

STREET-LEVEL ACTOR DYNAMICS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHARACTER EDUCATION POLICY: THE GAPURA PANCA WALUYA PROGRAM

Lukman Hakim ^{1a*}, Muradi ^{2b}, Neneng Yani Yuningsih ^{3c}

¹Institut Master Program of Government Science Program, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, Indonesia

²³Department of Government Science Program, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, Indonesia

^alukman24001@mail.unpad.ac.id

^bmuradi@unpad.ac.id

^cneneng.yani@unpad.ac.id

(*) Corresponding Author

lukman24001@mail.unpad.ac.id

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 05-01-2026

Revised : 07-02-2026

Accepted : 15-03-2026

KEYWORDS

Character education;
Policy implementation;
Program Gapura Panca Waluya;
Street-level actors;
Street-level bureaucracy

ABSTRACT

Character education constitutes a strategic public policy instrument for strengthening citizenship quality and social resilience. In Indonesia's decentralized governance system, character education policy is translated into various regional initiatives, including the Gapura Panca Waluya Program in West Java Province. Although normatively formulated by the provincial government, the program's implementation at the school level demonstrates varying outcomes and practices that do not always reflect its transformative objectives. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of street-level actors in the implementation of the Gapura Panca Waluya Program and to identify structural challenges and patterns of implementation across schools. The research employs a qualitative policy study design based entirely on secondary data. Data were collected from regional policy documents, official government reports, educational evaluation records, and relevant academic literature. Document analysis was conducted to examine policy narratives, actor roles, and the relationship between policy design and school-level practices. The findings reveal that principals and teachers play a central role in interpreting and operationalizing character education policy. However, broad discretionary space, uneven institutional capacity, and evaluation mechanisms emphasizing administrative compliance encourage ceremonial and symbolic implementation patterns. Variations across schools reflect the interaction between local discretion and regional policy design. The study concludes that effective character education policy depends not only on normative clarity but also on coherent policy design, substantive supervision, and sustained capacity strengthening at the school level.

This is an open access article under the CC-BY-SA license.



INTRODUCTION

Education is widely understood as a strategic public policy instrument for strengthening citizenship quality and enhancing a nation's social resilience (Bestari, 2020; Trevisan, 2024). Contemporary educational challenges are no longer limited to academic achievement; they increasingly involve crises of values, integrity, and social behavior. The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report situates SDG 4 within a framework that assesses countries' likelihood of achieving national education targets, noting that most countries have submitted benchmark values for at least one of the SDG 4 indicators. This global context indicates that education quality is inseparable from governance capacity and the ability of school institutions to cultivate social and moral foundations alongside cognitive outcomes.

International evidence also shows that character education is often institutionalized as part of public governance, not merely as a pedagogical initiative (Iqbal dkk., 2022; Mongkhonvanit, 2017). In Finland, school policy consistently places well-being, trust, and social responsibility at its core (Blanco, 2019). Japan integrates moral education (*dōtoku*) nationally as a compulsory curriculum component (Er-razine, 2023). In the United Kingdom, a whole-school governance approach has been associated with reductions in disciplinary violations in schools implementing character policy comprehensively (Arnott & Menter, 2007). These cases suggest that character education operates as a state policy whose outcomes depend on governance arrangements and implementation capacity at the school level.

The effectiveness of character education policy is strongly shaped by implementation governance. Value-based policies tend to be high-discretion policies, creating broad interpretive space for implementing actors (Turner & Spain, 2016). In the education sector, teachers and principals do not merely execute administrative instructions; they act as frontline implementers (street-level actors) whose decisions influence how policy values are translated into everyday school practices (Guimarães dkk., 2022a; Taylor, 2007). Thus, character education becomes an arena where policy design, institutional constraints, and street-level discretion interact to shape policy results (Ota, 2022; Prasetya dkk., 2021).

