

Analysis of Policy Capacity for Social Assistance in Higher Education in the City of Tangerang

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Abstract:

Higher education is believed to be a way out of poverty, but in reality, not everyone has equal access to it—especially those from poor families. The Tangerang City Government has attempted to address this issue through an educational social assistance program. However, the problem raised in this study is why the effectiveness of the program is still questionable, especially in terms of the government's ability to design, implement, and maintain the sustainability of the policy to the fullest extent. This study aims to evaluate the policy capacity of the Tangerang City Government using a descriptive qualitative approach. The main focus is on three important dimensions: analytical, operational, and political capacity. The findings show that although the policy structure is in place, the government's analytical and operational capacity remains weak. Conversely, non-governmental actors such as students, the media, and civil society have made significant contributions to oversight and advocacy. This study recommends enhancing technical capacity within the bureaucracy, as well as fostering collaboration and information transparency to ensure that educational social assistance programs can reach more people in need in a fair and sustainable manner.

Keywords: Higher Education, Policy Capacity, Social Assistance for Education

1. Introduction

Quality education is believed to be one of the main instruments in breaking the cycle of poverty.

However, economic barriers and accessibility remain serious challenges for low-income communities to continue their education to the university level. Data from the 2023 National Socioeconomic Survey (Susenas) shows that only around 10.15% of Indonesia's population has pursued higher education (bachelor's degree). In contrast, the majority of Indonesia's population only completes education up to junior high school (22.74%) and senior high school (30.22%) (Indonesian Central Statistics Agency, 2023). The low level of participation in higher education in Indonesia is partly due to the high cost of education. The average Single Tuition Fee (UKT) at public universities in 2021 reached Rp4,409,099 per semester, while at private universities it was even higher, at around Rp6,841,422. Annually, education costs at public universities are estimated to reach Rp12.71 million and Rp17.01 million for

private universities (Central Statistics Agency Data Books, 2023). These high costs pose a significant barrier, particularly for low-income groups who structurally face limitations in purchasing power.

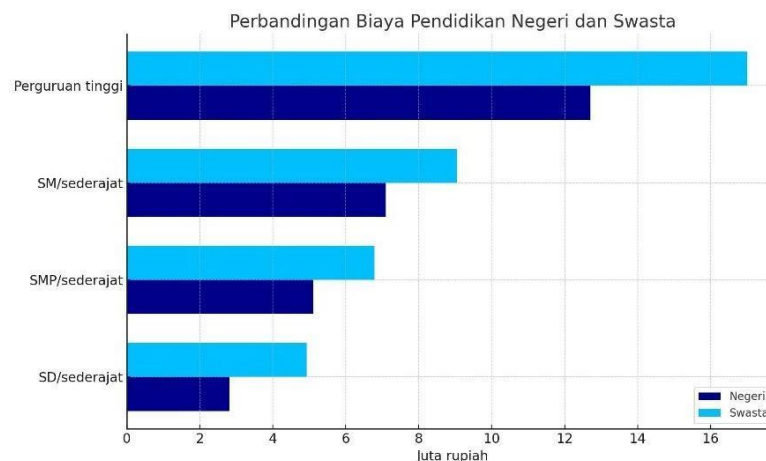


Figure 1. Education levels and education costs in Indonesia

As of March 2024, the number of poor people in Indonesia was recorded at 25.22 million. The phenomenon of poverty is not only occurring at the national level but also at the regional level, including in the city of Tangerang. In 2023, the poverty rate in the city of Tangerang reached 137,700 people, or approximately 5.89% of the total population of 1,930,556 people spread across 13 districts and 104 neighborhoods (Central Statistics Agency, 2023). Meanwhile, the number of residents in Tangerang City who have completed higher education (bachelor's degree) is recorded at 156,710 people, or only about 8.19% of the total population (Central Statistics Agency Data Books, 2023). This fact highlights the need for serious attention to the gap in access to higher education within the framework of local public policy. In line with human resource development theory, education plays a strategic role in creating competitive advantages. According to Ndaraha (1999), educated individuals can create added value that is not only comparative but also generative and innovative. (Maarjite Paais, 2017). This is reinforced by Kullapatar's (2018) view that the quality of human resources is reflected in the knowledge, skills, and professional capabilities they possess.

