



Implementation And Optimization Strategies for Handling School Dropouts

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Abstract

Data from the Makassar City Education Office in 2022 reported approximately 17,000 school dropouts. This phenomenon largely stems from low-income families, where children worked to support household finances. The high dropout rate has contributed to increasing unemployment and the declining competitiveness of human resources. In addition, school dropouts were more vulnerable to various social problems such as violence, crime, and child exploitation. This study aimed to analyze the implementation strategies for addressing school dropouts in Makassar City, including the supporting and inhibiting factors. This is a qualitative study with a case study approach in Education Office of Makassar during January–March 2025. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with nine informants, observations, and document analysis. The study found that dropout management strategies have been carried out through cross-sectoral collaboration involving the government, private sector, and community stakeholders. However, heavy workloads and limited institutional support remain major challenges. Optimization efforts included the implementation of equivalency programs for reintegration into formal schools, strengthening an integrated database system, multi-stakeholder approaches, and the provision of flexible alternative education. This study recommends simplifying procedures, establishing regular cross-sectoral coordination forums, and conducting periodic evaluations of resource allocation to ensure the effectiveness of school dropout management programs.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental right of every child that must be fulfilled to support individual development and societal progress. However, in many regions, including Makassar City, the number of children dropping out of school remains a serious problem requiring special attention. According to data from the Makassar City Education Office, in 2022, approximately 17,000 children dropped out of school, the majority of whom came from low-income families. This phenomenon impacts not only the future of these children but also the social and economic development of the region. Various factors, such as poverty, lack of access to quality education, and other social issues, contribute to the high dropout rate in Makassar City.

The government, both at the central and regional levels, has implemented various programs to prevent children from dropping out of school (Faliyandra et al., 2024; Sari, 2025). The implementation of the dropout management program in Makassar City has several key objectives (Umbase et al., 2024; Zulinto et al., 2022; Ananda & Prasetyia, 2024). First, the program is expected to significantly reduce the dropout rate, especially among low-income communities. By providing easier access to education, such as through scholarships, educational assistance, or tuition subsidies, this program can open opportunities for children to

continue their education and develop their potential without being constrained by financial constraints (Tangdibiri, 2023; Shehada, 2025; Sugeng et al., 2025). This program aims to raise public awareness of the importance of education. Through outreach to parents and communities, it is hoped that they will understand the role of education in improving lives and breaking the cycle of poverty. With stronger awareness, parents will be more supportive of their children's continued education to a higher level. Active community participation is also expected to strengthen the program's implementation, ensuring a broader and more sustainable impact (Anto et al., 2024).

Furthermore, this program is expected to strengthen the synergy between the government, educational institutions, and the community in addressing the issue of school dropouts. Through close collaboration, various parties can support and complement each other, for example, through improving learning facilities, teacher training, and enhancing the quality of the curriculum to meet student needs. It is hoped that with optimal support from all stakeholders, the education system in Makassar City will become more inclusive and responsive to the needs of children (Hastira et al., 2025; Fauziyah et al., 2025; Mahmud et al., 2025).

Another hope is for a long-term impact in the form of improving the quality of human resources in Makassar City (Pratiwi et al., 2024; Kurniati & Rattealo, 2024; Aziz et al., 2025). By reducing the dropout rate, it is hoped that more young people will have adequate education and skills, enabling them to contribute more significantly to future economic and social development. Children who avoid the risk of dropping out of school have a greater chance of entering a better job market, improving their well-being, and participating in social activities more actively (Afifuddin et al., 2025; Abdullah et al., 2025; Iskandar et al., 2026). However, these hopes are contradicted by the facts on the ground. According to data from the Makassar City Education Office in 2022, approximately 17,000 children from elementary to secondary school age dropped out of school or did not continue their education. This phenomenon is dominated by children from low-income families, who often have to work to support their families. This data shows that despite various government efforts; school dropout remains a significant issue in Makassar.

Poverty is one of the main causes of children dropping out of school. In Makassar, approximately 30% of the population falls into the low-income category, impacting their ability to finance their children's education. Children from these families are often forced to work to support their families, thus shifting their educational priorities. In some areas of Makassar, particularly in the outskirts or remote areas, access to quality educational facilities remains limited. Many schools lack adequate facilities, such as libraries, laboratories, and classrooms, resulting in suboptimal quality education. Furthermore, limited teaching staff and a curriculum that is not always adaptive to student needs also hinder the continuity of education for children in the area.

