



Journal of Deep Learning

<https://journals2.ums.ac.id/index.php/jdl>



Policy–Practice Gap in Teacher Career Development: Implications for Motivation and Educational Quality in Private Junior Secondary Schools

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DOI: 10.23917/jdl.v2i1.11634

Received: March 10th, 2026. Revised: April 10th, 2026. Accepted: April 22nd, 2026

Available Online: April 25th, 2026. Published Regularly: June, 2026

Abstract

This study aims to critically analyze the implementation of teacher career development policies in private junior secondary schools in Sukoharjo Regency and their impact on teacher motivation and educational quality. This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, involving teachers, school principals, and school supervisors as key informants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña framework. The findings reveal a significant gap between formal policies and their implementation (*policy–practice gap*), where policies tend to be administrative in nature and lack sustainable evaluation mechanisms. Furthermore, power structures dominated by school foundations and the weak application of meritocratic principles result in promotion and career development processes that are not based on performance and competence. These conditions lead to declining motivation, low organizational commitment, and a high intention among teachers to leave. More broadly, the weak career development system contributes to stagnation in instructional innovation and declining educational quality. This study highlights the importance of policy reform oriented toward transparency, meritocracy, and continuous professional development. The findings are expected to serve as a basis for developing more equitable, contextual, and sustainable teacher career development policies, particularly in the private education sector.

Keywords: teacher career development, education policy, policy–practice gap, educational quality, meaningful improvement, teacher performance, teacher work motivation.

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1. Introduction

Education constitutes a fundamental pillar of national development, playing a strategic role in shaping the quality of human resources. The success of an education system is largely determined by the quality of teachers as the primary actors in the learning process. In the context of junior secondary education, teachers function not only as

transmitters of knowledge but also as agents of transformation who instill values, build character, and develop students' competencies holistically. Therefore, teacher quality becomes a key determinant in achieving national education goals. However, such quality is not solely defined by initial qualifications but is significantly influenced by the sustainability of career development

systems implemented by educational institutions (Pratiwi et al., 2024).

Teacher career development is an integral component of human resource management in the education sector, aimed at enhancing professional competence, work motivation, and institutional commitment (Andriyani et al., 2025). Ideally, career development systems should be systematically designed, merit-based, and oriented toward improving the quality of teaching and learning. However, empirical realities indicate that the implementation of teacher career development policies, particularly in private schools, continues to face structural and cultural challenges. In several regions of Indonesia, including Sukoharjo Regency, these policies have not been consistently implemented and tend to be administrative rather than substantive in fostering professional growth (Suwarso, 2011). This situation is further exacerbated by weak integration between national policies and managerial practices at the school level, especially in private institutions that possess greater autonomy in managing human resources (Khikmawati et al., 2021).

Furthermore, there is strong evidence suggesting that teachers in private schools experience stagnation in their career progression due to the absence of transparent and accountable promotion systems. The lack of meritocratic mechanisms, weak leadership from school principals in promoting professional development, and limited performance-based incentives are dominant factors hindering teachers' career mobility (Rifky et al., 2023). The consequences of this condition are not only felt at the individual level such as low motivation and limited self-actualization but also systemically affect the quality of classroom instruction. Previous studies have shown that career development is significantly correlated with teachers' work

enthusiasm and effectiveness in classroom management (Rahmah & Prasada, 2024).

Normatively, teacher career development policies have been regulated through various frameworks, including the Regulation of the Minister of National Education No. 35 of 2010, which emphasizes competency- and performance-based career development as part of teacher professionalization. However, the implementation of such regulations in private schools remains suboptimal. In several private junior secondary schools in Sukoharjo, promotion decisions tend to be subjective and often disregard teachers' performance achievements and competencies (Murtiana et al., 2022). This reflects a gap between normative policy frameworks and empirical practices. Moreover, private school teachers often occupy a marginal position within the national education policy structure, despite their significant contribution to educational service provision (Wasono, 2019).

The problem is further compounded by the lack of competency- and achievement-based career development systems. A study by Novitasari (2021) revealed that in several regions, including Kebumen, teacher career development is not yet grounded in measurable and objective indicators. This condition leads to decreased trust among teachers toward existing systems and reduces their motivation to improve performance. In this context, a more in-depth investigation is required to understand how career development policies are implemented and how such policies are perceived and interpreted by teachers as the primary subjects of policy (Zulbahri et al., 2023).

