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From Private Problem to Institutional Agenda: Applying Anderson's Model to the Decline of Student Enrollment in Private Vocational Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the educational policy process in response to the decline in new student enrollment at Private Vocational High Schools (SMKS) in Mojokerto Regency and City for the 2025-2026 Academic Year. Utilizing Anderson's Public Policy theory, it traces the issue's evolution from an internal problem to an institutional one. Data were collected through document analysis, structured interviews with school principals and local education office officials, and policy observation. The findings reveal that the decline, initially an internal issue of attractiveness and competition, escalated into a public problem as it affected 35% of private SMKs. It further transformed into a systemic Education Policy Issue upon the discovery of an imbalanced quota allocation, where public schools accommodated only 38% of junior high school graduates, creating inequity for private SMKs. The issue was elevated to the institutional agenda through interventions such as reviewing admission quotas, advocating for fairer zoning, and enhancing collaboration with the Business and Industrial World (DUDI). The study concludes that Anderson's model provides an effective framework for understanding education policy dynamics in crisis response and underscores the need for inclusive policies to ensure the sustainability of private vocational education. These findings offer practical contributions for policymakers in designing more responsive and sustainable interventions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Vocational Secondary Education (SMK) is globally recognized as a strategic instrument in preparing skilled, adaptive human resources ready to face the challenges of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0 era. In this context, SMKs not only function as producers of technical workers but also as agents of innovation and drivers of the regional economy. The World Bank (2020) report emphasizes that investment in quality vocational education is key to boosting national productivity and competitiveness in an increasingly competitive global economic landscape. However, the effectiveness of vocational education in achieving its strategic goals heavily depends on its ability to adapt to the complex and ever-changing dynamics of the educational ecosystem.

In Indonesia, vocational education faces various challenges, one of which is that most of its institutions are managed by the private sector. Based on the latest data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) in 2024, approximately 61.14% of vocational high schools (SMKs) in Indonesia are privately managed, while public schools account for only 38.86%. These figures are not merely statistical data but a real picture that the National Education System still heavily relies on the vital role of the private sector, especially at the SMK level (Kompas.id, June 2025). This role is evident in efforts to expand educational access, provide

employment for teachers and educational staff, and offer various skill programs tailored to local labor market needs.

However, in recent years, a worrying trend has emerged in various regions of Indonesia, including a decreasing number of prospective students enrolling in private SMKs. This phenomenon is not just a temporary decline but indicates a deeper structural problem within the vocational education ecosystem. The situation becomes increasingly critical amid the demands of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0 era, which require schools to adapt quickly through curriculum renewal, improvement of practical facilities, and continuous strengthening of teacher competency. Unfortunately, these demands are difficult for private SMKs to meet, as they generally have limited funds and institutional capacity compared to public SMKs (Apriyanti & Hadiyanto, 2021). Consequently, the appeal and competitiveness of private SMKs in attracting prospective students continue to decline. The situation in Mojokerto Regency and City for the 2025-2026 Academic Year serves as an empirical example representing the complexity of this problem, with 35% of private SMKs in this region experiencing a significant decline in new student numbers. The impact of this decline is multidimensional and interconnected; financially, a reduced number of students means a decrease in the school's primary income from educational development contributions (SPP) and other funds, which in turn threatens the school's operational sustainability, including the ability to pay teacher salaries and maintain facilities. Psychologically, this situation creates uncertainty and mental pressure for teachers and educational staff who are beginning to worry about their future careers and the continuity of the schools where they work. On a broader scale, this phenomenon also potentially reduces investment interest and the level of trust from the Business and Industrial World (DUDI) in regional vocational education institutions.