Some people in Makassar City still view education as a low priority, especially those with low educational backgrounds. Research by Suharto (2020) revealed that parents' lack of understanding of the long-term benefits of education leads them to prioritize employment for their children over continuing their education. This factor contributes to low school participation rates at the secondary and tertiary levels. Although the government has launched various programs such as scholarships and educational assistance, their implementation is uneven and often faces administrative obstacles and a lack of public outreach. Many families who are entitled to educational assistance are unaware of the programs. Furthermore, there remains a gap between central-level policies and their implementation at the regional level, preventing programs from being implemented effectively. The high school dropout rate in

Makassar City also contributes to increased unemployment and lowers the competitiveness of human resources in the region. Children who do not continue their education tend to struggle to find decent and stable employment in the future, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. In addition, children who drop out of school are more vulnerable to social problems, such as violence, crime, and child exploitation. These facts demonstrate that the problem of school dropouts in Makassar City is complex and requires a more comprehensive approach. Strategic efforts to address this issue require considering various aspects, including economic, social, and educational aspects, and involving all stakeholders, including the government, educational institutions, and the general public.

Methods

Research Approach and Type of Study

Based on the objectives and characteristics of this research, the study adopts a case study approach. A case study is a qualitative research strategy that allows the researcher to conduct an in-depth exploration of a program, event, process, or activity over a bounded period and context. In this study, the case study method is employed to uncover the meaning, underlying dynamics, and essence of the implementation of interventions addressing school dropouts. The case study approach is considered appropriate as it enables the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the policy is executed, the challenges faced, and the experiences of stakeholders involved in the implementation process.

The type of research applied is qualitative research, as the primary goal is to explore and understand social phenomena rather than to test hypotheses. A qualitative design enables the researcher to capture the perspectives, attitudes, and lived experiences of individuals involved in the policy process. This design also provides flexibility in uncovering contextual factors that influence the success or failure of school dropout handling programs in Makassar City.

Research Location and Duration

The study is conducted at the Makassar City Education Office, located at Jalan Anggrek Raya No.2, Paropo, Panakkukang District, Makassar City, South Sulawesi 90231. Data collection activities take place from January to March 2025. The site was chosen because it is the main governmental body responsible for formulating and implementing educational policies, including programs aimed at addressing the issue of school dropouts.

Sources of Data

Primary Data

Primary data are obtained through in-depth interviews and field observations. Observations involve direct engagement in the research site to understand how the dropout handling programs are executed in practice. In-depth interviews are conducted through direct dialogue with stakeholders to explore their views, attitudes, and experiences regarding the implementation process.

The primary informants consist of individuals who are directly involved in or affected by the dropout handling program, including policymakers, school administrators, teachers, NGO representatives, and students. A total of nine key informants has been identified, including the Head of the Makassar City Education Office, a senior planner from Bappeda, heads of school units, classroom teachers, a UNICEF expert, and two student representatives. This combination of informants allows the study to capture perspectives from both implementers and beneficiaries of the program.

Secondary Data

Government Documents: annual reports from the Makassar City Education Office, local regulations, strategic plans, and statistical data on school dropouts. NGO and Third-Party Reports: documentation from organizations such as UNICEF and local NGOs engaged in education, which provide complementary insights into non-governmental interventions. Previous Studies and Literature: scholarly works, journal articles, and books that address school dropout phenomena and education policy implementation, both within Indonesia and in comparable contexts.

Research Focus and Scope

The primary focus of this study is to analyze the implementation strategies for addressing school dropouts in Makassar City using (Sutherland et al., 2023) Policy implementation model (1980). This element examines how the Education Office communicates the program's goals, rules, and procedures to stakeholders such as school principals, teachers, and NGOs. Clear and consistent communication is essential for alignment and shared understanding. This element analyzes the attitudes, motivation, and commitment of policy implementers including teachers, education staff, and social workers towards the dropout program. Their disposition plays a decisive role in ensuring successful implementation. This element evaluates the administrative and organizational arrangements that support or hinder the policy's execution. It includes examining procedures, regulations, flexibility, and inter-agency coordination mechanisms.

Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study are interview guides and document analysis protocols. Semi-structured interview guides allow the researcher to maintain focus on key themes while providing flexibility for informants to elaborate freely. Document analysis protocols ensure that secondary sources are systematically reviewed and categorized. The researcher's active participation in the data collection process is emphasized to ensure validity and reliability. Prolonged engagement in the field strengthens trustworthiness, while triangulation between interviews, observations, and documents ensures data credibility.

Data Collection Techniques

Interviews are the primary technique for gathering perspectives from key stakeholders such as education officials, school principals, teachers, NGO representatives, and students. The semi-structured format allows informants to share detailed experiences while ensuring that the researcher covers the critical dimensions of (Sutherland et al., 2023) model: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Observation is conducted to directly witness the implementation process of the dropout handling program. This technique enables the researcher to capture real-life interactions, routines, and challenges that may not emerge in interviews. Observations focus on school environments, administrative procedures, and stakeholder interactions. Document analysis supplements primary data by providing official, historical, and contextual information. This includes policy documents, statistical data, program reports, and NGO publications. Document analysis also serves as a tool for triangulation, verifying the accuracy of claims made during interviews and observations.