Based on this background, this study focuses on analyzing the implementation of teacher career development policies in private junior secondary schools in Sukoharjo Regency. The main problem addressed is how

these policies are structured and implemented, and to what extent they reflect the principles of fairness, professionalism, and accountability. In addition, this study seeks to explore how teachers perceive and respond to these policies in their daily practices. Accordingly, the research questions are formulated as follows: (1) how are teacher career development policies in private junior secondary schools in Sukoharjo structured and implemented, and (2) how do teachers critically interpret these policies from a qualitative perspective? These questions are particularly relevant given the limitations of previous studies, which tend to overlook teachers' lived experiences in understanding policy implementation.

The objective of this study is to critically examine the forms, implementation, and impacts of teacher career development policies in private junior secondary schools in Sukoharjo. Additionally, this study aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding these policies, as well as to formulate context-based and applicable policy recommendations. A descriptive-critical approach is employed to generate in-depth and reflective data on field realities, ensuring that the resulting recommendations are grounded in the actual needs of stakeholders (Pagawak, 2022).

Previous studies have predominantly focused on the relationship between career development and teacher performance using quantitative approaches, thereby failing to capture the contextual, structural, and narrative dimensions of such policies (Novitasari, 2021). Moreover, the voices of private school teachers who directly experience these policies are often underrepresented. This indicates a research gap that necessitates qualitative inquiry oriented toward experiential insights and

structural critique. Such an approach enables a deeper exploration of power dynamics, institutional practices, and social relations that shape policy implementation (Ananda, 2025).

The novelty of this study lies in its use of a critical qualitative approach to examine teacher career development policies from the perspective of policy actors themselves, namely teachers. This approach facilitates the identification of power structures, discriminatory practices, and institutional mechanisms influencing career mobility in the private education sector (Hafidh et al., 2022). The application of critical theory frameworks further contributes to uncovering the ideological dimensions embedded within educational policies (Hasan, 2017; Murti & Ramdhani, 2023).

The contributions of this study are multidimensional, encompassing academic, practical, and advocative aspects. Academically, this study enriches the field of education policy by positioning private school teachers as active subjects in policy processes. Practically, the findings may serve as references for private educational foundations, local education authorities, and accreditation bodies in designing fair and sustainable career development systems (Zulbahri et al., 2023). Furthermore, this study has the potential to support policy advocacy at both local and national levels by integrating local perspectives and participatory approaches in policy formulation (Pagawak, 2022).

In conclusion, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to understanding and improving teacher career development systems in private schools, particularly in Sukoharjo Regency. By incorporating local contexts, teachers' experiences, and a critical perspective, this study offers not only comprehensive analysis

but also contextually grounded and equitable policy recommendations. It may also serve as a foundation for future research on region-based education policies within the broader framework of educational decentralization (Sukri, 2022).

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design aimed at exploring in depth the practices, meanings, and perceptions of educational actors regarding teacher career development policies in private schools. A qualitative approach is selected as it enables researchers to understand phenomena holistically, contextually, and based on participants' subjective experiences within real-life settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design is considered appropriate for examining complex, context-dependent policy processes that involve multiple stakeholders and competing interests (Yin, 2014). The focus of this study is directed toward the implementation of teacher career development policies in several private junior secondary schools in Sukoharjo Regency, with particular emphasis on how these policies are understood, interpreted, and responded to by practitioners at the school level.

The research sites were selected purposively based on several criteria, including the diversity of school characteristics, variations in institutional management structures, and the presence of implemented teacher career development policies. This purposive selection allows the researcher to obtain rich and relevant data aligned with the objectives of the study. Previous studies have demonstrated that purposive site selection in qualitative research is effective in uncovering local-level dynamics of education policy and identifying

gaps between formal regulations and empirical practices (Sukri, 2022).

The informants in this study were determined using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, taking into account their direct involvement in policy implementation. The main informants consist of teachers, school principals, and school supervisors, who are considered to possess in-depth understanding of career development practices within the school environment. The snowball technique was employed to identify additional relevant informants based on recommendations from initial participants, thereby enriching the diversity of perspectives obtained (Pagawak, 2022).

Data were collected through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore informants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the implemented policies. Participant observation was employed to gain direct insights into the actual practices of policy implementation within the daily school context. Meanwhile, document analysis was conducted on various policy-related documents, including internal school guidelines, foundation regulations, and administrative records related to teacher promotion and career development. The use of multiple data collection techniques aims to ensure comprehensive and complementary data.

