

Nearest School, Unequal Access: Residential Justice in the Implementation of the New Student Admission System in Bandung City

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Abstract

The implementation of residential-based student admission policies is intended to promote equal access to public education by reducing geographical barriers and limiting excessive competition among applicants. However, residential proximity does not necessarily guarantee substantive equality when schools differ significantly in quality, resources, reputation, and socioeconomic composition. This study examines the implementation of Indonesia's New Student Admission System (SPMB) in Bandung City through the lens of residential justice. It investigates how residential criteria shape students' access to public secondary schools and whether the policy effectively reduces or instead reproduces existing educational inequalities. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research analyzes local policy documents and admission mechanisms and incorporates perspectives from education officials, school administrators, parents, and prospective students. The study conceptualizes justice not merely as equal geographical access but as equitable opportunities to obtain quality education. Preliminary analytical expectations suggest that residential-based admission may redistribute access without addressing unequal school quality across neighborhoods. The study therefore argues that admission reform should be accompanied by policies addressing school quality disparities, transportation accessibility, and socioeconomic segregation. The findings are expected to contribute to the international debate on admission policies, spatial inequality, and education justice in decentralized education systems.

[Penerapan kebijakan penerimaan siswa berbasis tempat tinggal bertujuan untuk mendorong akses yang sama terhadap pendidikan publik dengan mengurangi hambatan geografis dan membatasi persaingan yang berlebihan di antara para pelamar. Namun, kedekatan tempat tinggal tidak selalu menjamin kesetaraan substantif ketika sekolah-sekolah berbeda secara signifikan dalam kualitas, sumber daya, reputasi, dan komposisi sosial ekonomi. Studi ini meneliti implementasi Sistem Penerimaan Siswa Baru (SPMB) Indonesia di Kota Bandung melalui lensa keadilan tempat tinggal.

Studi ini menyelidiki bagaimana kriteria tempat tinggal membentuk akses siswa ke sekolah menengah negeri dan apakah kebijakan tersebut secara efektif mengurangi atau malah mereproduksi ketidaksetaraan pendidikan yang ada. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis dokumen kebijakan lokal dan mekanisme penerimaan serta menggabungkan perspektif dari pejabat pendidikan, administrator sekolah, orang tua, dan calon siswa. Studi ini mengkonseptualisasikan keadilan bukan hanya sebagai akses geografis yang sama tetapi sebagai kesempatan yang adil untuk memperoleh pendidikan berkualitas. Ekspektasi analitis awal menunjukkan bahwa penerimaan berbasis tempat tinggal dapat mendistribusikan kembali akses tanpa mengatasi ketidaksetaraan kualitas sekolah di berbagai lingkungan. Oleh karena itu, studi ini berpendapat bahwa reformasi penerimaan harus disertai dengan kebijakan yang mengatasi kesenjangan kualitas sekolah, aksesibilitas transportasi, dan segregasi sosial ekonomi. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat berkontribusi pada debat internasional tentang kebijakan penerimaan siswa, ketidaksetaraan spasial, dan keadilan pendidikan dalam sistem pendidikan yang terdesentralisasi.]

Keywords: SPMB, residential justice, educational inequality, school admission, Bandung

Introduction

Educational access is commonly understood as a fundamental dimension of social justice because the distribution of educational opportunities influences individuals' subsequent economic, social, and political trajectories. Yet access to education is not simply a matter of whether a school is physically available within a particular territory. It also concerns whether students can reach schools safely and affordably, whether they are eligible to enter them, whether they possess adequate information about admission procedures, and, most importantly, whether the schools available to them provide comparable educational opportunities. This multidimensional understanding is particularly important in urban education systems where schools are unevenly distributed across space and where neighborhoods differ substantially in socioeconomic composition, infrastructure, transportation connectivity, and institutional resources. Recent research on educational accessibility demonstrates that spatial inequalities can produce systematic differences in educational opportunity even when governments formally provide universal school coverage (He et al. 2021; Rodrigues et al. 2022). The question of educational equality must therefore be examined simultaneously as a question of social distribution and spatial organization. In this context, school admission policies are not merely administrative instruments for allocating students; they are also mechanisms through which governments organize the relationship between residential space and access to public resources.