The specific context of the Mojokerto region adds a layer of complexity to the problem. As an area with a relatively developed manufacturing and service industrial base in East Java Province, the need for skilled labor should be the main driver of growth and demand for vocational education. However, in reality, despite private SMKs being the most numerous, they struggle to attract new students. This makes the situation in Mojokerto ironic; on one hand, the demand for labor from the industrial world is high, but on the other hand, private SMKs have difficulty attracting prospective new students. This condition makes Mojokerto an important case study that needs to be examined in-depth from an educational policy perspective. This case offers valuable lessons about how the interaction between macro policy, inter-institutional competition, and local dynamics shapes the fate of vocational education.

Theoretical Basis and Benefits

In facing the complexity of educational problems such as those occurring in private SMKs in Mojokerto, public policy analysis emerges as an important instrument for understanding the mechanisms of issue recognition, formulation, and government response to strategic issues in education. Among the various available policy theory perspectives, the public policy model by James E. Anderson (2014) offers a systematic and structured framework to trace the journey of an issue, from its emergence as a private problem perceived by certain actors until it finally enters and is addressed in the formal government policy agenda. Anderson's model identifies five main stages in the issue transformation process: (1) Private Problem, when a condition is considered problematic by an individual or specific group; (2) Public Problem, when the problem is acknowledged to have a broader impact on society; (3) Policy Issue, when the public problem generates demands to be addressed by the government; (4) Systemic Agenda, when the issue is recognized by policymakers as something requiring serious consideration; and (5) Institutional Agenda, when the issue is formally included in the agenda of a specific government institution to formulate policy solutions.

The advantage of Anderson's model lies not only in its clear stage framework but also in its ability to map in detail the roles of various key actors—such as local government, politicians, interest groups, non-governmental organizations, and media—in pushing an issue to the policy surface (Sabatier & Weible, 2019). In the context of education, this model allows for a comprehensive analysis of dynamics involving many parties with diverse interests, ranging from School Principals and Foundations, School Supervisors, Parents, to the Industrial World. This study implements Anderson's model to examine the

policy process related to the decline of new students in Private SMKs in Mojokerto, with a specific focus on how an issue initially considered an internal management problem gradually develops into a political issue that attracts the attention and triggers a response from policymakers at the local level. Theoretically, this study is expected to provide three main contributions. First, to enrich the literature on educational policy analysis in Indonesia through the application of Anderson's model, whose use in the Indonesian education context is still limited and needs further exploration. Second, to develop a deeper understanding of the dynamics of agenda setting—the process of how a problem gains public attention—in the context of vocational education providers that have unique characteristics and stakeholders. Third, to provide a systematic perspective on the interaction and strategies among various actors, such as the Private School Principals Deliberation Forum (MKPS) and the Regional Education Office Branch in Mojokerto Regency and City, in the educational policy formation process that can serve as a reference for similar research in the future. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to be strategic considerations for local and central governments in formulating more targeted, fair, and effective affirmative policies to maintain the sustainability of the private SMK education ecosystem in Indonesia. The policy recommendations resulting from this in-depth analysis are expected not only to be adopted to solve problems in Mojokerto but also to become a model or lesson for other regions in Indonesia facing similar problems, so that the contribution of this study can be felt more broadly.

In addition to these contextual challenges, there remains a theoretical gap in understanding how education issues evolve within the policy cycle, particularly in the Indonesian context. Most studies on vocational education policy in Indonesia have tended to emphasize implementation and outcomes rather than the formative process of how issues are recognized and prioritized in the policy agenda. This study therefore contributes to filling that gap by systematically examining the transformation of a localized educational issue—declining student enrollment in private vocational schools—through the lens of Anderson's policy model. By employing this model, the research provides an explanatory framework to understand how the interplay between institutional interests, regulatory systems, and local political dynamics determines whether an issue is elevated or neglected in the policymaking process. This contribution is significant for both academic and policy communities, as it highlights the importance of agenda-setting mechanisms in shaping the sustainability of vocational education systems, particularly those heavily dependent on private sector participation.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Approach and Design

This research uses a qualitative case study approach focusing on the phenomenon of declining new student numbers in private SMKs in Mojokerto Regency and City, which is considered a critical and urgent case (Yin, 2018). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the context more deeply, explore the views of the actors, and trace the meaning behind complex social phenomena.