Data Analysis Techniques

Gathering data through interviews, observations, and documents, ensuring triangulation across sources. Selecting, simplifying, and categorizing raw data from transcripts, field notes, and documents into meaningful units for analysis. Organizing data into coherent formats (narratives, charts, or matrices) to allow for clearer interpretation of findings related to the

research focus. Interpreting data to derive findings, while continuously revisiting and verifying them against collected evidence to ensure accuracy and validity.

Results and Discussion

Implementation Strategy for Handling School Dropouts in Makassar City

Communication is a vital foundation in policy implementation, ensuring that information about the goals, procedures, and regulations of a program can be understood by all stakeholders. Without effective communication, even the best-designed policies are unlikely to reach their intended outcomes.

According to NP, Head of the Makassar City Education Office:

“We understand that clear and multi-channel communication is key. Therefore, the Education Office proactively disseminates information on dropout prevention programs through official circulars and regular coordination meetings with school principals to ensure a uniform understanding of goals and procedures. We also use digital platforms such as social media and our official website to reach the wider public. In addition, we encourage schools to hold face-to-face meetings with parents and local communities, which have proven to be highly effective in delivering direct messages to target families. We also partner with local media to strengthen information dissemination.”

Echoing this view, IHN, Head of UPT SPF Inpres Baraya I, explained:

“From the school’s side, the information we receive from the Education Office is generally clear and easy to understand. The technical guidelines and circulars provide a solid framework. What we value most is the open two-way communication channel during coordination meetings. It allows us to share specific challenges in the field and receive appropriate guidance, in line with the principle of interactive communication in policy implementation.”

At the classroom level, MH, homeroom teacher at UPT SPF SMPN 15, emphasized a personal approach:

“As a homeroom teacher, I’m the front line in ensuring information reaches students and parents, especially those most vulnerable. I believe in personal and empathetic approaches. I often interact directly with students showing signs of difficulty, trying to understand their conditions. For parents, we hold special meetings if there are issues with attendance or performance. We also use class or school WhatsApp groups as an effective tool for announcements and reminders. This heart-to-heart method, in my view, has a greater impact than formal announcements alone because it builds trust and a sense of ownership.”

Commitment and Dedication of Policy Implementers

Disposition, or the attitudes of policy implementers, is a crucial factor influencing the success of implementation. Positive attitudes and strong commitment from those responsible can drive program effectiveness, as emphasized by (Sutherland et al., 2023).

I, Senior Planner at Bappeda Makassar, explained:

“Bappeda holds a firm commitment to addressing school dropouts because we see it as a serious barrier to human-resource development in Makassar. In budget planning, we work hard to allocate sufficient funds to support education programs, including aid for at-risk children. Close coordination with the Education Office is continuously

maintained to ensure these programs are harmoniously integrated into regional development plans and achieve optimal targets. We consider every rupiah allocated as a fundamental investment in Makassar's future."

Similarly, HM, Head of UPT SPF SMPN 15, expressed:

"Our main motivation at school is the belief that every child has the right to a proper education. When a child is at risk of dropping out, we feel a strong urge to fight for their future. Although field challenges are not easy, seeing a student who was once hopeless become enthusiastic to learn again is an incomparable reward. This is part of our professional calling as educators not only to teach subjects, but also to accompany and guide."

From an external perspective, S, UNICEF Technical Expert for South Sulawesi, noted:

"From UNICEF's perspective, we observe a fairly strong commitment from implementers on the ground, both teachers and social workers. Many of them show extraordinary dedication, even willing to go beyond working hours to assist students. However, the common challenges are heavy workloads and limited resources, which can sometimes affect their effectiveness. It is important for the government to continuously strengthen capacity and provide psychosocial support so that the enthusiasm and performance of implementers are maintained and they do not experience burnout."

Procedures and Coordination in Handling Dropouts

Bureaucratic structure includes procedures, regulations, and administrative governance that can either support or hinder policy implementation. (Sutherland et al., 2023) emphasizes the importance of procedural clarity and effective coordination.

According to NP, Head of the Education Office:

"We continuously strive to simplify the procedures for applying for assistance, although there are standard requirements that must be met. For example, for the Indonesia Smart Program (PIP), we rely on data collection through the national education database (Dapodik), which is then verified by our team to ensure aid is properly targeted. The challenges often lie in outdated data or technical system issues. We are in the process of transitioning to a more digital system to speed up the process, but adaptation at the school level requires time and training. Coordination with the central government is also ongoing so that regulations can become more flexible and adaptive to local conditions."