Therefore, the government has a constitutional and moral responsibility to provide fair and equitable access to education through targeted policy interventions. In this context, both the national and regional governments are working to address these issues through various scholarship programs.

The Tangerang City Government has responded to this issue through a policy of providing social assistance for higher education costs for the poor, as stipulated in Mayor Regulation (Perwal) No. 15 of 2021, which was later updated to Perwal No. 87 of 2022 (Tangerang City Government, 2022). This regulation is derived from the national legal framework, such as Law No. 11 of 2009 on Social Welfare, Law No. 13 of 2011 on the Handling of the Poor, and Government Regulation No. 30 of 2012 on the Implementation of Social Welfare. In principle, there are no significant changes between the two regulations, such as the source of data for scholarship recipients, which comes from the Integrated Social Welfare Data (DTKS) of the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

However, changes have been made to the amount of assistance provided to recipient students. Under Perwal No. 15 of 2021, the amount of assistance is Rp8,000,000 per year for a maximum of five years. Meanwhile, under Regulation No. 87 of 2022, the assistance amount was adjusted to Rp6,000,000 per year, with additional support costs such as housing rent and educational supplies (Tangerang City, 2025). The number of recipients fluctuated: 237 people in 2021, 268 people in 2022, 60 people in early 2023, then increased to 265 people after the regulatory change, and 46 people in early 2024, which then increased to 330 people. The total number of recipients from 2021 to 2024 reached 1,206 people. These fluctuations indicate dynamics in the implementation and selection process of the program, raising questions about the effectiveness of the local government's capacity to manage the program.

Research on educational assistance programs for students highlights several approaches. Wardoyo (2023) emphasizes the impact of social assistance and financial literacy among students post-COVID-19. Meanwhile, Chautari (2020) focuses on scholarship distribution in Nepal. Furthermore, research discusses the influence of self-confidence and parental support on the interest of social assistance recipients in continuing to higher education (Hutabarat et al., 2024). On the other hand, (Muzayin Al Farosa, 2022) discusses the development of a decision support system for the selection of educational social assistance recipients at the National Foster Parent Movement Institution in Kediri. Meanwhile, (Farwansyah et al., 2022) investigates the factors contributing to children's desire to continue their education after secondary school, helping parents and their children better understand the process. However, most of these studies have not thoroughly assessed the capacity of local governments to formulate and implement educational assistance policies in a systematic and measurable manner.

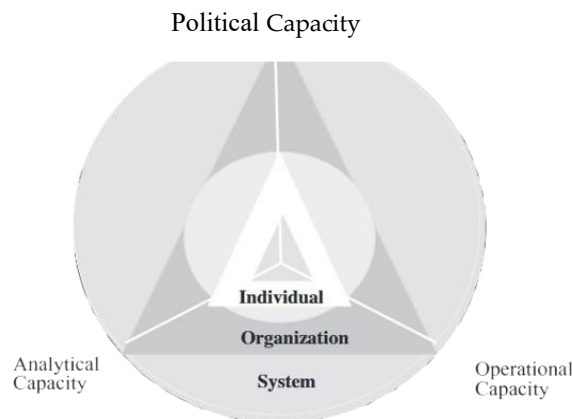
This study aims to fill the gap by evaluating the policy capacity of the Tangerang City Government in implementing educational social assistance programs through a comprehensive approach with three dimensions of policy capacity, namely analytical, operational, and political. This approach is still rarely applied in the evaluation of educational social assistance programs, especially in Tangerang City. This research stems from curiosity about how local governments manage their policy capacity to ensure that these programs run effectively. The main focus of this research includes the extent to which the government is able to accurately determine the target recipients of assistance, how the operational process supports implementation and verification of beneficiaries, and how political capacity plays a role in strengthening the effectiveness of the program. To that end, this research reviews three important aspects, namely, first, analyzing the analytical capacity of the government in utilizing data to establish targeted policies.

Second, evaluating operational capacity, particularly in resource management and the verification process for aid recipients; and third, assessing the role of political capacity in building support, establishing collaboration, and ensuring optimal program oversight. The findings of this study are expected to provide theoretical benefits by enriching academic research on policy capacity in education social assistance policies at the local level, as well as practical benefits by offering valuable insights to the City Government of Tangerang and other stakeholders in enhancing the effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of the program. As a result, the education social assistance program will not only be targeted effectively but also sustainable to support a better future for education.

