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Implementation of Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022 concerning the Aceh Education Council (MPA) with Discrepancy Evaluation Model (DEM) to Improve Education Quality in Aceh Province

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Abstract

Educational policy implementation in decentralized systems depends on whether regional institutions can translate formal mandates into operational governance. This study evaluated the implementation of Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022 concerning the Aceh Education Council (Majelis Pendidikan Aceh/MPA) using the Discrepancy Evaluation Model (DEM). A qualitative naturalistic inquiry involved internal MPA representatives and external educational stakeholders from the Aceh Education Agency, Aceh Dayah Education Agency, Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, district and municipal education councils, and related institutions. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis and were analyzed using the interactive qualitative model integrated with DEM comparison. The findings show that MPA has implemented its mandated functions in educational monitoring, policy recommendation, stakeholder coordination, and public participation. DEM identified a high discrepancy in Aceh-specific quality standards and moderate discrepancies in institutional governance, evidence-based monitoring, and stakeholder collaboration. Reported resource disparities and inconsistent coordination across regions further constrained implementation. The central issue is therefore not the absence of regulation but incomplete operationalization of the Qanun through institutional authority, contextual quality indicators, integrated education data, and follow-up mechanisms. The study implies that strengthening MPA should prioritize institutional capacity and evidence-based governance while remaining aligned with Aceh's distinctive educational context.

Keywords: Discrepancy Evaluation Model; Education Governance; Education Policy Implementation; Majelis Pendidikan Aceh; Quality Assurance

Introduction

Educational policy implementation remains a persistent challenge in decentralized education systems because formal mandates do not automatically translate into institutional practice. Implementation depends on institutional readiness, resource availability, stakeholder coordination, and the capacity of governance actors to sustain reform (Aldridge & McLure, 2024; Koh et al., 2023; McLure & Aldridge, 2023). In this context, collaborative governance is increasingly important because government agencies, educational institutions, communities, and professional networks jointly shape how policy is interpreted and enacted (Al-Thani, 2025;

Greany, 2022; Wullschleger et al., 2025). Accordingly, the central governance problem is not only whether a policy exists, but whether the institutions responsible for it can operationalize its mandates consistently and accountably.

The implementation of education policy represents a complex process influenced by political, institutional, social, and cultural factors. Previous studies have demonstrated that policy effectiveness depends heavily on implementation capacity, leadership commitment, coordination among institutions, availability of reliable data, and stakeholder engagement (Hofer et al., 2020; Prøitz et al., 2022; Rodrigues et al., 2025). Education reforms often fail not because policy objectives are inappropriate, but because insufficient attention is given to how policies are interpreted, operationalized, monitored, and adapted within specific contexts (Schildkamp, 2019; Skerritt et al., 2023; Tikkanen et al., 2020). Consequently, evaluation mechanisms become essential instruments for identifying discrepancies between policy expectations and actual practices, enabling governments and educational institutions to formulate evidence-based corrective strategies.

In decentralized education systems, the relationship between policy authority and implementation capacity becomes increasingly important. Decentralization provides opportunities for regions to develop educational policies that reflect local needs, cultural characteristics, and community aspirations; however, it also creates challenges related to institutional fragmentation, unequal resource distribution, accountability mechanisms, and coordination among government levels (Dewi, 2021; Green & Koebele, 2025; Tamtik & Colorado, 2022). Recent research highlights that regional education governance requires strong institutional arrangements, clear distribution of authority, and effective monitoring systems to ensure that educational policies generate sustainable impacts (Dewi, 2021; Saguin, 2019; Tamtik & Colorado, 2022). Thus, evaluating regional education institutions is critical for understanding whether policy frameworks are successfully transformed into effective governance practices.

The Indonesian education system provides an important context for examining these challenges because educational decentralization has produced diverse governance arrangements across provinces and districts. Although Indonesia has implemented various national quality assurance policies, including the National Education Standards (SNP), accreditation systems, and internal and external quality assurance mechanisms, disparities in educational quality remain evident across regions due to differences in infrastructure, teacher capacity, financial resources, and institutional governance (Alhapip et al., 2024; Arif et al., 2025; Sari, 2019). These conditions demonstrate that improving education quality requires contextualized governance approaches that consider regional characteristics rather than relying exclusively on standardized national policies.