IHN, Head of UPT SPF Inpres Baraya I, added:

"Coordination with the Education Office is already established, and we routinely report dropout cases. However, coordination with other agencies, such as the Social Services Office, still needs to be strengthened. We really hope there will be a more structured and regular cross-sector coordination forum so that dropout issues can be handled holistically not only from the educational aspect but also from the social and economic conditions of the family. This is in line with the principle of service integration for bureaucratic effectiveness."

Meanwhile, MR, homeroom teacher at UPT SPF Inpres Baraya I, described practical difficulties:

“In practice, the process of filling out data or completing documents can feel complicated and time-consuming, especially if parents do not have complete documents or are difficult to contact. Socialization of new procedures sometimes does not fully reach implementers at the school level. We really hope for simpler, more understandable guidelines and regular training for school staff. This is important to minimize administrative errors that could delay aid distribution and to ensure bureaucratic efficiency in the field.”

Optimal Use for Maximum Impact

The availability and utilization of human, financial, and physical resources are basic prerequisites for successful program implementation.

As explained by NP, Head of the Education Office:

“We prioritize budget allocation for various aspects, from educational assistance and teacher capacity building to school facility improvements. However, it must be acknowledged that the available budget is not always sufficient to meet all existing needs. Likewise with human resources; although we have a dedicated team, their numbers are limited compared to the scale of the problems faced. In this regard, we are greatly helped by support and partnerships with non-governmental organizations such as UNICEF, which have provided valuable training and technical assistance.”

S, UNICEF expert, confirmed this:

“Makassar has fairly good resource potential from both government and community sources. However, coordination in resource utilization needs continuous improvement. It is important to ensure that financial assistance programs are delivered on target and on time, and that existing school facilities are maximized. Another crucial aspect is improving teacher and staff capacity for early identification and guidance through continuous training. In addition, technology use for data management and communication can be further optimized to increase program efficiency and outreach.”

From the school’s perspective, IHN, Head of UPT SPF Inpres Baraya I, shared:

“Honestly, the resources available at the school are not yet fully adequate. The number of guidance and counseling (BK) teachers is very limited, even though they have to handle many student cases. Supporting facilities such as comfortable counseling rooms or innovative learning media also need significant improvement. Although there is an operational budget, for intensive mentoring programs that require extra funding, we often have to look for alternatives or rely on external support. We really hope there will be additional special funding for dropout prevention programs, as well as more qualified educational staff in the counseling field.”

Hopes and Realities from Beneficiaries

Students’ voices offer direct insights into how these programs affect their lives and what drives or hinders their access to education.

A, a student at UPT SPF Inpres Baraya I, explained why some of her peers dropped out:

“There are many reasons, Kak. The most common is economic factors they have to help their parents work, like selling or doing other jobs to support the family. Some also have low interest and motivation to study, so they feel lazy to go to school. In addition, some of my friends got involved in negative peer groups and preferred playing outside rather than studying. I also heard some dropped out because their parents didn’t pay

enough attention or had an unhealthy home environment, making them feel uncomfortable both at home and at school.”

She also shared the challenges she personally faces in continuing to higher education:

“The main challenge is definitely the high cost, Kak. Even though there is assistance, for high school the needs are bigger. Parental support is also very important without it, the motivation to continue school decreases. And also, the distance to the next school level can be far, which means daily transportation costs are not small.”

On the benefits of government or school aid, she said:

“It really helps, Kak! For example, assistance with school fees or uniforms really eases the burden on my parents. So we can keep going to school without worrying too much about the costs. That aid truly reduces the financial burden on our family.”

Finally, she expressed her hopes:

“My hope is that this program can continue to the next levels, Kak not just until junior high, but also senior high, and even college if possible. I also hope that school learning facilities and infrastructure keep improving so that we can study more comfortably and with more spirit. I feel I now have a better chance to keep getting an education. Thanks to the support from the school and the Makassar City government, I didn’t have to drop out like some of my friends. So now I have greater hope for my future.”

Optimization of Handling School Dropouts in Makassar City

The optimization efforts to address school dropouts in Makassar have been initiated by various stakeholders but still face systemic challenges. The Head of the Makassar Education Office (HDM) emphasized that the government has introduced programs such as the *Kartu Makassar Cerdas* and free schooling. However, the main obstacle lies in data collection:

“Some children who qualify are not yet recorded due to limited field personnel. We are building an integrated database to ensure no child is left behind” (HDM).

At the school level, principals implement localized monitoring. The Principal of a Junior High School in Biringkanaya (PSM) highlighted that

“Every year about 15–20 students are at risk of dropping out. We optimize a class teacher–based monitoring system and cooperate with local health centers to address health-related absenteeism” (PSM).