In terms of understanding, there is a lot of scientific literature that defines the theory of Policy Capacity, highlighting different dimensions and subjects. The relationship between the capacity of a policy and the organization or institution that initiates the policy is very closely related, because a policy will be realized as expected if the capacity of the organization, through the readiness of human resources, can face the various challenges that will be encountered. Painter and Pierre (2005) define policy capacity as the ability to gather the necessary resources for making collective, intelligent choices, particularly in setting strategic directions. and allocate resources for public purposes, for example, define policy capacity as the ability to mobilize the necessary resources to make wise collective choices, particularly in setting strategic directions, to allocate scarce resources for public purposes (Painter & Pierre, 2005a). Meanwhile, according to (Yan et al., 2023), policy capacity is often viewed from the ability of public agencies to coordinate and implement public services and is described as an administrative capacity that includes analysis, implementation, and coordination capacity.

Policy capacity often appears in political rhetoric, but its exact definition remains unclear, and there is no consensus on how to operationalize and measure it. Policy Capacity Theory divides policy implementers' competencies into three general types of important skills: analytical, operational, and political. Policy capacity is also an important measure of effective policy performance in the public sector (Wu et al., 2015a). (Brenton et al., 2023) state that policy capacity is often measured as the ability to anticipate change, make informed decisions, develop programs to implement policies, and attract and manage the necessary resources. Emphasizing the importance of the role of permanent professional staff in strengthening policy capacity amid political instability, such as frequent changes in politicians, policy capacity, from this perspective, reflects the level of expertise of civil servants, in terms of training, skills, and the overall experience of the policy workforce within government agencies (Cohen & Sabah, 2023).

The concept of policy capacity is highly debated, partly due to the difficulties associated with its conceptualization and measurement (Mukherjee et al., 2021). (Fellegi, 1996) argues that the concept of policy capacity encompasses a broader range of issues, primarily the nature and quality of resources available to review, formulate, implement policies, and apply practices and procedures for how existing organizational resources are mobilized and used. Refining this definition by introducing analytical policy capacity, which is a concept more focused on the acquisition and utilization of knowledge in the policy process (Howlett, 2009). They have the policy capacity to maintain existing policies they favor and can also utilize these resources to drive policy changes aligned with their commitments.



Gambar 2. Policy Capacity Model

Sumber: (Wu et al., 2015)

According to the Policy Capacity Theory (Wu et al., 2015a), there are three main variables that are often used to evaluate an organization's ability to formulate and implement policies. First, analytical capacity, which refers to the ability of policy actors (both individuals and institutions) to collect, process, and utilize data and information to design appropriate policies. This capacity is highly dependent on research skills and data utilization in the decision-making process. In the context of this study, analytical capacity includes: the availability and quality of data on aid recipients (e.g., DTKS); the ability to analyze the educational needs of the poor; and evidence-based policy formulation mechanisms. Second, operational capacity relates to the ability of policy-implementing institutions to implement formulated policies, including managing resources, coordinating, and monitoring and evaluating policy implementation effectively and efficiently. This includes: budget and human resource management; beneficiary selection and verification mechanisms; and program monitoring and evaluation. Third, political capacity, which is the ability to interact with stakeholders, build political legitimacy and support, and manage challenges and conflicts in the policy process. Political capacity assesses the ability to build networks and manage resistance to policy. In this study, it includes: inter-agency coordination; community participation; and legislative and executive support for program sustainability. Although analytical, operational, and political capacities are interrelated, they are governed by different considerations, and their contributions to the policy process can be separated and are not interchangeable. In the analytical capacity dimension, research can clarify how research skills and data utilization are used in formulating scholarship policies, particularly in the context of mapping the needs of the poor in Tangerang City. Meanwhile, the operational capacity dimension needs to highlight the specific role of resource management, such as how funding allocation and supporting infrastructure are managed by the relevant agencies to ensure effective policy implementation. In other respects, according to Howlet's Policy Capacity Theory, policy implementation competencies are divided into three general types of important skills: analytical, operational, and political. Policy capacity is assessed at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels of resources. This forms an analytical table based on nine (9) items as follows: individual analytical capacity, organizational analytical capacity, systemic analytical capacity, individual operational capacity, organizational operational capacity, systemic operational capacity, individual political capacity, organizational political capacity, and systemic political capacity.