Through a case study design, this research attempts to comprehensively capture the dynamics of education policy occurring in Mojokerto, including the typical factors and challenges that influence it. This approach is considered most appropriate because, in this case, the boundaries between the phenomenon under study (declining student numbers) and its context (education policy and the SMK ecosystem in Mojokerto) are closely interrelated and difficult to separate (Yin, 2018).

This study is based on James E. Anderson's policy model, which provides a structured way of thinking to understand how an issue develops and is processed in the public policy cycle, from its emergence to becoming part of the government's agenda. Through this model, the study not only focuses on what happens in the field but also seeks to explain the process and mechanisms that cause a problem to change status into a public policy concern.

2.2. Data Sources and Data Collection Techniques

To ensure validity, consistency, and depth of data, this research uses triangulation techniques, which involve combining various sources and data collection methods to complement and strengthen the findings (Patton, 2015). The forms of triangulation used include:

1. Document Analysis. This technique is used to interpret and understand in-depth various written data related to policies and regulations. The analyzed documents cover various primary and secondary data sources that provide a comprehensive picture of the context and dynamics of the policy under study, including:
 - Official reports from Vocational High Schools (SMKs) under the Regional Education Office Branch in Mojokerto Regency and City containing nominal data of class X students for the 2025-2026 Academic Year. This document is used as a basis for quantitatively viewing the distribution and trend of declining new student numbers.
 - Policy documents and technical guidelines for the New Student Admission Selection (SPMB) for Public Senior High Schools and Vocational High Schools in East Java Province for the 2025-2026 Academic Year. Analysis of this document helps understand the regulatory framework that can affect the level of competition between public and private schools.
 - Statistical data on junior high school graduates and the capacity of public secondary schools (both SMA and SMK) in East Java Province in 2025. This data is used to examine the extent of the gap between the number of junior high school graduates (supply) and the capacity of public schools (demand).
 - Minutes of coordination meetings of SMA/SMK/PKLK supervisors within the Regional Education Office Branch in Mojokerto Regency and City. This document provides an overview of the government's internal discussions regarding the issue of declining new students and the initial steps that have been or are being considered to address it.
2. Informant Interviews. To complement and enrich the document analysis results, this study also conducted in-depth interviews with 10 key informants. These informants consisted of 5 Principals of private SMKs in the Greater Mojokerto Area who have various skill programs and school conditions (from the most affected to relatively stable), 3 SMK Supervisors from the Regional Education Office Branch in Mojokerto Regency and City, and the Head of SMK Section and staff of the Regional Education Office Branch in Mojokerto Regency and City.
3. Observation. This study also conducted non-participant observation in a focus group discussion (FGD) organized by the Private School Principals Deliberation Forum (MKKS) SMK to discuss the issue of declining student numbers. Through this observation, the study attempted to capture the dynamics of interaction, debate, and negotiation processes that occurred among the participants, including school principals, foundation representatives, and parties from the Regional Education Office.

The observation notes provide a more comprehensive view of social and political factors, supporting the findings from interviews and document analysis, especially in understanding how different parties interpret and respond to the issues faced.

2.3. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis process is based on the five stages as explained in Anderson's model, namely:

1. Identify the characteristics of the issue as an internal problem for each SMK through interview data and documents.
2. Analyze the issue becoming a public problem based on empirical evidence of the widespread impact from quantitative data and principals' reports.
3. Examine the issue becoming a policy debate, especially related to the determination of new student quotas in SPMB, by analyzing the frames used by stakeholders.
4. Review documents and meeting minutes to see the issue entering the systemic agenda.
5. Document the form of policy response that then elevates the issue to the institutional agenda.