Community actors also play a critical role. The School Committee Chair of SD Inpres Antang (SCC) explained,

“We routinely visit students’ homes to understand their problems. The main issues are distance and transportation costs, so we mobilize alumni donations to support transport assistance” (SCC).

From the household perspective, financial hardship remains central. A Parent of a dropout (PRT) expressed,

“I want my child to study, but my income is uncertain. School assistance is not enough because we still need to buy uniforms and books. If there were full support, I would re-enroll my child” (PRT).

Beyond financial and logistical barriers, psychological challenges also affect students. The Guidance and Counseling Teacher of SMA Negeri 6 Makassar (GCT) stated,

“Psychological factors are often overlooked. Many students experience mental pressure due to family conditions. We optimize the role of counseling teachers with intensive guidance, including involving psychologists from local health centers” (GCT).

Overall, the findings indicate that strategies for handling school dropouts in Makassar require improvement through integrated approaches, focusing on socialization, education quality, and family economic support. Strong collaboration between government, schools, and the community is essential to reduce dropout rates and expand access to quality education.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Implementation

The implementation of dropout handling strategies in Makassar is influenced by both supportive and inhibiting factors. According to the Head of the Education Office (HDM), communication with the community is key:

“Through circulars and coordination meetings, we inform the public about available programs. However, challenges remain in reaching all levels of society” (HDM).

Educators show strong commitment, but face heavy burdens. A Primary School Teacher (GST) said,

“We often work beyond office hours to assist at-risk students. However, the increasing number of students without additional teachers creates significant workload pressures” (GST).

External institutions contribute as well. A Social Worker from UNICEF (SWU) noted,

“Coordination between the Education Office and NGOs is very important. We often collaborate with UNICEF for technical support, but we face human resource limitations” (SWU).

Parents’ economic struggles remain a persistent barrier. A Parent (PRT) stated,

“We want our children to attend school, but daily needs force us to make difficult choices. Easier-to-access assistance would be very helpful” (PRT).

From a broader perspective, NGO Activists (NGA) highlighted administrative obstacles:

“Procedures for aid submission are often complicated and time-consuming. Many parents lack complete documents, making it difficult to access assistance. Simplification is urgently needed” (NGA).

Taken together, the findings show that effective communication, strong commitment of teachers, and support from social institutions are key enablers, while limited resources, bureaucratic complexity, and economic hardship serve as major obstacles. Addressing these through resource allocation, capacity-building, and streamlined procedures could significantly strengthen dropout prevention efforts in Makassar.

Implementation Strategy for Handling School Dropouts in Makassar City

This discussion analyzes the findings of qualitative research on the implementation and optimization strategies for handling school dropouts in Makassar City, referring to the (Sutherland et al., 2023) policy implementation model framework. Each indicator Communication, Disposition, Bureaucratic Structure, and Resources will be discussed in depth, enriched by a review of relevant literature to provide a strong theoretical foundation. Communication is a fundamental element in successful policy implementation, as it ensures that information regarding policy objectives, procedures, and regulations is understood and

absorbed by all relevant parties. According to the Program Management Institute (Celestin et al., 2022), effective communication is a key factor in program success. Without clear and timely communication, important information can be hampered or lost, creating information gaps that impact the achievement of program objectives. The research findings indicate that the Makassar City Education Office has implemented various communication channels, such as official circulars, regular coordination meetings, digital platforms, and encouraged face-to-face meetings at the school and community levels. This effort aligns with Suharto (2020) perspective, which emphasizes the importance of program outreach to parents and the community to raise awareness of the importance of education. Communication by the Head of the Education Office demonstrates a systematic, top-down dissemination of information. However, while the information was generally perceived as clear by the school, the need for "further inquiries" or "two-way communication channels" indicates that vertical and horizontal communication can still be optimized. Homeroom teachers, as frontline implementers, demonstrated the importance of a personal approach and empathetic communication with students and parents (Raphaelli et al., 2026). This study emphasizes that effective communication, which includes clarity, empathy, non-verbal communication, openness, and constructive feedback, is crucial for building healthy and productive relationships (Asis et al., 2025; Nguyen, 2024; Oved & Raichel, 2025). These findings indicate that effective communication increases trust, reduces conflict, and improves collaborative outcomes (Soid et al., 2025). These findings also align with previous research indicating that a lack of outreach and community understanding is a barrier to the implementation of education assistance programs (Suharto, 2020). Optimizing communication does not stop at the dissemination of information, but also at how the information is received, interpreted, and responded to by the parties involved.