2. Research Method

The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative, which is used to describe and analyze phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of individuals and groups. The information obtained must be valid, reliable, and consistent with reality. Generally, data collection techniques can include interviews, observations, and document studies (Sodik & Siyoto, 2015). Data collection techniques are the methods researchers use to obtain data, whether primary or secondary.



Figure 3. Data collection methods

Source: Researcher's findings, 2025.

Primary data was obtained through interviews with technical staff in the government, the Tangerang City Council (DPRD) in charge of social and educational affairs, the Tangerang City Social Service, and the community/students receiving scholarships. Secondary data consisted of official documents, statistics from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), and related scientific literature. Following the collection of data, the next steps involved data analysis, mapping, and comparison using variables and indicators within the policy capacity framework, which assesses the government's capabilities based on three main aspects: analytical capacity (the ability to understand and design policies based on data and analysis), operational capacity (the ability to implement policies effectively), and political capacity (the ability to build support and collaboration with stakeholders). To ensure data validity, this study uses source triangulation by comparing results from various data sources. The informants to be interviewed in this study are.

Table 1. Research Informants

| Resource person | Institution/University | Position |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------|
|-----------------|------------------------|----------|

| | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Muh Tahir | Tangerang City Social Services Agency | Head of Division |
| Social Services Agency | Tangerang City Social Services Agency | Staff |
| Social Services Agency | Tangerang City Social Services Agency | Staff |
| Syamsuri | Tangerang City Council | Chairman of the local parliament |
| Yeni Kusumaningrum | Tangerang City Council | Member of the local parliament |
| Hilyatul Wapiah | Muhammadiyah University of Tangerang | Student |
| Ferdy | Muhammadiyah University of Tangerang | Student |
| Nisa | Muhammadiyah University of Tangerang | Student |
| Firda Dea | Pamulang University | Student |
| Delisa Sesilia Putri | Pamulang University | Student |
| M. Dimas Prodero | Mercu Buana University | Student |
| Mohd Rizki Pater Rahman | Bina Sarana Informatika University | Student |
| Manisa | Al Azhar University Indonesia | Student |
| Rista | Yatsi Madani University | Student |
| Emma | Open University | Student |

Source: Primary Data Collection Techniques

In this study, information analysis was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach with policy capacity theory as the main framework. Three main indicators were evaluated: analytical, operational, and political capacity, which served as benchmarks for assessing the ability of the Tangerang City Government to implement social assistance programs for education costs. Research data was obtained through interviews, official documents, and scientific literature, which were then processed using Nvivo12plus software. The use of the crosstab feature in Nvivo12plus facilitated the analysis of the interrelationships between policy indicators, while concept maps were used to visualize the main findings, enabling the data to be presented more clearly and easily understood. Research data must not be secondary data (taken from other studies).

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3. Results and Discussion

Analysis of the Capacity of Social Assistance Policies for Education in Tangerang City

The implementation of higher education social assistance policies in Tangerang City cannot be separated from the context of the policy capacity of those involved. In public administration practice, sufficient budgets and formal regulations do not necessarily guarantee the successful implementation of a program. Most of the success is associated with how well policy actors have adequate capacity to formulate, implement, and evaluate policies adaptively in response to social dynamics and community needs (Painter & Pierre, 2005b). Therefore, this study explicitly uses the policy capacity approach as the main analytical framework in assessing the implementation of higher education social assistance policies in Tangerang

City. The policy capacity approach is considered relevant because it systematically explains the three main dimensions that significantly determine the success of a public policy. First, analytical capacity, which refers to the ability of policy actors to collect, process, and utilize data and knowledge to produce evidence-based policies. Second, operational capacity, which reflects the extent to which policy-implementing institutions are able to manage resources, implement programs efficiently, and conduct ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Third, political capacity, which is the ability to build legitimacy, establish collaboration with stakeholders, and ensure political support and accountability in every policy process (Wu et al., 2015). These three dimensions not only complement each other but also form the foundation for the creation of policies that are responsive, adaptive, and socially and politically sustainable. To effectively apply the policy capacity approach, it is important to first identify the key actors involved in the policy process. Each actor has different capacities, interests, and roles in determining the success of policy implementation. Therefore, mapping actors is a crucial first step in understanding how policy capacity interactions and distribution occur at the local level. In the local context of Tangerang City, social assistance policies involve several actors who hold various positions and roles. This study maps five main actors:

The local government through the Social Services Agency, which is responsible for policy implementation; the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), a member of Commission II of the Tangerang City Council; local media as social watchdogs and public information channels; students as recipients and initiators of public engagement; and civil society organizations that help improve advocacy and monitoring at the grassroots level.