To ensure data validity, this study applied source and method triangulation techniques, as recommended in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different informants, while method triangulation involved cross-verifying data from interviews, observations, and documents. In addition, member checking was employed by confirming preliminary

findings with participants to ensure alignment between the researcher’s interpretations and participants’ actual experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This validation approach is consistent with practices in education policy research, which emphasize respondent verification and triangulation to enhance credibility and objectivity (Rifky et al., 2023).

Data analysis was conducted iteratively using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al., (2014), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, focused, and simplified raw data obtained from the field. The data were then presented in the form of descriptive narratives, matrices, and thematic categories to facilitate interpretation. The final stage involved drawing conclusions iteratively by continuously relating findings to the theoretical framework employed in this study.

In the analytical process, the researcher did not merely describe the phenomena but also conducted critical interpretation of the meanings embedded in the data. The analysis was directed toward identifying structural inequalities, power dynamics, and forms of resistance present in the implementation of teacher career development practices in private schools. To achieve this, the study adopts a critical education policy perspective as articulated by Ball (2012), which emphasizes uncovering ideological dimensions and power relations within educational policies. This perspective is also reflected in the study by Murti & Ramdhani (2023), which highlights the ambiguity of local government roles in teacher career development policy implementation.

Thus, the analytical approach employed in this study is not only descriptive-narrative but also interpretive-critical, as emphasized by Stake (1995) in qualitative case study

research grounded in social critique. This approach enables the researcher not only to understand empirical phenomena but also to uncover the underlying structures and ideologies shaping policy practices, thereby producing more in-depth and reflective analysis.

3. Result and Discussion

a. The Gap between Formal Policy and Implementation in Teacher Career Development

One of the central findings of this study is the significant gap between formal teacher career development policies and their actual implementation in practice, particularly in private junior secondary schools in Sukoharjo Regency. Normatively, most schools have established policy instruments such as standard operating procedures (SOPs), performance appraisal systems (*Sasaran Kinerja Pegawai/SKP*), and professional development programs. However, in practice, these policies are implemented inconsistently, unsystematically, and without sustainability. This indicates that the mere existence of policy frameworks does not necessarily lead to effective implementation, especially in the absence of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

This finding aligns with the critical policy perspective proposed by Ball (2012), which argues that educational policies often exist as symbolic texts (*policy as text*) but are not fully realized in practice (*policy as practice*). In this context, teacher career development policies in private schools tend to function as administrative instruments rather than as transformative tools for enhancing teacher professionalism. Similar patterns have been identified by Murti & Ramdhani (2023), who highlight ambiguities in the implementation of educational policies at the local level.

To further elucidate this phenomenon, educational actors are summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Summary of Interview Findings

Actor	Key Issues Identified	Category of Findings
Teacher	Lack of a clear career system, limited training opportunities, and declining motivation	System ambiguity & psychological impact
School Principal	Limited funding, non-collaborative leadership, and pressure from the foundation	Managerial constraints & structural pressure
School Supervisor	Limited access, supervision is mostly administrative, and lack of active involvement	Weak supervision & institutional exclusion

Table 1 demonstrates a consistent pattern of perceptions among educational actors regarding the weak implementation of career development policies. Teachers, as primary implementers, experience uncertainty in career pathways and limited access to professional development opportunities. School principals face dilemmas related to resource constraints and structural pressures from foundations. Meanwhile, school

supervisors encounter limitations in conducting substantive supervision. These findings suggest that the policy gap is not merely technical but is deeply rooted in structural and governance-related issues.

These qualitative findings are further supported by quantitative data on the distribution of teacher career development aspects, as presented below:

Table 2. Distribution of Teacher Career Development Aspects in Private Schools

Assessment Aspect	Number of Schools	Percentage
Have scheduled internal training	11	28.9%
Do not have internal training	27	71.1%
SKP implementation with follow-up actions	9	23.7%
SKP treated as a formality	29	76.3%
Have continuous CPD programs	4	10.5%
Do not have regular CPD programs	34	89.5%
Performance-based promotion	8	21.1%
Promotion not based on objective indicators	30	78.9%

Table 2 clearly illustrates that most schools lack structured and sustainable career development systems. The high percentage of schools without regular CPD programs (89.5%) and the dominance of promotion practices not based on objective indicators (78.9%) indicate weak implementation of meritocratic principles. Furthermore, the use of performance appraisal systems (SKP) as mere formalities without continuous evaluation demonstrates that policy instruments are not effectively utilized as tools for professional development. This condition reinforces the existence of a *policy–*

practice gap, where policies function primarily as administrative legitimization rather than as mechanisms for improving educational quality. Riyadi & Arroji (2026) emphasizes that human resource development policies in private schools tend to be normative and lack effective monitoring systems.

