified accountability frameworks (OECD, 2020). In the Indonesian context, this duality may contribute to inconsistent implementation patterns across institutions.

Comparatively, prior empirical studies on curriculum reform in Indonesia have primarily focused on implementation challenges such as educator readiness and institutional capacity (Suyanto & Nugroho, 2020). While these studies attribute implementation gaps to resource limitations, the present findings suggest that regulatory architecture itself constitutes a significant variable. Inconsistent terminologies and procedural redundancies within regulatory texts shape institutional interpretation and action. This finding resonates with Bowen's (2009) assertion that policy documents are active agents influencing organizational behavior rather than passive administrative records.

Another significant finding concerns the sequencing of regulatory issuance. Several technical guidelines were released without explicit cross-referencing to prior regulations, creating potential ambiguity regarding normative precedence. In policy design theory, coherent sequencing is essential to avoid fragmentation and policy layering effects (Howlett & Cashore, 2014). Fragmented sequencing may result in what Tikly (2020) describes as "reform accumulation," where successive initiatives overlap without systematic integration. In such contexts, institutions often rely on internal policy translation mechanisms to reconcile regulatory inconsistencies.

The analysis further indicates that accountability provisions in curriculum regulations emphasize measurable outcomes such as learning achievement indicators while offering limited guidance on pedagogical processes or contextual implementation. This imbalance reflects broader global trends toward performance-based governance (OECD, 2020). However, excessive emphasis on measurable outputs may overshadow contextual and pedagogical considerations. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) argue that policy evaluation frameworks must account for interpretative and cultural dimensions of educational practice.



Without such balance, regulatory coherence may exist formally but remain substantively shallow.

In comparing this study with prior research employing interviews and surveys (Rahmawati & Suryadi, 2021), a notable distinction emerges. Earlier studies reported disparities in implementation across institutions but attributed them primarily to local factors. The present document-based analysis reveals that such disparities may also stem from structural inconsistencies within the regulatory corpus itself. Thus, implementation gaps cannot be understood solely as operational failures; they may reflect deeper design-level incoherence. This perspective aligns with Yin's (2018) argument that policy effectiveness must be assessed through structural as well as contextual analysis.

From a governance perspective, the findings illustrate that regulatory coherence operates along both symbolic and substantive dimensions. Symbolically, alignment of reform language fosters legitimacy and policy continuity. Substantively, however, gaps in coordination mechanisms undermine implementation consistency. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize that trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry depends on contextual depth; similarly, policy trustworthiness depends on clarity and harmonization. When regulatory documents lack explicit integration strategies, implementing actors must fill interpretative gaps, potentially generating uneven practice.

Importantly, the findings do not suggest complete incoherence. Rather, they indicate partial and layered coherence shaped by competing governance logics—standardization, decentralization, and accountability. Such hybridity is characteristic of contemporary education reform (Tikly, 2020). The Indonesian curriculum policy framework reflects an attempt to reconcile global reform discourses with national legal traditions. However, without systematic alignment across regulatory instruments, implementation coherence remains contingent upon institutional interpretation.

In conclusion, the results demonstrate that while curriculum regulations in Indonesia exhibit

rhetoical and goal-level alignment, operational and procedural coherence remains fragmented. This fragmentation influences how institutions interpret and enact curriculum policy. By foregrounding regulatory architecture as a determinant of implementation outcomes, this study extends prior research that has predominantly emphasized human and institutional factors. The findings underscore the importance of integrated policy design, clear terminological harmonization, and coordinated sequencing of regulatory instruments to enhance substantive coherence. Through qualitative document analysis, this research contributes a structural perspective to the study of curriculum policy implementation, highlighting that regulatory coherence is not merely a legal attribute but a governance condition shaping educational practice.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that curriculum policy regulations in Indonesia demonstrate partial coherence, with alignment in policy objectives but fragmentation in procedural guidelines and institutional coordination. At the macro level, regulatory documents demonstrate consistency in articulating overarching goals, such as competency-based education, institutional autonomy, and outcome-oriented learning. This pattern reflects vertical coherence in the formulation of curriculum objectives across hierarchical regulatory instruments. However, at the operational level, the analysis identifies procedural ambiguities, overlapping mandates, and inconsistent terminologies in regulations governing curriculum implementation, assessment systems, and institutional responsibilities. These structural inconsistencies weaken horizontal coherence by creating multiple interpretations of regulatory provisions among institutions responsible for curriculum implementation.

The findings indicate that implementation disparities may not be explained solely by institutional capacity or human resource



readiness. Instead, the architecture of regulation itself plays a decisive role in shaping how curriculum policy is enacted. Regulatory flexibility, while intended to promote contextual adaptation, may inadvertently produce fragmentation when not accompanied by clear coordination mechanisms. Therefore, strengthening policy coherence requires not only harmonized objectives but also integrated procedural guidelines and systematic regulatory sequencing.

Ultimately, regulatory coherence should be understood as a governance condition that directly influences the effectiveness and sustainability of curriculum reform. Enhancing alignment across legal and technical instruments is essential to ensure consistent and equitable implementation throughout Indonesia's education system.

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