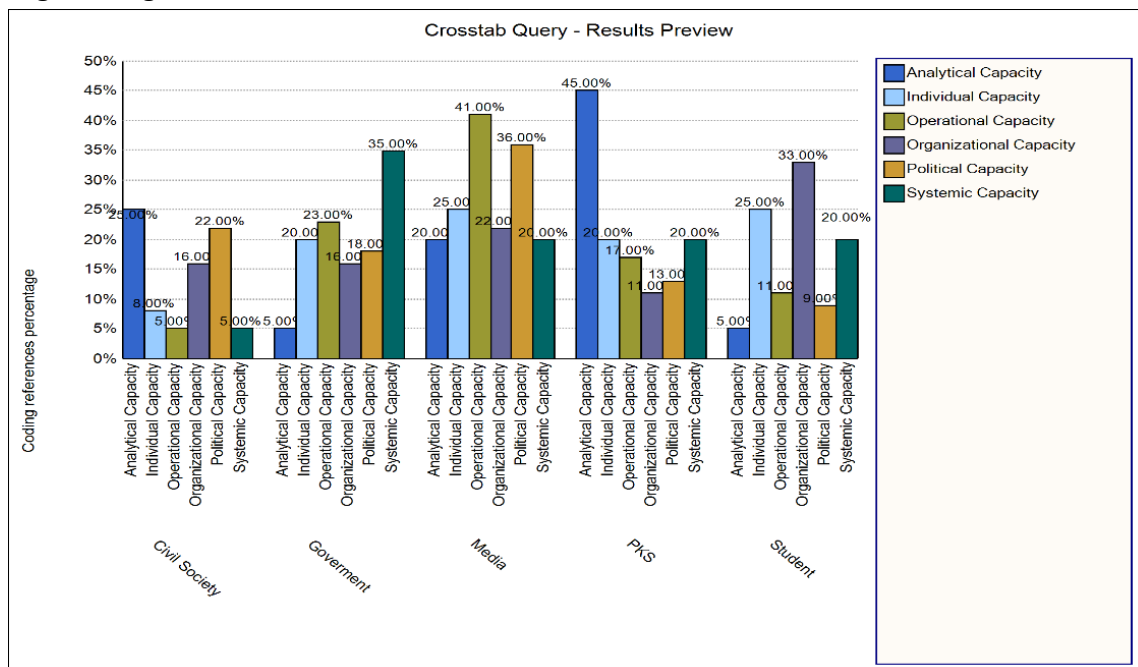


Figure 4. Graph showing the distribution of actors' roles in the three dimensions of policy capacity analysis using Nvivo12plus.

Source: Researcher's findings, 2025.

Analitical Capacity

Analytical capacity refers to the ability of policymakers to obtain, understand, and use data effectively to support planning and decision-making processes. In the context of social and educational assistance in Tangerang City, the availability and utilization of accurate and up-to-date data is a crucial factor. The government and related agencies are expected to develop information systems to provide effective data on the number of poor students, the likelihood of dropping out of school, and the distribution of demand based on geographical area. The ability to analyze social and educational needs is another important aspect. The government must be able to identify social changes that affect access to education, including the impact of the local economy, changes in family structure, or national crises such as pandemics.