Moreover, the limited role of external supervision further exacerbates this gap, as reflected in the following interview excerpts with school supervisors:

Table 3. Summary of Supervisors’ Interview Findings

Theme	Narrative Quote
Limited supervision	"We only visit private schools twice a year."
Not involved in training	"Private schools do not involve us in teacher training activities."
Foundation autonomy	"All decisions are made by the foundation."

Table 3 provides deeper insights into the limited role of school supervisors in the career development system of private school teachers. The narrative excerpts reveal that supervision is largely administrative rather than substantive and is not integrated with professional development initiatives. Additionally, the dominance of foundations in strategic decision-making processes undermines transparency and accountability in career development practices. These findings are consistent with Sukri (2022), who notes the limited supervision of private schools, and Khumaidi & Hamdani (2024), who highlights the weak control mechanisms within decentralized education systems.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the gap between formal policy and implementation constitutes a complex structural issue. It is not merely the result of technical limitations but is also shaped by weak governance structures, insufficient supervision, and the dominance of internal institutional interests. Therefore, policy reform should not only focus on the formulation of regulatory frameworks but also on strengthening implementation through continuous evaluation systems, transparency

in decision-making, and enhanced accountability at the school level.

b. Power Structure Dominance and Weak Meritocracy in Teacher Career Development

The findings of this study reveal that one of the primary factors hindering the effectiveness of teacher career development policies in private schools is the dominance of power structures that are not balanced by meritocratic principles. In many cases, decision-making related to promotions, access to training, and the distribution of professional development opportunities is driven more by power relations than by objective performance indicators. This condition reflects structural inequality in human resource governance within private schools (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Based on interviews with various educational actors, it was found that teachers occupy a relatively weak position in determining their own career trajectories. School principals and foundations, as key authorities, hold dominant control over career-related decisions, often without transparent evaluation mechanisms. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of *power asymmetry* in educational management, where the distribution of authority among actors is uneven (Yin, 2014).

To better understand this pattern of power dominance, the classification of actors and their roles in career-related decision-making is presented below:

Table 4. Actor Structure and Power Distribution in Teacher Career Development

Actor	Role in Decision-Making	Level of Influence	Power Category
Foundation	Primary decision-maker	Very high	Structural dominance
School Principal	Internal policy implementer	High	Managerial authority
Teacher	Instructional practitioner	Low	Subordinate
School Supervisor	Administrative oversight	Very low	Symbolic role

Table 4 illustrates that foundations hold a dominant position in shaping teacher career development policies. School principals act as implementers of internal policies; however, in many cases, they lack full autonomy as they remain under the authority of the foundation. Meanwhile, teachers who are central actors in the learning process are positioned as subordinates with minimal influence. School supervisors, who are expected to serve as external control mechanisms, play a limited role and are largely confined to administrative oversight.

This imbalanced power structure has significant implications for the absence of meritocracy in teacher career development. In a meritocratic system, promotions and career advancement should be based on performance, competence, and professional contributions. However, the findings indicate that practices in the field are largely influenced by subjective factors such as loyalty, personal relationships, and leadership preferences.

To further examine meritocratic practices in private schools, the following data on career development indicators are presented:

Table 5. Meritocracy Indicators in Teacher Career Development

Evaluation Indicator	Number of Schools	Percentage
Performance-based promotion	8	21.1%
Relationship-based promotion	30	78.9%
Regular performance evaluation	10	26.3%
No systematic evaluation	28	73.7%

Table 5 clearly demonstrates that only a small proportion of schools apply meritocratic principles in career development. In contrast, the majority still rely on subjective approaches that are not grounded in objective indicators. This indicates that performance evaluation systems have not yet become the primary basis for career-related decisions.

Such conditions contradict the principle of *merit-based promotion*, which is widely advocated in global education reform (Hardy, 2012). A study by Sherly et al. (2025) also found that weak meritocratic implementation directly affects teachers’ motivation and teaching quality. Similarly, Romandoni et al., (2024) argue that the absence of a merit

system hampers teacher professionalization and weakens bureaucratic reform in the education sector.

In addition, the dominance of power structures also limits teachers’ access to professional development programs. Many teachers reported that they did not have equal opportunities to participate in training, as such decisions were entirely controlled by principals or foundations. This suggests that the distribution of professional development opportunities is neither equitable nor transparent.