Indonesia's reform of student admission policy provides an important illustration of this problem. The former PPDB zoning system sought to distribute students according to residential proximity and to weaken the concentration of applicants in schools traditionally perceived as "favorite" or high-performing institutions. In 2025, the national policy was reorganized under the Sistem Penerimaan Murid Baru (SPMB), with "domicile" replacing the previous terminology of "zoning." The distinction is not merely semantic because the new framework emphasizes the establishment of admission areas according to the distribution of schools, the distribution of prospective students, and school capacity. In Bandung City, the 2025/2026 SPMB arrangement established four domicile areas for junior secondary education, while the local government also used a maximum radius of 3,000 meters for SMP admission. The Bandung Education Office explicitly stated that the distribution of domicile areas considered school availability, the distribution of school-age children, and the capacity of educational institutions (Dinas Pendidikan Kota Bandung 2025).

The policy therefore represents an attempt to align educational opportunity with residential geography. However, the central analytical problem remains whether this geographical alignment actually produces greater educational justice. The normative rationale for residential admission is persuasive to the extent that distance constitutes a real barrier to education. Students who live far from public schools may face higher transportation expenses, longer travel times, greater exposure to traffic and safety risks, and reduced opportunities to participate in school-related activities. Geographic accessibility research has demonstrated that the spatial distribution of schools and the transportation networks connecting them are central components of educational opportunity (Miyauchi et al. 2022). However, distance should not be treated as an inherently neutral measure. A straight-line radius between a residence and a school may substantially differ from the actual travel distance experienced by students, particularly in dense and irregular urban environments. Research on Jakarta demonstrates that the assessment of school accessibility produces different results depending on whether accessibility is measured through a simple radius or through the road network connecting residential areas and schools (Sari et al. 2022).

Consequently, a student may be "near" a school according to administrative calculations while experiencing considerably greater practical barriers to reaching it. This distinction is essential for Bandung, where topography, traffic congestion, road hierarchy, and uneven public transportation connectivity can mediate the relationship between residential location and actual school accessibility.

The concept of residential justice offers a useful analytical framework for addressing this tension. Residential justice may be understood as a condition in which individuals' residential locations do not systematically predetermine their opportunities to obtain essential public goods and services. In educational policy, this concept is closely related to spatial justice because schools and residential

neighborhoods are physically situated within the same urban space and are consequently influenced by the distribution of socioeconomic power. Stewart et al. (2021) explicitly identify school zoning as a spatial-justice issue because school enrollment boundaries interact with housing markets, neighborhood inequality, transportation, and socioeconomic segregation.

The significance of this perspective is that it prevents policymakers from treating geographical proximity as equivalent to equality. If two students live in different neighborhoods and are assigned to their respective nearest public schools, the policy may appear formally equal; nevertheless, if one school has substantially stronger teachers, facilities, learning resources, academic performance, and institutional reputation, the two students are not receiving equivalent educational opportunities. Residential justice therefore requires attention to both the spatial distribution of schools and the distribution of educational quality among those schools.

The relationship between residential location and educational opportunity is further complicated by socioeconomic segregation. Residential areas are rarely socially homogeneous, and housing markets frequently sort households according to income, education, occupation, ethnicity, and other socioeconomic characteristics. When school admission is strongly tied to residential location, such segregation can be reproduced within schools. In other words, residential inequality can become educational inequality through the admission mechanism. International research provides substantial evidence for this possibility. Brandt and Bygren (2022), for example, demonstrate that the local opportunity structure of school choice can influence segregation according to parental education and migration background. Tapia (2023) similarly finds that admission priority rules, including distance-based mechanisms, can influence the level of ethnic segregation among schools. These findings are relevant to Bandung because they suggest that residence-based admission cannot be assessed independently of the social geography of the city. The policy may reduce competition between individual students while simultaneously reinforcing differences between schools located in socioeconomically distinct neighborhoods.