A policy is definitely made through a very long process. This process begins with data collection and in-depth studies by relevant agencies, such as the Social Services Agency and the Regional Development Planning Agency, which map the socio-economic conditions of students and the potential risk of dropping out of school. The data is reinforced by input from academics and research institutions to produce evidence-based educational needs analysis. Subsequently, through public consultation forums and development planning meetings (musrenbang), various stakeholders, including student representatives, civil society organizations, and the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), provide input and social legitimacy to the policy draft. The formulation of higher education social assistance policies is grounded in a strong legal foundation as the legal basis for its implementation. This policy is based on Law Number 11 of 2009 of the Republic of Indonesia on Social Welfare, which states that every citizen has the right to social protection and security, especially those who are vulnerable and poor. Additionally, Law Number 13 of 2011 on the Handling of

The Poor and Needy strengthen the state's mandate to provide social interventions to disadvantaged groups, including access to higher education. Government Regulation No. 39 of 2012 on the Implementation of Social Welfare emphasizes the role of local governments in ensuring that citizens' social rights are systematically fulfilled. At the local level, the City of Tangerang has issued Mayor's Regulation No. 132 of 2021, which outlines the position and functions of the Social Affairs Department as the implementing agency for programs, and Mayor's Regulation No. 41 of 2022, which serves as a guideline for the procedures and accountability of social assistance distribution. Specifically, Mayor Regulation No. 87 of 2022 serves as an affirmation of access to higher education for the poor, acting as a policy instrument that clarifies the mechanisms, targets, and responsibilities of the government in implementing social assistance for higher education costs. All these legal foundations serve as both legal and moral pillars in efforts to create social justice and equality of access to higher education in the City of Tangerang.

Based on the research results, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and the media stood out in terms of analytical capacity, with percentages of 45% and 20%, respectively. This shows the significant role of non-governmental actors in overseeing data-driven policies. On the other hand, the government's capacity for analyzing social and educational needs remains low (only 5%), indicating the need for enhanced technical capacity to make policies more responsive and targeted. Collaboration between academics, policy researchers, and data analysts is essential for developing evidence-based policy interventions while strengthening the legitimacy of programs in the public eye. The role of the student sector and media as independent monitors is also important, despite their relatively low analytical capacity percentages (5% and 20%).

In theory, analytical capacity can be analyzed using approaches such as Policy Analytical Capacity (Howlett, 2009), which assesses the extent to which institutions have the tools, expertise, and resources to produce evidence-based policies. With strong analytical capacity, education assistance policies in Tangerang City can be formulated and implemented in a more responsive manner to the needs of the community.

Operasional Capacity

Once policies have been formulated based on an analysis of social and educational needs, the next challenge is to ensure that these policies can be effectively implemented at the operational level. This is where operational capacity plays a crucial role. Operational capacity reflects not only the administrative and technical capabilities of implementing agencies, but also the quality of coordination between actors, resource management, and the effectiveness of governance in program implementation. Without adequate operational capacity, even well-designed policies may fail to have a real impact on beneficiaries in the field.

Public Policy Implementation Process

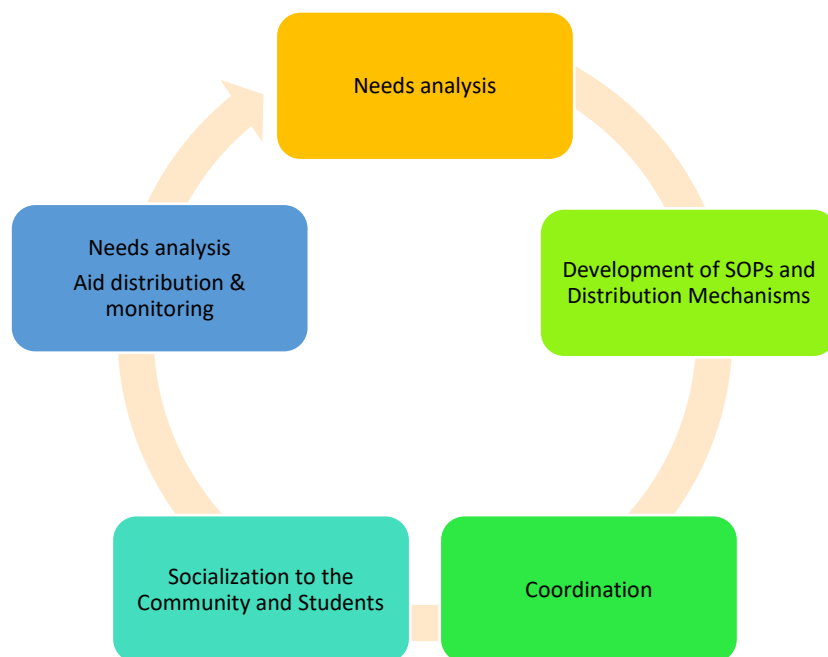


Figure 5. Policy Implementation Process

Source: Researcher's findings, 2025.