In Indonesia, character education policy reflects the state's attempt to strengthen governance functions in shaping the character of young citizens. However, national indicators suggest serious implementation challenges. Education evaluation trends reported in recent years show disparities across regions and signs of decline in certain character-related dimensions. In addition, integrity issues in educational settings remain salient. Such patterns indicate that the core problem is not the absence of policy commitment, but rather the capacity of implementation governance at the operational level.

Within a decentralization framework, national character education priorities are further translated into regional programs (Finuliyah dkk., 2023; Raharjo, 2016). The Gapura Panca Waluya Program in West Java Province represents a concrete example of how a regional government formulates contextual character education policy grounded in local values. The program functions not only as a normative guideline, but also as a governance instrument implemented through the education bureaucracy and schools as public service units. Schools, in this context, operate as arenas of micro-level governance where principals, teachers, and school staff enact the state's character formation agenda. Yet, implementation at the school level suggests that policy objectives articulated at the provincial level are not always translated into consistent practices. Although the five values *Cageur*, *Bageur*, *Bener*, *Pinter*, and *Singer* are generally recognized as shared moral ideals, their implementation is often reduced to incidental and ceremonial activities (e.g., orientation events or thematic programs), rather than being systematically embedded in learning processes, school governance, and daily routines.

Such variation indicates uneven interpretive understanding among implementers and limited institutional support for sustained internalization. Differences in principals' managerial capacity, limited teacher training, and weak

coordination mechanisms contribute to implementation patterns that depend heavily on school-level initiative. As a result, the same policy may generate different outcomes across schools. This condition makes the case analytically significant for understanding how street-level actors shape the meaning and results of regional character education policy.

To assess the novelty and positioning of this study, bibliometric mapping was conducted using Publish or Perish and VOSviewer. The search retrieved 957 documents using the keywords “character education” and “policy implementation,” which were then visualized in a bibliometric network map (Figure 1). The mapping indicates that existing studies on character education are largely dominated by pedagogical and curricular approaches, emphasizing classroom practices, value internalization, and program evaluation. However, this dominant stream often underexamines policy implementation as a governance process involving discretion, negotiation, and institutional constraints at the school level. Departing from this mainstream, the present study positions character education as a regional public policy and conceptualizes schools as micro-governance arenas in which principals and teachers operate as street-level bureaucrats who actively construct policy meaning and direction through everyday practice.