The Indonesian literature reveals a similar tension. Existing studies generally acknowledge that zoning has the potential to expand access and reduce the concentration of students in particular institutions, but they also identify persistent problems involving unequal school quality, limited capacity, public resistance, data verification, information gaps, and administrative implementation. Chaniago et al. (2024), for example, conclude that zoning can improve educational accessibility but that disparities in school quality remain a significant obstacle to achieving equal educational opportunities.

Research in Bangka likewise identifies problems concerning the accuracy of distance measurement, unclear zoning boundaries, public understanding, and implementation capacity (Prihatini, Bakuda, and Agung 2024). Studies in Muaro Jambi and Singkawang report comparable challenges, particularly regarding

unequal school facilities, school capacity, technical implementation, and public understanding (Mahmud et al. 2024; Zuliyantini, Nandang, and Sagita 2025). These findings suggest that admission reform cannot be separated from the institutional and spatial conditions in which it is implemented.

Bandung constitutes a particularly significant case because the city has previously experienced the implementation of zoning at the secondary-school level and has been identified as an important site for examining the interaction between policy design and local implementation. Setiawan et al. (2022) demonstrate that zoning implementation in Bandung involves challenges in communication, coordination, and implementation capacity, while Hidayat et al. (2024) identify practical challenges in the implementation of zoning at SMP Negeri 12 Bandung.

The transition from PPDB zoning to SPMB domicile therefore should not be interpreted as a complete departure from the previous system. Rather, it can be understood as an institutional recalibration of a continuing policy objective: to organize access to public schools according to residential proximity while attempting to mitigate the inequalities generated by unrestricted competition. The Bandung case thus provides an opportunity to move beyond the conventional question of whether zoning “works” and instead ask a more fundamental question: does residentially organized admission produce substantive educational justice when the educational landscape itself remains spatially unequal?

This study employs a qualitative case-study approach to examine residential-based student admission in Bandung City. The case-study strategy is appropriate because the research focuses on a contemporary policy process whose outcomes are shaped by the interaction of formal rules, institutional implementation, residential geography, school characteristics, and the behavior of families. Rather than attempting to estimate a causal effect of SPMB on student outcomes, the study seeks to interpret the mechanisms through which residence-based admission can redistribute educational opportunity and the conditions under which it may reproduce inequality. The primary analytical materials consist of local policy documents concerning SPMB, official explanations of the Bandung admission system, and recent peer-reviewed research published between 2021 and 2025. The literature was selected according to four thematic categories: educational zoning and student admission in Indonesia; spatial justice and educational accessibility; school choice and segregation; and socioeconomic inequalities in educational opportunity. The analysis uses thematic interpretation to identify recurring relationships among residential location, distance, school quality, socioeconomic composition, transportation, information, and access. The resulting framework treats residential justice as a relational rather than purely geographical concept: a residentially just system is one in which the location of a student's home does not systematically constrain that student's opportunity to obtain quality public education.

Previous studies can be divided into three broad strands. The first examines the administrative implementation of zoning policies in Indonesia and generally

identifies a mixture of achievements and obstacles. Research by Setiawan et al. (2022), Wulandari et al. (2022), Mahendra (2022), and Chaniago et al. (2024) indicates that zoning can reduce excessive competition and distribute enrollment more evenly, but implementation remains constrained by unequal school capacity, public resistance, technical difficulties, and differences in institutional quality. The second strand focuses on the social consequences of zoning, particularly parental perceptions and school culture. Handayani and Kewuel (2023) show that zoning can generate new burdens for families as they adapt to changing admission expectations, while Hidayat (2023) highlights tensions surrounding academic culture in schools traditionally perceived as high-performing. The third strand, which is particularly important for this study, examines the spatial and socioeconomic dimensions of school access. International research shows that school choice, zoning, transportation, residential segregation, and school quality interact in complex ways (Brandin and Bygren 2022; Jheng et al. 2022; Greaves 2024; Gazmuri 2024).