Operational capacity reflects the ability of the government and its partners to effectively implement policies, including procedures, governance, and aid distribution. Once policy designs have been developed based on social and educational needs analyses, the next step is to develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) and clear distribution mechanisms. In this context, the Social Services Agency, the Regional Representative Council, and universities coordinate intensively to ensure synchronization of recipient data, distribution schedules, and program monitoring. This process also

involves disseminating information about the policy to the community and beneficiaries so that implementation runs smoothly and is on target.

In the results of the analysis, the government sector stands out in operational capacity (23%), reflecting their primary role in direct implementation. However, it is important to assess the effectiveness of implementation more deeply, including to what extent administrative procedures accelerate or hinder aid distribution. Cross-sectoral coordination is another key indicator. In education social assistance policies, coordination between the Social Affairs Office, the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), and university authorities is crucial to synchronize beneficiary data, distribution schedules, and monitoring and evaluation. If coordination is not smooth, it may result in duplicate beneficiaries, distribution delays, or data discrepancies between institutions.

The main challenges in operational capacity are also related to the availability of human resources, budget, and supporting infrastructure. The availability of competent human resources, integrated information systems, and sufficient budget are the foundations for policy implementation. In this case, it shows that students and PKS study programs are still relatively low in this competency. This is reasonable because they are not direct implementers, but they still play an important role as mentors or partners. In public policy theory, operational capacity can be analyzed using the Governance Capacity approach (Peters, 2015), which emphasizes managerial and institutional capabilities to implement policies consistently and efficiently. In the context of Tangerang, strengthening SOPs and improving digital-based distribution systems can be concrete steps to enhance this capacity.

Political capacity

Political capacity reflects the support and commitment of political actors such as the Regional Representative Council (DPRD) and local government in maintaining the continuity and legitimacy of policies. This policy draft was not only prepared based on technical studies, but also discussed openly through public consultation forums and development planning deliberations. Here, various parties such as students, civil society, the DPRD, and local governments are actively involved. This process is important so that the policies created have strong social legitimacy and are supported by many parties. In this way, the risk of politicization that could disrupt the continuity of programs between leadership periods can be minimized.

The results show that the Government and Media sectors have high percentages in this category (18% and 36%), indicating significant involvement in building policy legitimacy. Political commitment is crucial to maintaining program continuity across leadership periods and avoiding the politicization of social assistance. Community and student participation is also an important aspect of political capacity. This participation can take the form of public forums, planning meetings, or involvement in policy oversight. Political capacity reflects the support and commitment of political actors such as the Regional Representative Council (DPRD) and local government in maintaining the continuity and legitimacy of policies. This policy draft was not only prepared based on technical studies, but also discussed openly through public consultation forums and development planning deliberations. Here, various parties such as students, civil society, the DPRD, and local governments are actively involved. This process is

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Implications of Findings for Policy Capacity

The results of this study indicate a striking gap between the idealism of educational social assistance policies and the reality of their implementation in the field. In an ideal scenario, such policies should be supported by strong analytical capacity, efficient operations, adaptive organizations, and a systemic environment that supports the participation of all actors. However, the data shows that the government, as the main actor, has the lowest analytical capacity at 5% and organizational capacity at only 16%, indicating a weak ability to process data, formulate needs-based policies, and build responsive internal structures. Research by (Wu et al., 2015) confirms that the government's low analytical capacity is often a major obstacle to the effective implementation of social policies, especially in developing countries. This limitation creates a sharp gap between the normative objectives of policies and their effectiveness in implementation.