Aceh represents a distinctive case within Indonesian education governance because of its special autonomy status and the integration of Islamic values and local wisdom into regional policy development. Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022 concerning the Aceh Education Council (Majelis Pendidikan Aceh/MPA) establishes MPA as a community-based and independent educational institution and a partner of the Aceh Government in policy formulation and recommendation. For the present evaluation, the principal regulatory standards are derived from Articles 6-9 of the Qanun (Government of Aceh, 2022), particularly the mandates related to comprehensive evaluation of education standards, policy recommendations, coordination and monitoring, and the strengthening of stakeholder and community participation. These provisions provide the normative baseline against which actual implementation conditions are compared. However, as emphasized in policy implementation research, formal authority does

not by itself ensure effective implementation because institutional capacity, resource availability, and coordination mechanisms shape how regulatory mandates are translated into practice (Fadhila et al., 2023; Fitriah, 2020; Irwandi et al., 2025).

To examine the gap between these regulatory expectations and actual practices, this study applies the Discrepancy Evaluation Model (DEM). Although DEM was originally developed for program evaluation (Provus, 1969), its standards-versus-performance logic is directly relevant to governance evaluation because it enables an explicit comparison between a formal regulatory baseline and observed institutional conditions. In this study, DEM is used as a complement to policy-implementation and governance perspectives: governance literature helps explain the actors, capacities, and coordination processes that shape implementation, whereas DEM provides a structured procedure for identifying where actual performance departs from mandated standards. Recent applications of discrepancy-based evaluation have demonstrated its usefulness for examining educational programs, institutional performance, curriculum implementation, and quality assurance (Divayana et al., 2021, 2022; Suyasa & Divayana, 2021). However, these applications have largely remained at program or school level, leaving the use of DEM for evaluating a regional policy-intermediary institution comparatively underexplored.

Furthermore, previous studies on education governance have primarily examined national policy implementation, school leadership, accreditation systems, and quality assurance mechanisms, while empirical investigation of regional education councils as policy intermediaries remains limited (Green & Koebele, 2025; Nicholson & Wilkins, 2025; Wirandana & Khoirunurrofik, 2024). Particularly in contexts where education policies are strongly influenced by local culture, religious values, and regional autonomy, there is insufficient understanding of how institutional actors negotiate regulatory mandates, stakeholder expectations, and practical implementation challenges. Therefore, examining the implementation of Qanun Aceh Number 7 of 2022 provides an opportunity to extend existing discussions on educational governance by demonstrating how policy evaluation frameworks can be used to analyze institutional effectiveness within a decentralized and culturally distinctive education system.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to evaluate the implementation of Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022 concerning the Aceh Education Council using the Discrepancy Evaluation Model. The analysis is guided by two questions: to what extent has MPA implemented its mandated governance functions, and what discrepancies remain between the regulatory standards established in the Qanun and the actual implementation conditions? Strategic recommendations are treated as implications derived from the identified discrepancies rather than as a separate empirical objective. By integrating regional education-governance analysis with discrepancy-based evaluation, the study seeks to clarify how a regional education council operates between formal policy mandates and practical implementation conditions in a decentralized and culturally distinctive education system.

Method

Research Design and Evaluation Framework

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a naturalistic inquiry design to examine the implementation of Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022 concerning the Aceh Education Council (Majelis Pendidikan Aceh/MPA) and the discrepancies between regulatory expectations and actual implementation practices. The unit of analysis was the implementation of MPA's institutional mandate under the Qanun, rather than the individual participants themselves. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on institutional processes,

stakeholder perspectives, organizational practices, and contextual factors influencing policy implementation in a real-world governance setting (Ann Cutler et al., 2021; Gunnulfsen, 2021; McCloat & Caraher, 2020). Naturalistic inquiry was therefore used to interpret how the mandate was experienced and enacted, while DEM supplied the criterion-referenced structure for comparing those interpreted conditions with the regulatory standards.