Despite these contributions, a gap remains in connecting Indonesian admission reform to a broader theory of residential justice. Much of the Indonesian literature asks whether zoning improves equality of access; this study instead asks whether geographical redistribution is sufficient to produce substantive equality when the quality and socioeconomic composition of schools remain uneven.

Residential Proximity as Formal Equality

The first analytical issue concerns the policy's attempt to establish geographical proximity as a principle of fairness. Residential admission has an important egalitarian function because it challenges the idea that public schools should be treated as a competitive market in which families with greater economic, informational, or social resources can pursue the most desirable institutions. By assigning greater priority to students living near schools, governments can reduce the importance of long-distance commuting and limit the concentration of applicants around a small number of high-status institutions. The Bandung SPMB framework reflects this orientation by establishing domicile areas according to the spatial distribution of schools, prospective students, and available capacity. The local government has explicitly described the system as an effort to bring schools closer to students' places of residence rather than simply reproducing the previous administrative boundaries. (Dinas Pendidikan Kota Bandung 2025.) From a formal equality perspective, this represents a significant policy shift because residential location becomes an explicit basis for allocating access to public education.

Nevertheless, geographical proximity is best understood as formal or procedural equality, rather than substantive equality. A system is formally equal when students are subject to the same admission criterion; it becomes substantively equitable only when the criterion does not systematically disadvantage particular groups. Distance-based allocation can satisfy the first condition without satisfying

the second. For example, students from two neighborhoods may both receive priority at their nearest schools, but the educational value of those schools may differ substantially. One may have stronger infrastructure, more experienced teachers, higher parental involvement, greater access to extracurricular activities, and stronger institutional networks, while the other may operate under more constrained conditions. In such a situation, equal treatment according to distance does not compensate for unequal educational environments. This distinction is consistent with the spatial-justice literature, which emphasizes that the organization of physical space reflects broader distributions of social and economic power (Stewart et al. 2021). The policy question therefore shifts from “How close is the school?” to “What kind of educational opportunity does proximity provide?”

The problem is especially important because geographical distance is not an objective measure of accessibility in isolation. A 3,000-meter radius, for instance, defines a spatial relationship mathematically, but students experience accessibility through streets, sidewalks, public transportation, traffic, physical barriers, and household resources. The Jakarta study by Sari et al. (2022) demonstrates that school accessibility differs according to whether it is calculated through a simple radius or a road-network approach, indicating that formal zoning boundaries can produce different understandings of who is actually within reach of a school.

This finding has direct analytical relevance for Bandung. A residential admission system based on administrative distance can potentially underestimate the mobility burdens experienced by students in neighborhoods with poor transport connections. Consequently, residential justice requires that policymakers distinguish between geometric proximity and functional accessibility. The nearest school is not necessarily the most accessible school, and a school that is accessible is not necessarily a school that provides equivalent educational quality.

Residential Segregation and the Reproduction of School Inequality

The second issue concerns the possibility that residential admission reproduces existing social segregation. School zoning policies implicitly assume that residential proximity provides an acceptable basis for distributing students. Yet residential neighborhoods themselves are structured by housing markets and socioeconomic inequality. Higher-income households generally possess greater capacity to choose where they live, while lower-income households often have fewer residential options. Consequently, if school admission follows residence too closely, families' unequal residential opportunities can be transformed into unequal educational opportunities. This does not mean that residential admission necessarily increases segregation; rather, it means that its distributive effects depend partly on the existing social geography of the city. In areas where socioeconomic groups are strongly segregated, residential admission may stabilize that segregation by producing school populations that closely mirror neighborhood composition.