Data validity was enhanced through source and method triangulation, specifically by comparing and verifying information from various documents, interview results, and observation notes to improve the accuracy and reliability of the analysis results (Patton, 2015).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Evolution of the Problem Based on Anderson's Stages

3.1.1. Stage 1: Private Problem - Internal Challenges of Each SMK

in the initial stage, the decline in the number of new students in private SMKs in Mojokerto was generally viewed as an internal problem of each school. Each institution operating independently under its foundation tended to interpret the causes of this problem from their own internal perspectives and conditions. Based on in-depth interviews with five SMK principals, several internal factors were often considered to play a role in the decreasing number of registrants, including:

- **Curriculum and Skill Concentrations Not Meeting Labor Market Demands:** Many private SMKs acknowledged that the curriculum and skill programs they offered were not fully in line with the latest developments and needs in the Business and Industrial World (DUDI). One principal of an SMK with a Light Vehicle Engineering concentration revealed, "We have difficulty equipping practical tools, while technology continues to develop rapidly. As a result, our graduates are often considered not ready to work by the industry."
- **Conventional School Marketing and Branding Strategies:** The majority of private SMKs still relied on traditional promotion methods such as installing banners and distributing brochures. The use of social media and digital platforms to build the school's image and reach Generation Z prospective students was still minimal and not managed strategically. Consequently, their visibility and appeal were inferior compared to public SMKs, which often had more active and well-managed social media accounts.
- **Public Perception and Cost:** There was a strong perception in the community that public SMKs were superior in terms of quality, facilities, and partnerships with industry. Additionally, the more affordable, even free, cost of education in public SMKs was a major attracting factor. Another principal added, "Parents choose public schools because they are considered to lead to faster employment and are affordable, even though their children might be more suited to the skill concentrations offered in private schools." This shows that economic considerations and public perception often override children's interests and talents.
- **Graduate Reputation and Tracer Study:** Results from tracer studies conducted by several private SMKs showed that the average waiting time for graduates to get a job ranged from 6 to 12 months. This figure was slightly longer compared to graduates of public SMKs, giving rise to the perception that private SMK graduates had lower competitiveness. This condition indirectly reinforced the stigma in society and the industrial world that the quality of private school graduates was still inferior to that of public schools.

At this stage, the solutions attempted were internal through coordination meetings between teachers and the foundation. The steps taken were generally technical and operational, such as increasing the intensity of promotions without touching more fundamental policy aspects. Some schools tried to offer tuition fee discounts and free registration fees, but this actually had the potential to reduce service quality due to decreased income.

3.1.2. Stage 2: Public Problem - Emerging Concerns

The problem, which was initially private, then developed into a public issue when the Mojokerto Regional Education Office Branch conducted verification and found that 35% of the 61 private SMKs in the region experienced a significant decline in student numbers. Some schools had not even received new students until August 2025. "This is a burden for us when more than a third of private schools lack students; this is no longer their affair, but has become the affair of our education system as a whole," expressed an SMK Supervisor.

This finding signified that the decline in student numbers was no longer a standalone problem but a systemic issue requiring government attention. The impacts that emerged, such as the potential closure of schools, reduction of teachers and educational staff, and reduced public access to vocational education, made this issue part of broader public interest. This issue became more prominent when the Private MKPS began voicing their concerns collectively through the Regional Education Office Branch in Mojokerto Regency and City, thus attracting public attention.

3.1.3. Stage 3: Policy Issue - Questioning the Quota System

This issue then evolved into a policy debate when private SMKs began questioning the quota system in the public school SPMB. Data showed a disparity in capacity:

- The number of junior high school graduates in East Java in 2025 reached 682,252 students.
- The SPMB quota for public SMA/SMK only covered 261,396 students or about 38% of total graduates.
- The remaining approximately 62% (420,856 students) were expected to enter private schools, yet many private SMKs actually had difficulty getting new students.

This disparity raised serious questions about resource equity and distributive justice in education policy. Private SMK principals began questioning the SPMB zoning policy, which was considered still biased towards public schools. They argued that this policy, although aimed at equity, actually reduced the role of private schools by not providing adequate incentives or affirmation (Djalil & Mulyono, 2020). At this point, the decline in student numbers was no longer considered a school managerial problem but a public policy issue requiring a comprehensive system review.