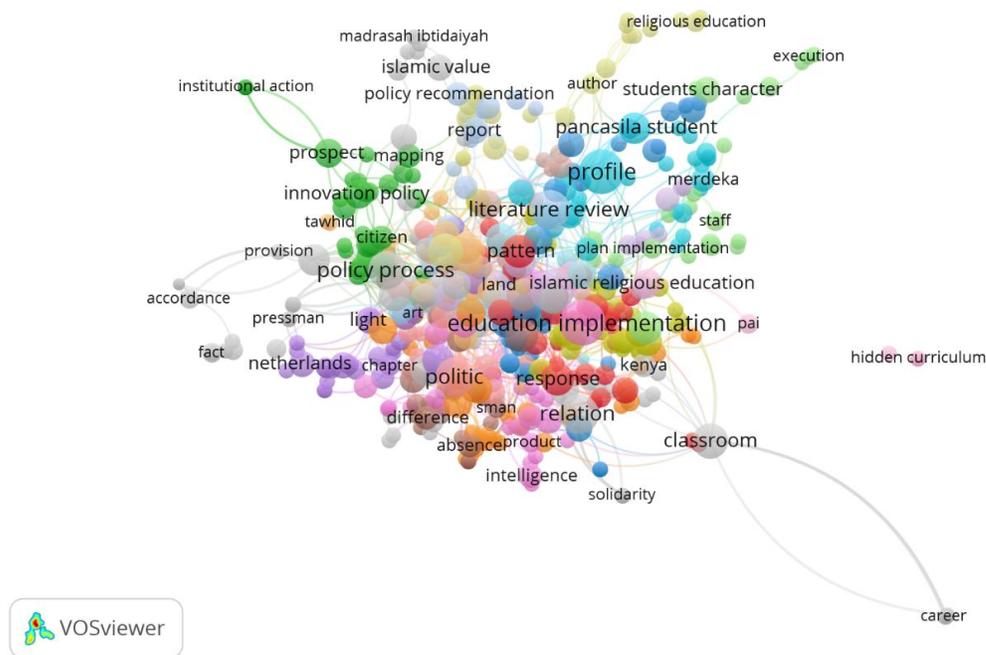


Figure 1. Bibliometric Analysis

Source: Create by researcher team, Vosviewer, 2026

Despite the growing body of literature on character education, much of the existing research remains concentrated on pedagogical strategies, curriculum integration, and classroom-level interventions. While these studies contribute to understanding instructional approaches, they tend to overlook character education as a public policy process shaped by governance structures, institutional capacity, and street-level discretion (de Oliveira dkk., 2024; Guimarães dkk., 2022). In particular, limited attention has been given to how regional governments design value-

based education policies within decentralized systems, and how such policies are interpreted, negotiated, and enacted by principals and teachers at the school level. This gap is significant because value-based policies, by their nature, rely heavily on interpretive agency and discretion (Turner & Spain, 2020), making implementation outcomes contingent upon local governance dynamics rather than solely on formal policy design.

Responding to this gap, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of street-level actors in the implementation of the Gapura Panca Waluya Program as a regional character education policy in West Java Province. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how principals and teachers interpret and operationalize policy values, identify structural and institutional challenges influencing implementation, and explore patterns of variation across schools. By positioning character education within a governance and policy implementation framework, this research contributes to expanding the discourse from a focus on “whether character education is implemented” toward an examination of “how and by whom character education policy is constructed in practice.” In doing so, the study strengthens the theoretical integration between character education research and street-level bureaucracy theory, and provides a governance-based perspective for designing more coherent and sustainable value-based education policies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a policy study design focusing on the implementation of character education policy through the Gapura Panca Waluya Program in West Java Province. A qualitative design was selected because character education constitutes a value-based public policy whose implementation involves interpretation, negotiation, and discretion at the operational level (Guimarães dkk., 2022; Turner & Spain, 2020). In decentralized governance systems, policy outcomes are often shaped not solely by formal design but by the interaction between institutional structures and street-level actors (de Oliveira dkk., 2024; Jansen, 2024). Therefore, a qualitative policy analysis enables a deeper understanding of how policy meaning is constructed and enacted in practice.

This research adopts a document-based policy analysis. Rather than conducting direct field observations or interviews, the study relies entirely on secondary data drawn from official policy documents, provincial regulations, institutional reports, performance evaluation documents, and relevant academic literature. Document analysis is particularly suitable for examining governance processes and institutional narratives because policy texts serve as instruments that frame actor roles, define implementation expectations, and structure accountability mechanisms (Holcombe & Kidanemariam Gebru, 2022).

The primary object of analysis is the Gapura Panca Waluya Program as a regional character education policy formulated by the West Java Provincial Government. The program is grounded in five core values Cageur, Bageur, Bener, Pinter, and Singer which function as normative policy principles guiding school-level character formation. The analysis focuses on how these normative principles are translated into institutional arrangements and operational practices within schools as public service units.

Data sources consist of:

1. Regional policy and regulatory documents related to the Gapura Panca Waluya Program;
2. Official reports and institutional publications issued by the West Java Provincial Education Office;
3. National evaluation documents concerning education performance and integrity; and
4. Peer-reviewed academic literature addressing policy implementation, decentralization, governance capacity, and street-level bureaucracy (Guimarães dkk., 2022; Setiawan dkk., 2022; Taylor, 2007).

Data were analyzed using qualitative document analysis through interpretive and thematic procedures. The analytical process involved:

1. Identifying policy narratives and normative objectives embedded in official documents;
2. Mapping the formally assigned roles of principals, teachers, and supporting staff within policy texts;

3. Examining evaluation and supervision mechanisms established by the provincial government; and
4. Interpreting how institutional design potentially shapes patterns of discretion and variation in school-level implementation.