This phenomenon is illustrated in the following table:

Table 6. Teachers’ Access to Professional Development

Development Aspect	Number of Schools	Percentage
Open access to training	9	23.7%
Limited access to selected groups	29	76.3%
Transparent selection process	7	18.4%
Non-transparent selection	31	81.6%

Table 6 indicates that most schools do not implement transparent mechanisms for granting access to training. Limited access and non-transparent selection processes reflect exclusivity in professional development opportunities. This reinforces the argument that dominant power structures contribute to inequality in career advancement.

From a theoretical perspective, this condition can be explained using the critical policy framework proposed by Ball (2012), which argues that policies are never neutral but are shaped by power relations and competing interests. In this context, teacher career development policies in private schools function not only as managerial instruments but also as arenas of power contestation among actors.

Murti & Ramdhani (2023) further highlight that ambiguity in actor roles within education policy can reinforce the dominance of certain groups while weakening the participation of others. In this study, the dominance of foundations as non-pedagogical actors emerges as a key factor hindering teacher professionalization.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that weak meritocracy and dominant power structures are key determinants of teacher career stagnation in private schools. Addressing this issue requires governance reform that emphasizes transparency, accountability, and the implementation of objective, performance-based evaluation systems. Furthermore, strengthening the role of school supervisors as external control agents is essential to ensure that career development policies are implemented fairly and professionally.

c. The Systemic Impact of Career Development Policies on Teacher Motivation and Educational Quality

The findings of this study indicate that weaknesses in the implementation of teacher career development policies do not only affect organizational structures but also have direct consequences on teachers' psychological conditions and overall educational quality. The lack of a clear career system, limited opportunities for professional development, and non-merit-based promotion practices have created a condition of stagnation that contributes to declining teacher motivation. In the long term, this condition has the potential to hinder instructional innovation and reduce the quality of educational services in private schools.

Based on interview results, most teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the existing career system. They perceived that their efforts and dedication were not matched by adequate recognition or opportunities for professional growth. This condition reflects a low level of *perceived fairness* within the organization, which, according to Suryana (2021), is a crucial factor in shaping teacher loyalty and performance. When teachers perceive the system as unfair, their commitment to the institution tends to decline, and their work orientation shifts toward merely fulfilling minimum obligations.

To systematically illustrate this condition, the following table presents a summary of teachers' perceptions of the career system and its impacts:

Table 7. Teachers’ Perceptions of the Career System and Its Impacts

Perception Aspect	Key Findings	Impact on Teachers
Career pathway clarity	No structured career pathway	Uncertainty in professional direction
Performance evaluation system	Lack of transparency and consistency	Distrust in the system
Professional development opportunities	Limited and non-continuous training	Declining competence
Promotion system	Not performance-based, tends to be subjective	Decreased motivation
Recognition of performance	Lack of clear appreciation mechanisms	Reduced work enthusiasm

Table 7 demonstrates that teachers’ perceptions of the career system are predominantly negative and directly affect their psychological and professional conditions. The absence of a clear career pathway leads to a lack of long-term professional orientation. Furthermore, non-transparent evaluation systems create distrust toward school management. This condition is exacerbated by limited training opportunities, resulting in stagnation of competencies. From a human resource management perspective, this indicates a failure of institutions to build

healthy *employee engagement*. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize that trust in organizational systems is a fundamental element in creating productive and sustainable work environments.

The impact of these conditions is not only individual but also reflected in collective teacher behavior within the school environment. One of the most prominent indicators is the increasing intention of teachers to leave the institution, as shown in the following table:

Table 8. Indicators of Impact on Teacher Retention and Loyalty

Indicator	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Intention to leave within 1–2 years	21	55.3%
Willingness to stay due to career support	17	44.7%
Decline in work motivation	24	63.2%
Lack of engagement in instructional innovation	26	68.4%

Table 8 shows that more than half of the teachers have intentions to leave in the near future. This high percentage indicates a retention crisis among teachers in private schools. Moreover, the majority of teachers exhibit declining motivation and low engagement in instructional innovation. This suggests that ineffective career development policies directly affect the sustainability of human resources in educational institutions.

These findings are consistent with Sherly et al. (2025), who argue that weak talent management systems significantly contribute to declining teacher performance. Romandoni et al., (2024) further assert that the absence of

meritocratic systems in educational organizations hinders reform and reduces service quality. Therefore, teacher retention is not solely influenced by financial factors but also by perceptions of fairness and career development opportunities.