The analytical framework of this study was based on the Discrepancy Evaluation Model (DEM) developed by Malcolm M. Provus. DEM was selected because it provides a systematic framework for evaluating the alignment between predetermined standards and actual implementation conditions. In this research, DEM was utilized to examine the extent to which the implementation of Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022 corresponded with its intended objectives, particularly regarding institutional roles, educational quality assurance, monitoring mechanisms, coordination practices, and stakeholder participation. The model enabled the researchers to identify discrepancies between the normative standards established in the regulation (*das sollen*) and the empirical conditions found during the implementation process (*das sein*), followed by the formulation of strategic recommendations for institutional improvement.

The integration of qualitative inquiry and DEM provided a comprehensive analytical perspective by allowing the study to investigate not only the existence of implementation gaps but also the underlying causes, institutional consequences, and potential solutions for strengthening education governance. The analytical framework was developed by integrating data collection procedures, qualitative analysis processes, and discrepancy evaluation stages, as presented in Figure 1.

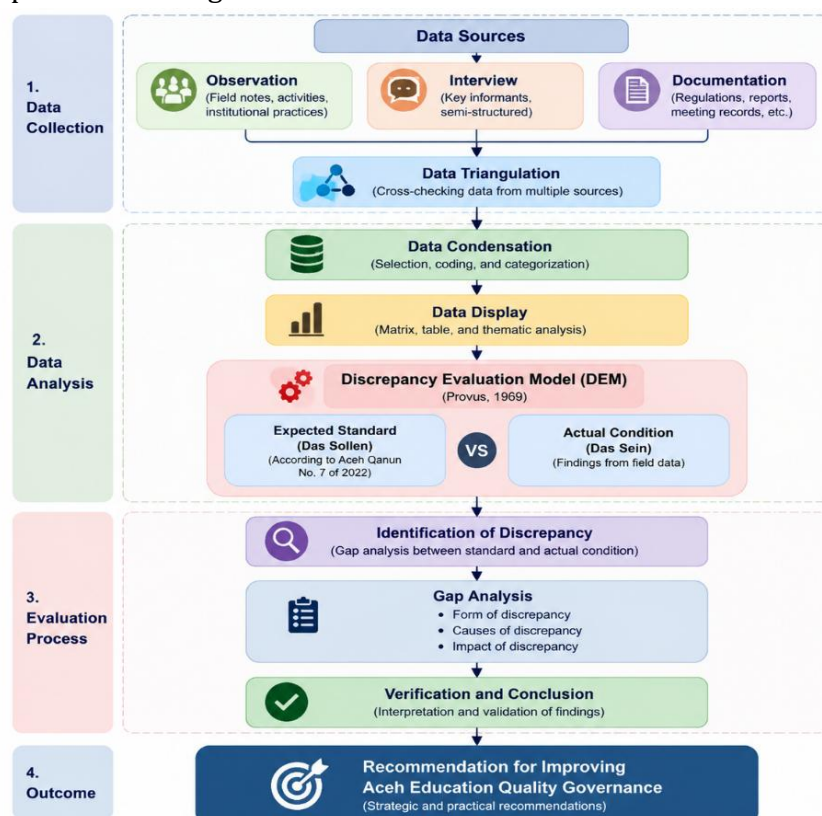


Fig. 1 Research Procedure and Data Analysis Framework Based on the Discrepancy Evaluation Model

Research Setting and Participants

This research was conducted at the Secretariat of the Aceh Education Council (MPA), Banda

Aceh, Indonesia. The research setting was selected because MPA represents a strategic educational governance institution established through Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022 with responsibilities related to educational policy recommendations, monitoring, evaluation, coordination, and public participation. Therefore, MPA provides an appropriate context for examining how regional educational policies are translated into institutional practices aimed at improving education quality.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria already central to the study: their institutional position, relevant professional expertise, and direct involvement in the implementation or oversight of education policy associated with MPA. This sampling strategy was appropriate because the study required information-rich participants with first-hand knowledge of the institutional mandate and its implementation. Participant adequacy was considered in relation to the breadth of institutional perspectives represented across internal and external stakeholder groups.