The theoretical framework guiding the analysis integrates street-level bureaucracy theory and policy design perspectives. Street-level bureaucracy theory posits that frontline actors exercise discretion in implementing policies under conditions of limited resources and institutional constraints (Taylor, 2007; Wenner & Settlege, 2015). This perspective allows the study to conceptualize principals and teachers as micro-level governance actors who actively construct policy outcomes. In addition, policy design theory emphasizes the alignment between normative objectives and implementation instruments (Jong, 2019). This framework is used to assess whether the Gapura Panca Waluya Program’s institutional arrangements support substantive value internalization or primarily encourage administrative compliance.

By combining document analysis with governance-oriented theoretical lenses, this study seeks to explain how a regional character education policy is structured, interpreted, and reproduced within school institutions. The research design, therefore, does not aim to measure program effectiveness quantitatively, but to analyze the governance dynamics that shape variation in implementation outcomes across schools.

Figure 2 illustrates the overall research framework, including policy context, data sources, and analytical approach.



Figure 2. Research Method

Source: Create by researcher team, 2026

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the implementation of the Gapura Panca Waluya Program is not a linear administrative process but a governance dynamic mediated by street-level actors within schools. Although the provincial government formulates the policy as a normative framework grounded in the values of Cageur, Bageur,

Bener, Pinter, and Singer, its realization depends largely on how principals, teachers, and school staff interpret and operationalize these values in everyday practice.

Street-Level Actors as Policy Interpreters

At the school level, principals occupy a central position as policy interpreters and implementation leaders. Official policy documents assign principals responsibility not only for administrative coordination but also for shaping school culture in alignment with character education objectives. In practice, however, the degree of internalization varies across institutions. Some principals incorporate character values into strategic planning, annual programs, and organizational routines, while others emphasize symbolic activities tied to specific events.

This variation reflects the discretionary nature of value-based policies. According to street-level bureaucracy theory, frontline actors inevitably exercise discretion when translating abstract policy goals into concrete actions (Guimarães dkk., 2022b; Taylor, 2007). In decentralized systems, such discretion becomes even more prominent, as local actors operate within varying institutional capacities and resource constraints (Jansen, 2024). The findings demonstrate that principals actively construct policy meaning rather than passively implementing centrally defined directives.

Teachers function as the primary operational actors responsible for embedding character values into classroom practices. Policy texts frame teachers as agents of internalization through instruction, role modeling, and habituation. However, document analysis reveals uneven levels of preparedness and institutional support. Without detailed technical guidance, teachers rely heavily on personal initiative and interpretive judgment. As a result, the integration of character values into learning activities differs significantly among schools.

Supporting staff and student affairs units contribute to program implementation through extracurricular activities and school climate management. Nevertheless, their involvement is often complementary rather than systematically integrated into a coherent institutional framework. This condition reinforces the fragmented character of implementation in some schools.

Figure 3 illustrates this dynamic interaction. The provincial policy provides a normative structure, but its translation into practice is mediated by leadership capacity, teacher discretion, and institutional context. The discretionary space exercised by street-level actors produces a spectrum of outcomes, ranging from ceremonial character education to deeply embedded institutional culture. Implementation, therefore, emerges as a negotiated process rather than a purely top-down administrative sequence.