International evidence demonstrates that admission mechanisms can interact with residential patterns in ways that are not immediately visible from administrative data. Brandñn and Bygren (2022) show that local school-choice opportunities can affect segregation according to parental education and migration background, while Tapia (2023) demonstrates that school priority rules can shape ethnic segregation. Greaves (2024) further shows that school choice can produce segregation depending on the institutional structure within which families make decisions. The broader implication is that school allocation mechanisms cannot be evaluated independently from the opportunity structures surrounding families. A rule that appears neutral may generate unequal consequences because households possess different resources for responding to that rule.

Socioeconomic resources matter particularly when families attempt to avoid schools perceived as lower quality. Jheng et al. (2022), in a systematic review and meta-analysis, conclude that family socioeconomic status significantly influences the ability to make advantageous school choices. Higher-SES families are more capable of obtaining information, evaluating alternatives, managing transportation, and, in some contexts, relocating to neighborhoods associated with desirable schools. This suggests that residential admission may constrain some forms of school choice while leaving other forms of socioeconomic adaptation intact. Families with greater resources can potentially respond to restrictive admission systems through residential mobility, private schooling, tutoring, transportation arrangements, or other educational investments. Less-resourced families, by contrast, are more likely to remain dependent on the public school available within their residential area. The policy may therefore appear equally restrictive while producing unequal consequences across social groups.

This mechanism is particularly relevant to the distinction between individual equality and structural equality. Residential admission may improve individual equality by preventing one student from using resources to travel across the city to obtain a preferred school. Yet structural inequality persists if some neighborhoods consistently contain stronger schools than others. In that situation, the admission system has redistributed access within an unequal structure without transforming the structure itself. Gazmuri (2024) provides an important comparative illustration: even when a reform attempts to reduce selective behavior in schools, socioeconomic segregation may persist because families themselves have different preferences and capacities, particularly regarding peer composition and perceived school quality. Residential justice therefore requires attention to both the rules governing admission and the unequal social environments in which those rules operate.

School Quality and the Paradox of “Proximity without Parity”

The third issue is the unequal quality of schools across residential areas. This is arguably the central limitation of a residence-oriented admission system because

the effectiveness of proximity depends on the assumption that students have access to schools of reasonably comparable quality. If school quality is highly differentiated, directing students to nearby schools may produce a paradox: the policy successfully brings students closer to schools while simultaneously limiting their access to higher-quality educational environments. This is what may be described as proximity without parity. The student is closer to school geographically, but not necessarily closer to educational opportunity in substantive terms. Indonesian research repeatedly identifies this issue. Chaniago et al. (2024) find that disparities in school quality remain a major obstacle to the effectiveness of zoning, while Zuliyantini, Nandang, and Sagita (2025) identify differences in facilities, capacity, and school quality as persistent implementation problems.

The concept of school reputation intensifies this problem. Public schools often acquire reputations through historical academic performance, university admission outcomes, teacher quality, facilities, peer composition, and parental networks. Even if admission rules reduce the formal advantage of these schools, reputational hierarchies may remain embedded in families' perceptions. Hidayat (2023) shows that zoning can alter the academic culture of schools traditionally perceived as "favorite," demonstrating that changing student admission rules can affect institutional identities as well as enrollment patterns. However, changing the composition of students does not automatically equalize institutional quality. Without parallel investments in teachers, infrastructure, leadership, learning resources, and student support, the policy risks asking families to accept unequal educational environments in the name of geographical equality.

The international literature reinforces the importance of quality as a determinant of school selection. Houston and Henig (2023) demonstrate that academic-performance information can shape school preferences and potentially contribute to segregation. Kafka (2022) similarly argues that parental assessments of school "fit" cannot be reduced to simple information availability because families interpret school characteristics through social networks, expectations, and cultural perceptions. These findings are important for Bandung because the existence of a residential priority rule does not eliminate families' perceptions of quality differences. If parents continue to believe that certain schools offer superior educational outcomes, competition may simply migrate from formal admission channels to other strategies. The policy may therefore suppress one form of school competition without resolving the underlying hierarchy that generates demand for particular schools.