3.1.4. Stage 4: Systemic Agenda - Issue Recognition

This problem began to be officially recognized when the Mojokerto Regional Education Office Branch placed it as an issue requiring government attention. Several steps taken included:

- Holding discussions with SMK supervisors to discuss the condition of private schools.
- Conducting a study of the regulations and quotas for new student admission in public SMA/SMK.
- Organizing internal meetings at the Branch Office level to formulate possible policy responses.
- Forming a Team involving representatives from private SMKs to delve into the root causes and formulate policy recommendations.

This stage shows that the issue of declining student numbers had entered the systemic agenda where the decrease in new students impacted private vocational institutions. This process illustrates what Anderson calls the Systemic Agenda, where a problem has been acknowledged by government actors as something requiring serious consideration and possibly requiring action.

3.1.5. Stage 5: Institutional Agenda - Formulating Policy

The final stage was when this issue entered the institutional agenda and was responded to through concrete policy drafts. Several proposed formulations included:

- Reviewing the 40% quota regulation for public SMA/SMK to provide greater space for private institutions. A concrete proposal was to study the technical guidelines for the following year's SPMB to consider more proportional quotas and provide special affirmation for private SMKs with superior programs.
- Increasing promotional support for private SMKs through the use of digital media, education exhibitions, and industrial cooperation. The Education Office Branch also planned to create a digital social media platform to promote all SMKs, both public and private.
- Developing affirmative policies for affected private SMKs, such as operational cost relief and providing full scholarships for new students, funded from BOS or cooperation with DUDI.
- Strengthening the link and match program between private SMKs and DUDI through more substantive partnerships, including teacher internships, technology transfer, and graduate absorption (Majid & Rahmatullah, 2020).

These steps reflect the local government's commitment to correcting structural inequalities and strengthening the role of private SMKs in the vocational education ecosystem. Although these policies are still in the formulation stage, the entry of this issue into the institutional agenda indicates the success of the agenda setting process carried out by private SMK stakeholders.

3.2. Discussion of Anderson's Model in the Context of Education Policy

The application of Anderson's model in analyzing the decline of students in private SMKs in Mojokerto clearly and systematically shows how an educational problem that initially seemed small and internal can gradually develop into a strategic issue requiring public policy attention and intervention. This process did not occur simply or linearly but was full of dynamics, debate, and tug-of-war between various interests among the parties involved, from the school level to the local government.

The findings of this study are in line with previous studies that also used Anderson's model in an educational context. For example, research conducted by Sutanto (2024) on zoning policy education in Indonesia found that public and private school dissatisfaction with the policy also underwent a similar escalation process, from a private problem to a policy issue that prompted regulatory revision. Similarly, a study by Eka Prihatin (2018) on strengthening link and match between SMKs and industry showed that pressure from business associations and private schools played a major role in pushing the issue onto the national policy agenda.

However, this study also revealed some peculiarities in the Indonesian context. First, the role of professional associations or collective forums such as the Private MKKS proved crucial as a catalyst in transforming private problems into public problems and policy issues. Without coordination, the complaints of each school might remain isolated and not have strong enough driving force to reach the government's agenda. Second, strong empirical data (such as the 35% figure and the 38% vs 62% disparity) played a very important role in convincing the government that this problem was not merely anecdotal or perceptual but a real problem with systemic impact. Third, Anderson's model, although effective in mapping stages, does not explicitly explain how political and power factors at the local level influence the speed and form of policy response. In this context, personal relationships between school principals and the Education Office Branch, as well as the political bargaining position of large foundations, often also influenced this process.