The participants consisted of internal and external educational stakeholders. Internal participants included representatives of the Aceh Education Council, including leadership members, secretariat representatives, and relevant commissions responsible for educational monitoring and evaluation. External participants included representatives from the Aceh Education Agency, Aceh Dayah Education Agency, Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Aceh, district and municipal Education Councils (MPD/MPK), and other stakeholders involved in educational governance processes. The involvement of multiple stakeholder groups enabled the researchers to capture diverse perspectives regarding the relationship between regulatory expectations and actual implementation practices.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and document analysis. The use of multiple data collection techniques was intended to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation process and strengthen the credibility of findings through methodological triangulation.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants using an interview protocol developed based on the research objectives and the dimensions of the Discrepancy Evaluation Model. The interviews explored participants' perspectives regarding the implementation of Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022, institutional authority, coordination mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation practices, stakeholder involvement, educational quality challenges, and responses toward identified implementation gaps. The semi-structured format allowed researchers to maintain consistency across interviews while providing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences and interpretations.

Observation was conducted to examine institutional practices, coordination patterns, and organizational activities associated with MPA's educational governance functions. The observation process focused on institutional interactions, monitoring activities, communication mechanisms, and practical implementation of educational quality assurance responsibilities. Field notes were systematically recorded to document relevant contextual information and support the interpretation of interview findings.

Document analysis was conducted to complement and validate information obtained from interviews and observations. The analyzed documents included Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022, institutional reports, meeting records, policy recommendations, educational evaluation documents, and other relevant administrative materials. These documents were examined to identify the consistency between formal regulatory expectations and actual implementation conditions.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed the interactive analytical model proposed by M. B. Miles et al. (2018), which involves continuous interaction between data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process began during data collection and continued throughout the interpretation stage to ensure that emerging findings were consistently connected with empirical evidence.

Data condensation involved selecting, coding, categorizing, and organizing relevant information obtained from interview transcripts, observation records, and documentary sources. The coding process was directed toward identifying major themes related to institutional capacity, policy implementation, governance mechanisms, quality assurance practices, and factors influencing implementation effectiveness.

Following data condensation, the researchers organized the findings through thematic matrices to identify relationships, patterns, and differences across interviews, observations, and documents. The themes were then compared with the expected standards derived from Articles 6-9 of Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022. For transparency, the discrepancy levels reported in Table 2 were treated as qualitative categories: 'Moderate' indicates that the mandated function or standard was present but only partially operationalized, whereas 'High' indicates that the expected standard was substantially absent or had not yet been institutionalized. These categories summarize the relative extent of the gap between the regulatory standard and the triangulated empirical condition rather than representing statistical scores. The classifications were checked against the thematic matrices before final interpretation.

The discrepancy analysis focused on understanding the differences between regulatory expectations and practical implementation, the factors contributing to these gaps, their implications for educational governance, and possible strategies for improvement. Through this process, the findings were synthesized to explain how institutional capacity, coordination mechanisms, stakeholder participation, and evaluation practices influenced the effectiveness of MPA implementation in improving education quality in Aceh.

The final stage of analysis involved verification and interpretation of conclusions by repeatedly examining the consistency between empirical evidence, theoretical perspectives, and the DEM framework. This process ensured that the conclusions represented a rigorous interpretation of the implementation challenges and opportunities associated with Aceh education governance.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Credibility was supported through methodological and source triangulation by comparing evidence from semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and documentary materials. Interpretations were repeatedly checked against the available evidence during the analysis so that claims reflected the institutional conditions represented in more than one data source where possible.

Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, institutional characteristics, participants, and implementation conditions. Such contextual descriptions allow readers and researchers to assess the relevance of the findings for other educational governance contexts with similar characteristics.

Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of the research procedures, including participant selection, data collection processes, analytical decisions, and interpretation stages. Confirmability was ensured by maintaining an analytical record that demonstrated how findings were derived from empirical evidence rather than researcher assumptions.

Through these methodological procedures, this study provides a rigorous evaluation of the implementation of Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022 and offers evidence-based insights into strengthening regional education governance through institutional evaluation and continuous quality improvement mechanisms.

Results

Institutional Implementation of Aceh Education Council under Qanun Aceh Number 7 of 2022

The implementation of Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022 demonstrates that the establishment of the Aceh Education Council (*Majelis Pendidikan Aceh*/MPA) represents an institutional effort to strengthen education governance through monitoring, evaluation, policy recommendation, and stakeholder participation mechanisms. Based on interview findings, observations, and document analysis, MPA has performed several functions mandated by the regulation, particularly related to educational monitoring, coordination with educational stakeholders, and the formulation of recommendations for improving education quality.

The empirical findings indicate that MPA has positioned itself as an educational governance institution that does not directly execute technical education programs but functions as an advisory, monitoring, and coordinating body. The institution facilitates communication between government agencies, educational institutions, academics, and communities to identify educational problems and formulate improvement strategies. This finding indicates that the role of MPA corresponds with the concept of collaborative educational governance, where quality improvement depends on interaction among multiple stakeholders rather than relying solely on governmental authority.

However, the findings also reveal that the implementation of MPA's institutional mandate has not been fully optimized. Although the regulatory framework provides broad authority for monitoring and evaluation, several operational limitations remain, particularly regarding institutional continuity, coordination mechanisms, and the availability of supporting systems for evidence-based decision-making.

The comparison between the expected functions of MPA based on Qanun Aceh Number 7 of 2022 and the actual implementation conditions is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison between Regulatory Expectations and Actual Implementation of MPA Functions

Institutional Function	Expected Condition (Qanun Aceh No. 7/2022)	Actual Implementation Condition	Identified Gap
Educational monitoring	MPA conducts systematic monitoring of education quality	Monitoring activities are conducted through visits, discussions, and forums	Monitoring mechanisms are not yet fully supported by integrated quality data
Policy recommendation	MPA provides strategic recommendations to Aceh Government	Recommendations have been produced through meetings and evaluations	Follow-up mechanisms for recommendations remain limited
Coordination	MPA strengthens collaboration among education stakeholders	Collaboration exists with education agencies and communities	Coordination intensity varies across regions
Public participation	MPA facilitates community involvement in education improvement	Community engagement occurs through discussions and consultations	Participation has not been evenly distributed

Table 1 shows that the principal discrepancy does not lie in the absence of a regulatory framework, but in the operationalization of the mandated functions. The expected conditions are anchored in Articles 6-9 of Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022, while the actual-condition statements synthesize the interview, observation, and documentary evidence used in the study. Overall, the Qanun provides a broad institutional mandate, but the translation of that mandate into quality-

assurance practice remains influenced by institutional capacity, resource availability, and coordination effectiveness.

Discrepancy Analysis between Regulatory Standards and Actual Implementation Conditions

The DEM analysis identified several discrepancies between the ideal conditions established in Qanun Aceh Number 7 of 2022 and the actual implementation practices observed in the field. The discrepancy primarily occurred in four dimensions: institutional structure, educational quality standards, resource distribution, and governance mechanisms.

The first discrepancy concerns institutional structure and authority implementation. Although Qanun Aceh Number 7 of 2022 strengthens MPA's position as an educational advisory institution, the implementation of the new institutional structure has not been fully realized. The findings indicate that the transition toward the new organizational structure requires stronger institutional consolidation, particularly regarding leadership continuity and operational authority.