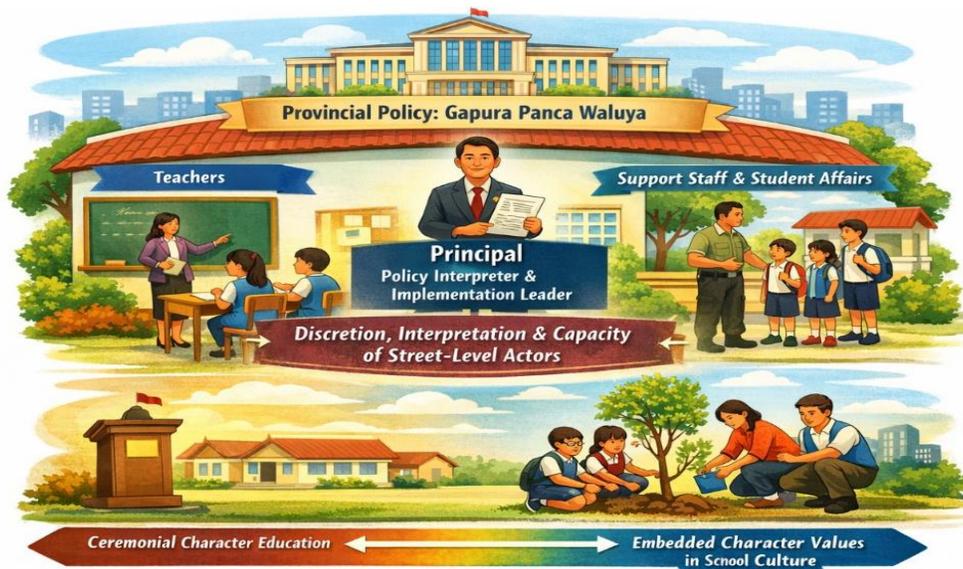


Figure 3. Illustrative Model of Street-Level Actor Dynamics in the Implementation of the Gapura Panca Waluya Program
 Source: Create by researcher team, 2026.

Structural and Institutional Challenges

Beyond actor dynamics, several structural challenges shape implementation outcomes. First, policy operationalization remains relatively general. Although normative objectives are clearly articulated, technical implementation instruments lack detailed guidance. This gap between normative ambition and operational clarity creates interpretive variability at the school level. From a policy design perspective, misalignment between goals and instruments can weaken transformative capacity (Jong, 2019).

Second, capacity constraints significantly affect program realization. Teachers and school staff are expected to function as character-building agents, yet training, pedagogical tools, and institutional mentoring are unevenly distributed. Research on governance capacity highlights that decentralized systems require sustained institutional strengthening to ensure consistent policy implementation (Setiawan dkk., 2022). In the absence of structured capacity development, implementation becomes dependent on individual leadership and initiative.

Third, supervision and evaluation mechanisms emphasize administrative compliance. Reporting systems and measurable indicators prioritize visible outputs, such as documented activities and ceremonial programs. From a street-level perspective, this creates incentives for coping strategies, where actors align their practices with bureaucratic expectations to reduce risk and workload pressures (Kim & Weiner, 2022; Wenner & Settlege, 2015). Consequently, symbolic implementation may represent rational adaptation rather than weak commitment.

Fourth, sustainability presents an ongoing concern. Frequent policy adjustments and leadership transitions influence program continuity. As decentralized governance research suggests, policy sustainability depends not only on regulatory continuity but also on stable institutional leadership and vertical coordination (Halpin dkk., 1991). When policy signals shift or leadership changes occur, program intensity may decline, reducing the likelihood of deep cultural embedding.

Figure 4 synthesizes these challenges, demonstrating how policy vagueness, limited capacity, compliance-oriented evaluation, and sustainability issues interact to produce variations in school-level implementation. The combined effect of these factors explains why identical policy directives generate heterogeneous outcomes across schools.



Figure 3. Challenges in Implementing Character Education Policy
 Source: Create by researcher team, 2026.

Governance Implications

The results challenge purely top-down models of policy implementation. Consistent with street-level bureaucracy theory, policy outcomes are produced through everyday practices of frontline actors rather than merely executed according to formal design (de Oliveira dkk., 2024; Guimarães dkk., 2022b). In the case of the Gapura Panca Waluya Program, the meaning and substance of character education policy are reconstructed within schools as arenas of micro-governance.