Disposition refers to the attitudes, perceptions, and commitment of policy implementers toward the program being implemented (Sutherland et al., 2023; Teamann, 2025). The level of support and acceptance from actors in the field significantly influences the enthusiasm and effectiveness of implementation. Strong commitment can be a driving force, overcoming various bureaucratic and resource-intensive obstacles. Interviews with the Head of the Education Office and school principals revealed a strong motivation and moral commitment to ensuring every child receives their right to education. The principal explicitly stated that seeing students regain their enthusiasm was "satisfying in itself" and part of their "professional calling." This reflects the internalization of program values by implementers, which is an indicator of positive disposition. This aligns with research findings from Rajab (2023) & Wijayanto & Warlizasusi (2025) that internalized leadership values by principals, such as responsibility and integrity, enable them to serve as role models for teachers and students and create an environment conducive to achieving educational goals. On the other hand, UNICEF's perspective highlights the strong commitment of implementers in the field, but with the caveat of heavy workloads and limited resources (Singleton, 2023; Brazell, 2024; Dong et al., 2026). This indicates that despite the implementers' positive personal dispositions, external factors can impact their ability to fully realize these commitments. This aligns with research conducted by Metz (2021) on Implementation in Human Service Systems, which found that successful service program implementation requires organizational resource support. Without adequate support, implementers will face significant obstacles in achieving organizational goals. This support includes the availability of budgets, tools, and supporting policies. Bappeda's commitment to budget allocation also demonstrates a positive disposition at the planning level, which is essential for program sustainability. Bureaucratic structure encompasses the procedures, regulations, and administrative governance that underpin policy implementation (Sutherland et al., 2023). An efficient, clear, and coordinated structure will facilitate

implementation, while complexity or lack of coordination can be a serious obstacle. The Education Office has attempted to simplify data collection and verification procedures, for example through the use of Dapodik. However, acknowledgements of "out-of-date data" and "technical constraints" indicate challenges in data synchronization and technological adaptation. Homeroom teachers' views of "the complicated and time-consuming data entry process" and the need for "more concise guidelines" indicate a mismatch between designed procedures and practice on the ground. This is relevant to the concept of bounded rationality in bureaucracy, where limited information, capacity, and resources can hinder efficient implementation. Recent research emphasizes that these limitations remain very present in modern public administration, particularly at the policy implementation level (Jones, 2017; Gigerenzer & Selten, 2020). Furthermore, although coordination with the Education Office is progressing well, the expectation for a "more regular and structured cross-sectoral coordination forum" with other agencies such as the Social Services Office indicates a lack of inter-agency integration. (Sutherland et al., 2023) emphasized that fragmentation in bureaucratic structures and a lack of coordination between agencies can be major obstacles to policy implementation, particularly for complex issues such as school dropouts that require multidimensional (educational, social, and economic) handling. Optimizing bureaucratic structures requires streamlining procedures, strengthening information systems, and improving cross-sectoral coordination. The availability and utilization of resources, including budget, human resources, physical facilities, and information, are essential prerequisites for policy implementation (Sutherland et al., 2023). Programs will not be effective if the necessary resources are inadequate or not allocated appropriately.

The findings indicate that budget allocation remains a challenge, with the Head of the Education Office acknowledging that the budget is "not always sufficient" and UNICEF highlighting the need for "coordination in resource utilization." This aligns with the Background report, which states that "implementation is uneven and often encounters administrative obstacles and a lack of socialization." Despite programs like the PIP (Public Education Program), financial constraints remain a major cause of children dropping out of school (Suharto, 2020). The limited number of guidance counselors in schools and the need for "special funds" confirm that human and financial resources are less than ideal at the operational level. Resource utilization also requires more optimal strategies, as recommended by UNICEF to ensure targeted and timely assistance and maximize the use of existing facilities. The implication of this resource shortage is a decreased effectiveness of interventions, as implementers may lack adequate tools or support to run programs optimally. Contemporary implementation theory emphasizes that resource adequacy is a strong predictor of policy success, as without adequate financial, human, and institutional support, implementation often faces serious obstacles (Matland, 2016; Hupe & Hill, 2016; Nilsen et al., 2020). Therefore, greater investment and more efficient allocation are urgently needed to address the issue of school dropout. Students' direct perspectives provide empirical validation and in-depth qualitative insights into the realities on the ground. Their voices reflect how policies are interpreted and perceived by the primary target group. Students' recognition of economic factors as the primary reason their peers drop out of school is highly consistent with data from the Makassar City Education Office and previous research (Suharto, 2020; Tamar et al., 2025; Brazell, 2024; Singleton, 2023; Jidar et al., 2024). Furthermore, lack of interest, promiscuity, and lack of parental attention are also significant contributing factors, reinforcing the multifaceted complexity of the problem. Challenges to continuing to the next level are also dominated by costs and parental support, as well as access to transportation, which are directly related to issues of resources and family disposition (Dong et al., 2026). Crucially, however, is students' recognition that government and school assistance "is very helpful and somewhat