The implication of these findings is that efforts to influence education policy should not only focus on submitting complaints or demands but must be supported by strong data and effective communication strategies to "frame" the problem in such a way that it can be understood as a shared problem requiring joint solutions. For the government, this study underlines the importance of responsive feedback mechanisms so that problems at the grassroots level can be detected and responded to more quickly before developing in. When viewed in comparison with other policy process models, Anderson's framework provides distinct advantages but also certain limitations. For instance, Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework explains agenda setting as a result of the convergence of three streams—problems, policies, and politics—emphasizing the role of timing and policy entrepreneurs in opening "windows of opportunity." In contrast, Anderson's model offers a more sequential and structured view, making it particularly suitable for tracing issues in bureaucratic systems like education governance in Indonesia, where hierarchical decision-making remains dominant. However, combining both perspectives may yield richer insights: while Anderson's model helps identify the formal progression of issues within institutions, Kingdon's perspective can reveal the informal and political factors influencing those transitions. Future policy research could therefore adopt a hybrid approach to understand how educational issues—such as the declining competitiveness of private vocational schools—move not only through formal administrative procedures but also through political advocacy, media framing, and stakeholder coalitions. Such integration would strengthen the theoretical foundation for analyzing complex education policy environments in developing countries to a larger crisis.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusion

Based on in-depth analysis using Anderson's public policy model, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of declining new student numbers in private SMKs in Mojokerto Regency and City for the 2025-2026 Academic Year has clearly evolved through the five stages of Anderson's model: from (1) a Private Problem faced individually by each school due to internal factors such as limited facilities and weak marketing strategies; (2) developing into a Public Problem when its impact spread and affected 35% of the private SMK population in the region, thus attracting collective attention; (3) then changing into a Policy Issue when stakeholders began questioning the fairness of macro policies, specifically the SPMB quota system considered unequal and unfair; (4) until finally entering the Systemic Agenda of the local government, recognized as a serious problem requiring policy consideration; and (5) reaching its peak in the Institutional Agenda with the formulation of several concrete policy proposals such as reviewing the SPMB quota, strengthening promotion, and affirmative policies.

This process shows that educational problems are often structural and cannot be solved only by technical-managerial approaches at the school level. Broader and systemic policy interventions are essential to create a fair and conducive environment for the sustainability of all policy actors, including the private sector. Anderson's model has proven to provide a relevant analytical framework for understanding the complex dynamics of education policy formation in Indonesia.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, this study recommends several strategic steps for various stakeholders:

1. For Local Government (Education Office Branch):

- Conduct an in-depth and participatory study of the quota and zoning policies in SPMB, involving representatives from private SMKs, professional associations, and the industrial world. This study aims to formulate a fairer and more sustainable formula.
- Develop concrete affirmative policies by designing and implementing technical assistance programs (affirmative action) for affected private SMKs.
- Initiate and manage a centralized digital platform such as a website or application that promotes all SMKs in its region to create equal access to information for prospective students and parents.

2. For Private SMKs:

- Innovate by renewing curricula and skill programs that truly suit local industry needs. Each school needs to develop a flagship program that distinguishes it from other schools.
- Strengthen partnerships with the Industrial World; without relying solely on government assistance, private SMKs must actively establish strategic and substantive partnerships with the industrial world, ranging from curriculum synchronization, industrial internships, to guaranteed graduate absorption.
- Enhance digital marketing by forming a quality development team and digital marketing strategies to build a strong brand image and reach prospective students in the digital spaces where they spend their time (Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok).

3. For Future Research:

- Conduct similar research with a broader scope, for example, at the provincial or national level, to test the findings from the Mojokerto case study.
- Research more deeply the political and power factors that influence the agenda setting and formulation process of education policy at the local level, which may complement Anderson's model, which tends to be more structural.
- Conduct evaluative studies to analyze the effectiveness of the policies later implemented by the local government in response to this issue.

With these recommendations, it is hoped that not only can the problem of declining students in private SMKs in Mojokerto be overcome, but a more equitable, sustainable vocational education ecosystem can also be created, contributing significantly to human resource development and the regional economy.

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