From a governance perspective, the findings suggest that the primary tension lies between normative aspirations and administrative instruments. The program aspires to transform school culture, yet institutional incentives prioritize compliance and documentation. This structural mismatch encourages pragmatic adaptation and increases the risk of symbolic implementation. Therefore, ceremonial practices should not be interpreted solely as implementation failure, but as institutional responses to policy design and evaluation structures.

Overall, the study demonstrates that regional character education policy effectiveness depends on coherent policy design, substantive supervision, and sustained capacity development. Without alignment between normative objectives and governance mechanisms, value-based education policies risk being reduced to symbolic representation rather than becoming embedded institutional practices.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of character education policy through the Gapura Panca Waluya Program cannot be understood as a linear progression from policy formulation to school-level execution. Consistent with street-level bureaucracy perspectives (Guimarães dkk., 2022; Taylor, 2007), implementation emerges through the discretionary practices of principals and teachers who actively interpret and reconstruct policy meaning within their institutional contexts. Policy outcomes, therefore, reflect negotiated governance processes at the micro level rather than simple compliance with formal directives.

The findings further indicate that ceremonial and symbolic implementation patterns should not be viewed solely as weak commitment. Instead, they represent rational adaptations to policy designs and evaluation mechanisms that emphasize administrative compliance. From a policy design standpoint (Jong, 2019), misalignment between normative aspirations and implementation instruments generates structural incentives for schools to prioritize measurable outputs over deep cultural transformation. In this context, discretion functions less as a source of innovation and more as a coping mechanism under institutional constraints (Wenner & Settlage, 2015).

The primary contribution of this study lies in strengthening a governance-based understanding of character education policy. By situating character education within decentralized governance dynamics (de Oliveira dkk., 2024), this research shifts the analytical focus from questioning whether policy is implemented to examining how and by whom policy is enacted and reproduced in practice.

Ultimately, sustainable character education requires coherence between policy design, supervision mechanisms, and sustained capacity development at the school level. Without such alignment, value-based policies risk remaining symbolic rather than becoming embedded institutional practices.

REFERENCES

- Arnott, M., & Menter, I. (2007). The Same but Different? Post-Devolution Regulation and Control in Education in Scotland and England. *European Educational Research Journal*, 6(3), 250–265. <https://doi.org/10.2304/eej.2007.6.3.250>
- Bestari, P. (2020). The Essence of Public Policies in Learning for Civic Education. *Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Civic Education Conference (ACEC 2019)*. 2nd Annual Civic Education Conference (ACEC 2019), Bandung, Indonesia. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200320.047>
- Blanco, C. (2019). *Higher education policies and question of social (in)equality: Cases of Argentina and Finland*. <https://doi.org/10.1344/REYD2019.19.29045>
- de Oliveira, S. E. C., Nakagawa, L., Lopes, G. R., Visentin, J. C., Couto, M., Silva, D. E., d'Albertas, F., Pavani, B. F., Loyola, R., & West, C. (2024). The European Union and United Kingdom's deforestation-free supply chains regulations: Implications for Brazil. *Ecological Economics*, 217, 108053. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800923003166>
- Er-razine, S. (2023). What Moroccan schools can learn from Japanese moral education? *The Journal of Quality in Education*, 13(22), 81–95. <https://doi.org/10.37870/joqie.v13i22.384>
- Finuliyah, F., Susilo, S., & Saputra, P. M. A. (2023). The Promise of Fiscal Decentralization on the Threat of Poverty Rates in Special Region. *Journal of International Conference Proceedings*. <https://doi.org/10.32535/jicp.v6i3.2489>
- Guimarães, T. C. D. A., Bernardo, E. D. S., & Borde, A. M. (2022a). Street-level Bureaucracy in Teacher Discretionary Power. *Educação & Realidade*, 47, e110669. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2175-6236110669vs02>
- Guimarães, T. C. D. A., Bernardo, E. D. S., & Borde, A. M. (2022b). Street-level Bureaucracy in Teacher Discretionary Power. *Educação & Realidade*, 47, e110669. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2175-6236110669vs02>