eases the burden on parents (Hakim, 2023; Sapiyah et al., 2025; Bankole, 2024; Toharudin et al., 2024)." This demonstrates that existing programs, despite challenges, have had a tangible positive impact on student retention. Students' hopes that the program "continues to the next level" and that "learning facilities and infrastructure" are available confirm that the need for ongoing support and a conducive learning environment are priorities for them. Students' recognition that they "feel they have a chance" to continue their education is a strong indicator of success, although there is still room for improvement (Khaerunnisa et al., 2025). Overall, this study confirms that managing dropout rates in Makassar City is a complex effort, involving multiple stakeholders and influenced by diverse factors. Despite significant commitment and efforts from the government and schools, optimization is still needed for each indicator of the (Sutherland et al., 2023). Improving communication quality, strengthening the disposition of implementers through institutional support, simplifying bureaucratic structures, and allocating more adequate and efficient resources are key to achieving a more significant and sustainable reduction in dropout rates in Makassar City.

Optimizing the Handling of School Dropouts

Various efforts to optimize the handling of school dropouts in Makassar City have been undertaken by various stakeholders, but comprehensive improvements are still needed. Based on in-depth interviews with nine key informants, it was revealed that the local Education Office has developed the Makassar Smart Card Program and provides free schooling, although it still faces challenges in accurate student data collection. At the school level, regular monitoring by homeroom teachers and collaboration with community health centers have been implemented to anticipate dropout cases. Community leaders and school committees also play an active role as bridges between schools and parents, including by conducting home visits and raising funds for transportation assistance for underprivileged students.

However, the main challenge remains related to family economic factors, with many parents struggling to meet their children's educational needs despite school assistance. One casual worker parent revealed that the assistance received was insufficient to cover his child's complete educational needs. Responses to this situation have come from various parties, including NGOs that provide alternative afternoon schools for working children, as well as former dropouts who have successfully returned to education through the flexible Package C program. Experts emphasize the need for a holistic approach that focuses not only on education but also on empowering families economically through training programs and business mentoring. Optimizing data-driven policies and comprehensive evaluations, including strengthening integrated database systems, collaborative multi-stakeholder approaches, and providing flexible alternative education are key to sustainably reducing the dropout rate in Makassar City.

Optimization in the context of managing school dropouts in Makassar City can be understood as an effort to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of every element involved in implementing education policies. According to the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (2022), optimization is a process or action to make something better, higher, or more effective. In this case, optimization aims to achieve desired results, namely a significant reduction in the dropout rate. Communication optimization can be achieved by strengthening existing communication channels and creating more effective two-way communication channels. This includes using information technology to disseminate information more widely and quickly, as well as holding discussion forums involving parents, students, and the community. This ensures that information about education programs is well received and actively responded to by all parties. Optimizing the implementer disposition can be achieved by providing better training and support to policy implementers. This includes strengthening

the implementers' moral commitment and motivation through recognition of their contributions and providing appropriate incentives. By increasing positive dispositions, implementers will be more motivated to overcome existing obstacles. Optimizing the bureaucratic structure can be achieved by simplifying procedures and improving coordination between agencies. This includes developing an integrated information system to facilitate data access and decision-making. With a more efficient bureaucratic structure, policy implementation can run more smoothly and effectively.

Optimizing resources involves more appropriate budget allocation and maximizing the utilization of existing human resources. The government needs to ensure that the budget allocated for education programs is sufficient to meet needs, as well as increase the capacity of educators through training and professional development. With adequate resources, education programs can be implemented more effectively. Optimizing the management of school dropouts in Makassar City is a crucial step towards achieving better education goals. By strengthening communication, improving the disposition of implementers, simplifying the bureaucratic structure, and allocating resources efficiently, it is hoped that the dropout rate can be significantly reduced. These efforts will not only benefit children at risk of dropping out of school but will also contribute to better human resource development in Makassar City.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation and Optimization of the Strategy for Handling School Dropouts in Makassar City

This study identifies various supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation and optimization of the strategy for handling school dropouts in Makassar City. Using the (Sutherland et al., 2023) policy implementation model framework, this analysis focuses on four key indicators: Communication, Disposition, Bureaucratic Structure, and Resources. Clear and multi-channel communication is a key supporting factor in policy implementation. The Makassar City Education Office has proactively disseminated information through circulars, coordination meetings, and digital platforms. This aligns with the concept of modern interactive communication, which emphasizes the importance of two-way dialogue between implementers and the community, including the use of digital technology to increase participation and rapid response (Vaughan et al., 2018; Moyo & Sefara, 2021). With open lines of communication, challenges in the field can be communicated and addressed more effectively.