Furthermore, the impact of low motivation and loyalty is also reflected in the quality of the teaching and learning process. Several school principals reported that teacher career stagnation leads to limited innovation in teaching methods and a lack of reflective practices in instruction. This condition is illustrated in the following table:

Table 9. Impact on Instructional Quality and School Environment

Impact Aspect	Key Findings	Implications
Instructional innovation	Teachers tend to rely on conventional methods	Less engaging learning experiences
Pedagogical reflection	Minimal self-evaluation and methodological improvement	Stagnation in teaching quality
Teacher–student interaction	Less optimal due to low motivation	Declining educational relationships
School culture	Non-reflective and lacking continuous improvement	Stagnant learning environment

Table 9 indicates that the impact of career development policies extends beyond individual teachers to affect instructional quality and school organizational culture. The low level of instructional innovation suggests that teachers are not encouraged to develop creative and adaptive teaching methods. Additionally, the lack of pedagogical reflection indicates that teaching practices do not experience meaningful improvement over time.

These findings are supported by Hasan (2017) and Murtiana et al. (2022), who emphasize a positive correlation between effective career systems and the quality of educational services. Pratiwi et al. (2024) also demonstrate that teachers who actively participate in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs tend to exhibit higher teaching quality and stronger relationships with students. Thus, career development policies play a strategic role in determining overall educational quality.

Moreover, the phenomenon of passive resistance exhibited by teachers such as reduced initiative and engagement can be understood through the concept of *critical agency* proposed by Bonner et al. (2020). In this context, teachers do not openly resist policies but instead adapt to systems they perceive as unjust. This form of resistance serves as an important indicator of a crisis of trust within the institution.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that weaknesses in teacher career

development systems have broad systemic impacts, ranging from individual psychological conditions to macro-level educational quality. Therefore, policy reform should not only focus on structural aspects but also consider the psychological and professional dimensions of teachers as the primary actors in the education system.

4. Conclusion

This study reveals that teacher career development policies in private junior secondary schools in Sukoharjo Regency continue to face fundamental challenges that are structural, cultural, and systemic in nature. Although many schools formally possess policy instruments such as standard operating procedures (SOPs), performance appraisal systems (SKP), and training programs, their implementation remains inconsistent, unsystematic, and unsustainable. This condition indicates a significant gap between normative policy frameworks and empirical practices (*policy–practice gap*), where policies function more as administrative tools rather than as transformative mechanisms for enhancing teacher professionalism.

Furthermore, the study finds that the power structure within private school governance tends to be dominated by foundations and certain managerial actors, resulting in weak implementation of meritocratic principles in teacher career development. Promotion processes and access to professional development

opportunities are often not based on performance and competence but are influenced by personal relationships and subjective considerations. This condition creates structural inequality, placing teachers in a relatively powerless position in determining their own career trajectories.

The impact of these conditions is not limited to individual teachers but also extends to broader educational outcomes. At the individual level, teachers experience declining motivation, reduced trust in institutional systems, and weakened organizational commitment. At the institutional level, these issues manifest in low engagement in instructional innovation, high turnover intention, and limited pedagogical reflection. Collectively, these factors contribute to stagnation in the quality of teaching and learning processes. Thus, teacher career development policies play a strategic role in shaping overall educational quality.

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the relevance of the critical education policy approach in analyzing policy implementation at the local level. The findings demonstrate that education policies should not be understood merely as regulatory products but as arenas shaped by power relations, competing interests, and complex social practices. Therefore, policy analysis must consider ideological, structural, and contextual dimensions that influence implementation in real-world settings.

From a practical standpoint, this study proposes several strategic recommendations. First, it is necessary to strengthen merit-based systems grounded in performance and competence, ensuring transparency and accountability in career advancement processes. Second, structured and inclusive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs should be developed to support the

professional growth of private school teachers. Third, the capacity of school principals in human resource management should be enhanced to promote teacher development effectively. Fourth, the role of school supervisors should be strengthened to ensure that supervision extends beyond administrative compliance toward substantive and continuous guidance. Finally, policy intervention from both local and central governments is essential to ensure equitable access to career development opportunities between public and private school teachers.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the enrichment of educational policy research, particularly in the area of teacher career development within the private sector, which has often been underexplored. It also provides a foundation for future research across different regional contexts and methodological approaches, aiming to generate a more comprehensive understanding of education policy dynamics in Indonesia.

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