- Halpin, D., Fitz, J., & Power, S. (1991). Local Education Authorities and the Grant-Maintained Schools Policy. *Educational Management & Administration*, 19(4), 233–242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/174114329101900404>
- Holcombe, S. J., & Kidanemariam Gebru, S. (2022). Agenda setting and socially contentious policies: Ethiopia's 2005 reform of its law on abortion. *Reproductive Health*, 19(S1), 218. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-021-01255-z>
- Iqbal, M., Najmuddin, N., Rizal, M., & Zahriyanti, Z. (2022). Challenges of Implementing Character Education Based on Islamic Values in the Independent Campus Learning Curriculum (MBKM). *QALAMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, dan Agama*, 14(1), 757–768. <https://doi.org/10.37680/qalamuna.v14i1.4839>
- Jansen, P. S. (2024). Exploring The Effects of English as a Foreign Language on First Language Development of Young Children: The Case of Greece. *Development*, 12(2), 44–75. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Pieter_Jansen4/publication/378180026_Exploring_The_Effects_of_English_as_a_Foreign_Language_on_First_Language_Development_of_Young_Children_The_Case_of_Greece/links/65cc20031bed776ae34f5edb/Exploring-The-Effects-of-English-as-a-Foreign-Language-on-First-Language-Development-of-Young-Children-The-Case-of-Greece.pdf
- Jong, M. de. (2019). *From Eco-Civilization to City Branding: A Neo-Marxist Perspective of Sustainable Urbanization in China*. <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/11/20/5608>
- Kim, T., & Weiner, J. (2022). Negotiating Incomplete Autonomy: Portraits from Three School Principals. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 58(3), 487–521. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X221080374>
- Mongkhonvanit, J. (2017). Thailand's dual education system: A way forward. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 7(2), 155–167. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-09-2016-0067>
- Ota, M. (2022). Discretionary Operations of Frontline Forest Bureaucrats in Tropical Developing Countries: A Case Study from Java, Indonesia. *Forests*, 13(7), 1000. <https://doi.org/10.3390/f13071000>
- Prasetya, I., Sulasmi, E., & Susana, S. (2021). The Child-Friendly School Program for Developing a Character School in the Primary Schools of Binjai City, Indonesia. *Randwick International of Social Science Journal*, 2(4), 575–582. <https://doi.org/10.47175/rissj.v2i4.338>
- Raharjo, P. (2016). Public Service Dynamics in Population Administration Sector: A Study on Electronic ID Card Service in Makassar Indonesia. *International Journal on Advanced Science, Engineering and Information Technology*, 6(6), 1040. <https://doi.org/10.18517/ijaseit.6.6.1501>
- Setiawan, A., Tjiptoherijanto, P., Mahi, B. R., & Khoirunurrofik, K. (2022). The Impact of Local Government Capacity on Public Service Delivery: Lessons Learned from Decentralized Indonesia. *Economies*, 10(12), 323. <https://doi.org/10.3390/economies10120323>
- Taylor, I. (2007). *Discretion and Control in Education*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1741143207081063>
- Trevisan, A. L. (2024). The educational policy of the new Brazilian Common National Curriculum Framework: An Analysis based on Biopolitics. *Pro-Posições*, 35, e2024c0103BR. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1980-6248-2022-0065en>
- Turner, E. O., & Spain, A. K. (2016). *The Multiple Meanings of (In)Equity: Remaking School District Tracking Policy in an Era of Budget Cuts and Accountability*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0042085916674060>
- Turner, E. O., & Spain, A. K. (2020). The Multiple Meanings of (In)Equity: Remaking School District Tracking Policy in an Era of Budget Cuts and Accountability. *Urban Education*, 55(5), 783–812. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916674060>
- Wenner, J. A., & Settlege, J. (2015). School leader enactments of the structure/agency dialectic via buffering: PRINCIPAL BUFFERING IN SCIENCE-SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 52(4), 503–515. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tea.21212>