The appropriate response is not necessarily to abandon residential admission but to connect admission reform with school-quality equalization. The government should progressively reduce differences in teacher distribution, infrastructure, learning resources, digital access, school leadership, student services, and instructional capacity among public schools. Such equalization is essential because the justice of an admission system cannot be separated from the quality of the institutions to which students are admitted. If students are compelled to attend their

nearest schools, the state assumes a stronger responsibility to ensure that those schools provide adequate and comparable educational opportunities. Residential admission without quality equalization transfers part of the burden of educational inequality from the admission market to the neighborhood.

Transportation and Information as Hidden Dimensions of Access

A fourth issue is the role of transportation. The policy language of residence can create the impression that geographical proximity automatically solves mobility problems, but actual educational accessibility depends on the transportation network connecting homes and schools. This distinction is particularly important in metropolitan environments where road congestion, limited sidewalks, inadequate public transportation, and physical barriers can substantially increase travel time. Miyauchi et al. (2022) demonstrate that school catchment areas can vary considerably when accessibility is evaluated using actual travel conditions rather than simple geographic distance. Research on transportation interventions further suggests that improvements in transport networks can expand access to schools and, under certain conditions, reduce school segregation by making a wider range of schools realistically accessible to students (Schoepfer et al. 2024).

The implication for Bandung is that transportation policy should be considered part of educational policy rather than an unrelated urban-service issue. Transportation also has a socioeconomic dimension. Affluent households can compensate for geographical disadvantage by using private vehicles, ride-hailing services, or other forms of paid mobility. Low-income households have fewer such options and may depend on walking or public transportation. Consequently, two students who live at the same distance from a school can experience fundamentally different levels of accessibility because their households possess different mobility resources. This observation reinforces the argument that residential justice cannot be achieved through distance criteria alone. The relevant policy objective should be to ensure that students from different socioeconomic backgrounds have comparable effective access to schools, not simply comparable calculated distance. Such an approach would encourage the integration of school admission policy with subsidized transportation, safer pedestrian infrastructure, and targeted mobility assistance for disadvantaged students.

Information constitutes another hidden dimension of access. Admission systems increasingly depend on digital platforms, electronic documentation, online registration, and complex combinations of admission pathways. Families differ in their digital literacy, familiarity with administrative procedures, access to reliable internet connections, and ability to interpret policy information. Indonesian studies have identified public misunderstanding, inadequate socialization, and technical difficulties as recurring problems in PPDB implementation (Wulandari et al. 2022; Prihatini, Bakuda, and Agung 2024; Mahmud et al. 2024).

A formally transparent system can therefore remain substantively unequal if some families have greater capacity to understand and navigate it. This issue suggests that SPMB should incorporate a broader conception of accessibility that includes geographical, informational, digital, and institutional accessibility. Admission platforms should provide clear information about school capacity, eligibility, geographical criteria, transportation options, and previous admission patterns. Public information should also be available through offline channels for families with limited digital access. Importantly, transparency should not merely mean publishing regulations; it should mean making the consequences of those regulations understandable to ordinary families. Residential justice is weakened when the formal rules are equal but the ability to navigate them is unequal.

From Residential Allocation to a Multidimensional Model of Educational Justice

The preceding discussion indicates that the central policy challenge is not whether SPMB should retain residential criteria, but how residential criteria should be embedded within a broader framework of educational justice. The evidence suggests that geographical proximity has genuine equity benefits because it can reduce travel burdens, distribute students more broadly, and weaken excessive concentration in a small number of schools. At the same time, proximity can reproduce inequality when neighborhoods differ sharply in socioeconomic composition and school quality. The policy should therefore move from a single-dimensional proximity model toward a multidimensional residential-justice model in which geographical access constitutes one component of justice rather than its final objective.