The positive disposition of policy implementers, such as teachers and social workers, is a key driver of program success. A strong commitment to ensuring every child receives a decent education creates strong motivation among implementers. This is evident in the dedication of implementers who are willing to work outside of working hours to assist students. Previous research shows that policy implementers, especially teachers, who are proactive and focused on student welfare are able to identify the risk of dropping out of school early, build supportive relationships, and collaborate with teachers and families to address students' social and personal challenges (Bălăuță et al., 2017; Stalnecker et al., 2022). Close coordination between the Makassar City Education Office and the Regional Development Planning Agency (BAPPEDA) helps ensure that education programs are integrated with regional development plans. This coordination also includes collaboration with non-governmental organizations such as UNICEF, which provides technical support and training. Institutional support and inter-agency coordination remain crucial factors in maintaining the effectiveness of program implementation. Recent research emphasizes that cross-sector collaboration and adequate organizational support improve motivation, capacity, and policy implementation outcomes (Hupe & Hill, 2016; Bryson et al., 2015; Nilsen et al., 2020). Despite limitations, prioritized budget allocations for education and support from non-governmental organizations have

positively contributed to program implementation. Dedicated human resources are also a crucial asset in addressing out-of-school children. Adequate resources are a strong predictor of policy success. Previous research emphasizes that without adequate financial support, human resource capacity, and infrastructure, the effectiveness of policy implementation will significantly decline (Matland, 2016; Nilsen et al., 2020; Hupe & Hill, 2016). Despite efforts to allocate budgets, many implementers complain that the available budget is not always sufficient to meet all needs. The limited number of teachers, particularly in the field of Guidance and Counseling, is also a constraint. This aligns with modern theories of resource constraints, which state that lack of finances, human resource capacity, and infrastructure can hinder the effectiveness of program implementation (Matland, 2016; Nilsen et al., 2020; Hupe & Hill, 2016). High workloads for implementers, such as teachers and social workers, can impact their effectiveness in implementing programs. This challenge often leads to burnout and reduced motivation. According to Suryanto (UNICEF Expert), it is important for the government to provide psychosocial support to maintain the enthusiasm and performance of implementers.

Complicated and sometimes outdated aid application procedures can hinder aid disbursement. Homeroom teachers revealed that the process of filling out data and completing documents is often time-consuming and difficult, especially if parents lack complete documentation. This highlights the need for streamlined procedures and training for school staff to minimize administrative errors. Economic factors are one of the main reasons children drop out of school. Many students must help their parents work to meet family needs. Furthermore, a lack of parental support and an unfavorable social environment also contribute to obstacles. According to Suharto (2020), these factors create complex challenges in managing dropouts. (Sutherland et al., 2023) Policy implementation theory provides a relevant framework for analyzing factors influencing the implementation of programs to address dropouts. This theory emphasizes the importance of four key indicators: communication, disposition, bureaucratic structure, and resources, which interact to determine the success of policy implementation. In this context, effective communication between the Education Office, schools, and the community is key to achieving program objectives. Modern interactive communication principles emphasize two-way dialogue between program implementers and the community, with a focus on participation, rapid feedback, and the use of digital media to enhance program effectiveness (Vaughan et al., 2018; Moyo & Sefara, 2021). Furthermore, the positive disposition of policy implementers, such as teachers and social workers, contributes to program success, indicating that implementer commitment and motivation significantly influence implementation effectiveness. Conversely, a lack of resources, both financial and human, can hinder program effectiveness. Therefore, it is important to understand the interplay between these factors in efforts to optimize the management of dropouts in Makassar City. Supporting and inhibiting factors in implementing strategies and optimizing the management of dropouts in Makassar City interact and influence program effectiveness. Effective communication, implementer commitment, and good coordination are key supporting factors, while limited resources, high workloads, and complex procedures act as barriers. Therefore, efforts are needed to overcome these challenges through simplifying procedures, increasing the capacity of implementers, and allocating more adequate resources to achieve better educational goals.

Conclusion

The implementation strategy for managing dropouts in Makassar City has been implemented through cross-sectoral collaboration involving all stakeholders, including the government, the private sector, and the community. The commitment and dedication of those implementing the program in the field are very high. However, heavy workloads and limited institutional support

have the potential to impact this positive disposition. Optimizing the management of dropouts has been implemented through formal school equivalency pathways, strengthening the integrated database system, a collaborative multi-stakeholder approach, and providing flexible alternative education, which are key to sustainably reducing the dropout rate in Makassar City. Supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation and optimization strategy for managing dropouts in Makassar City interact and influence program effectiveness. Effective communication, commitment from implementers, and good coordination are key supporting factors, while limited resources, high workloads, and complicated procedures are obstacles.

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