The obstacles in accessing information from key actors such as the Social Services Agency and Commission II of the Tangerang City Council are not only technical barriers in the data collection process, but also reflect weak political capacity and institutional accountability. The lack of information disclosure and communication from government institutions to the public is an indication of low institutional openness, according to Grindle (2017), which is a major obstacle to achieving inclusive and responsive policies. This finding shows that local governments have not yet fully established a culture of transparency that supports public participation and oversight. On the other hand, the willingness of the PKS faction to provide information shows that non-government political actors have a higher commitment to openness, while also emphasizing the importance of cross-actor collaboration to strengthen policy legitimacy. However, this openness is important for building trust and strengthening political capacity, which is also recorded at only 18% among government actors. On the other hand, the government has the highest score in systemic capacity at 35%, indicating that they remain structurally dominant within the policy system but have not yet been able to leverage this structural advantage to enhance other capacity dimensions evenly..

Meanwhile, external actors show a more varied distribution of capacity. Civil society, for example, has the highest analytical capacity at 25% among non-state actors, but is very weak in the individual (8%) and operational (5%) dimensions, indicating that analytical potential has not been matched by adequate individual and technical capabilities. Students excel in organizational capacity (33%) and individual capacity (25%), reflecting the strength of collective movements and personal capacity, but are weak in

analytical (5%) and political (9%) aspects. The media, on the other hand, is the most balanced, with operational capacity at 41% and political capacity at 36%, making it an important actor in voicing public criticism and pressuring government accountability. PKS, as a political party, shows the highest analytical capacity (45%) among all actors, but its other capacity scores are relatively low, particularly organizational capacity at only 11%. This confirms that a party's strength in analyzing issues is not always accompanied by institutional strength or systemic influence. This aligns with a study by Ansell (2008), which emphasizes that the effectiveness of collaboration between actors depends heavily on the balance of capacity and institutional commitment of each party.

Based on the dynamics of capacity among these actors, strengthening social assistance policies for education in Tangerang City requires a multi-actor and cross-dimensional approach. The government needs to improve its analytical and operational capacity through internal training, the use of open data, and improving the quality of human resources. Transparency and openness to public criticism must be enhanced to ensure that organizational and political capacity can grow in tandem. The City Council, particularly Commission 2, must improve public accessibility and participation as a form of legislative accountability. On the other hand, the potential of students, the media, civil society, and the PKS should be integrated into collaborative policy forums. Through data-driven synergy and active participation of all actors, it is hoped that education social assistance policies can achieve substantive effectiveness and social justice. This approach is also supported by modern public policy literature emphasizing the importance of collaborative governance in enhancing policy capacity and legitimacy (Bovaird, 2009).

Conclusion

This study shows that the implementation of higher education social assistance policies in Tangerang City has not been fully optimized due to disparities in the policy capacity of the implementing actors, particularly the local government. Although structurally, the Tangerang City Government has a dominant position in the policy system (systemic capacity), its analytical (5%) and operational capacities are still relatively low. This hinders the formulation of evidence-based policies, as well as the efficient and targeted implementation of programs.

Conversely, non-governmental actors such as students, civil society, the media, and certain political parties (PKS) demonstrate significant contributions in the analytical and political dimensions, particularly in terms of oversight and advocacy. However, their strength is not yet sufficiently organized in a systemic and institutional manner to exert consistent pressure for improving the quality of policy implementation. Overall, the analysis shows that the success of educational social assistance programs is not only determined by the availability of budgets and regulations but also heavily dependent on the quality of policy capacity at all levels: individual, organizational, and systemic. Therefore, enhancing technical capacity, political commitment, and cross-actor collaboration are essential prerequisites for the sustainability and effectiveness of these policies.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the researchers recommend that the Tangerang City Government, particularly the Social Services Agency, improve its analytical and operational capacity by strengthening human resource competencies, providing technical policy training, and optimizing data-based and integrated information systems. Additionally, transparency and accountability in the implementation of educational social assistance programs need to be strengthened, including through openness regarding beneficiary data, systematic program reporting, and the provision of responsive complaint mechanisms for public input. Researchers also recommend the importance of encouraging cross-actor collaboration between local governments, regional legislative councils, students, the media, and civil society through inclusive and participatory policy forums. Political commitment from legislative and executive stakeholders needs to be strengthened to ensure the sustainability of educational social assistance programs beyond the five-year political cycle. In addition, the Tangerang City Government is expected to begin adopting an evidence-based policy approach by involving academics and independent research institutions in the process of formulating, implementing, and evaluating policies comprehensively. Thus, the education social assistance program can not only run administratively but also be able to address the needs of the community substantively and sustainably in the long term.

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