Such a model should begin with school-quality equalization. The government should establish minimum quality standards that are meaningful not only in terms of physical facilities but also in teacher availability, instructional quality, school leadership, student support, learning resources, and educational outcomes. Funding formulas should recognize that schools serving disadvantaged communities may require greater rather than equal resources to achieve comparable opportunities. This approach would transform equality from “the same amount of resources” into “sufficient resources to produce comparable opportunities.” It would also reduce the risk that residential admission converts neighborhood inequality into institutional inequality.

Second, residential priority should be complemented by carefully targeted mobility mechanisms. Students should generally have access to nearby schools, but disadvantaged students should not be trapped within a low-quality local educational environment simply because of their address. Transportation-supported alternative access could be provided when local schools demonstrably lack capacity or quality. Recent modelling research suggests that strategic transportation

interventions can expand school-accessibility areas and potentially reduce segregation (Schoepfer et al. 2024).

In this model, transportation becomes an instrument of educational equalization rather than merely a logistical service. Third, the government should monitor the socioeconomic composition of schools as an explicit equity indicator. A successful SPMB system should not only produce an acceptable distribution of student numbers; it should also prevent extreme socioeconomic concentration across schools. This does not imply that every school must have an identical student composition, but significant and persistent concentration of disadvantaged students in particular institutions should trigger policy intervention. The international literature demonstrates that school-choice mechanisms can produce segregation even without explicit discriminatory preferences because households have unequal resources and preferences (Ukanwa, Jones, and Turner 2022; Brandĳn and Bygren 2022).

Monitoring socioeconomic composition would therefore allow policymakers to identify forms of inequality that are invisible when evaluation is restricted to distance and enrollment numbers. Finally, SPMB should be evaluated according to outcomes rather than administrative compliance. A policy may be implemented exactly according to its formal rules and nevertheless fail to achieve its substantive objectives. Evaluation should therefore consider at least five dimensions: actual travel time, school-quality differences, socioeconomic composition, family access to information, and students' opportunities to attend schools capable of providing quality education. This approach would allow Bandung's government to determine whether SPMB is genuinely reducing the relationship between residential location and educational opportunity. The most meaningful indicator of residential justice is ultimately not whether students attend nearby schools, but whether the educational consequences of where they live have become less unequal.

Conclusion

The implementation of the New Student Admission System in Bandung represents an important transformation in the governance of public-school access. By prioritizing residential proximity and organizing admission areas around the distribution of schools, prospective students, and institutional capacity, SPMB responds to legitimate concerns about geographical barriers, excessive competition, and unequal access to public education. Nevertheless, this article demonstrates that proximity should not be treated as synonymous with justice. A student can live close to a public school and still experience unequal educational opportunity if that school has weaker infrastructure, fewer qualified teachers, lower institutional capacity, less favorable transportation access, or a more disadvantaged socioeconomic environment than schools elsewhere in the city. The fundamental limitation of residence-based admission is therefore not that it prioritizes geography,

but that geography alone cannot resolve the inequalities embedded within the educational and residential structure of the city.

The concept of residential justice provides a more comprehensive basis for evaluating SPMB. From this perspective, the objective of admission reform should be to ensure that residential location does not systematically determine the quality of education available to students. Achieving that objective requires policies that extend beyond admission rules toward school-quality equalization, transportation accessibility, informational equity, and the monitoring of socioeconomic segregation. Residential priority can remain an important instrument because neighborhood-based education can reduce unnecessary travel and strengthen local educational communities; however, it must be accompanied by mechanisms that prevent students from being educationally constrained by the neighborhood in which they live. The Bandung case therefore suggests that the success of SPMB should ultimately be measured not by how many students attend the nearest school, but by whether the relationship between where students live and the quality of education they can obtain becomes progressively weaker. In that sense, the policy challenge is not simply to create a system in which every student can reach a school, but to construct an urban education system in which every residential location provides a credible pathway to quality education.

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