The second discrepancy relates to the absence of comprehensive education standards that specifically reflect Aceh's educational characteristics. The findings show that educational quality measurement remains predominantly based on National Education Standards (Standar Nasional Pendidikan/SNP). Although Aceh has initiated efforts to develop education models reflecting Islamic values and local characteristics, particularly through the Dayah curriculum policy, a comprehensive Aceh-specific education standard has not yet been fully established.

The third discrepancy concerns disparities in educational resources. Stakeholder accounts and the reviewed institutional materials indicated reported differences in infrastructure availability, teacher distribution, educational funding, digital access, and learning facilities between urban, rural, and disadvantaged areas. These findings should therefore be interpreted as evidence reported through the institutional stakeholder and documentary sources included in this study, rather than as a province-wide census of all schools. Within that evidentiary scope, the reported disparities were understood as constraints on the ability of educational institutions to achieve comparable quality standards.

The fourth discrepancy relates to governance coordination. Although MPA has developed collaborative relationships with government agencies, educational institutions, and communities, coordination mechanisms between provincial and district educational councils remain inconsistent. The DEM-based discrepancy mapping is summarized in Figure 2.

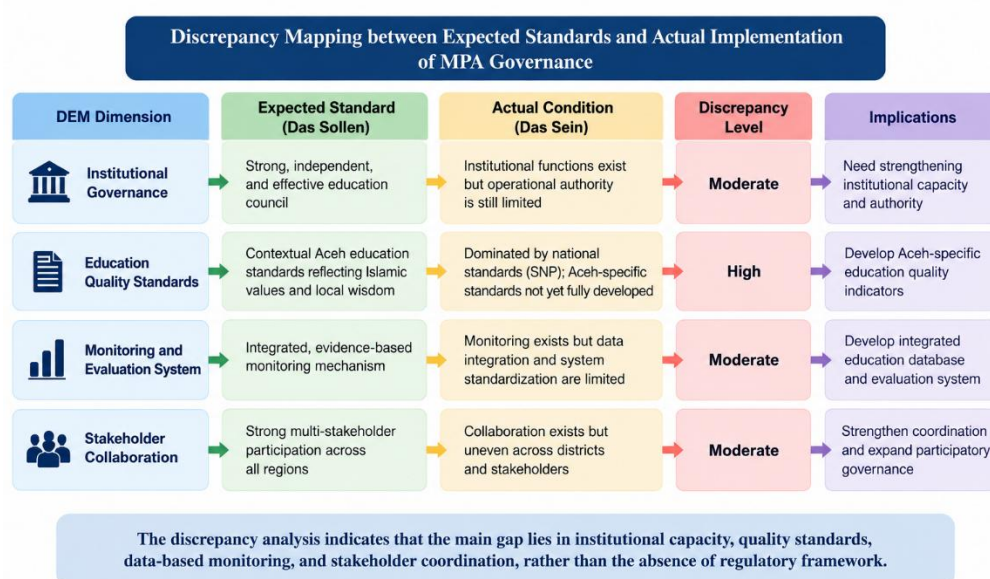


Fig. 2 Discrepancy Mapping between Expected Standards and Actual Implementation of MPA Governance

Figure 2 illustrates that the implementation gap is not caused by the absence of policy regulations but by differences between institutional expectations and operational capacity. The findings indicate that strengthening MPA requires improvements in institutional capacity, data-based monitoring systems, coordination mechanisms, and policy implementation strategies. The overall discrepancy analysis is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Discrepancy Evaluation Matrix of Aceh Education Council Implementation

DEM Dimension	Expected Standard	Actual Condition	Discrepancy Level	Required Improvement
Institutional governance	Strong and independent education council	Institutional functions exist but operational authority remains limited	Moderate	Strengthening institutional capacity
Quality standards	Contextual Aceh education standards	Dominated by national standards	High	Development of Aceh-specific quality indicators
Monitoring system	Evidence-based evaluation mechanism	Monitoring exists but data integration is limited	Moderate	Development of integrated education database
Stakeholder collaboration	Strong multi-stakeholder participation	Collaboration exists but uneven across regions	Moderate	Expanding participatory governance

Institutional Strengths and Challenges of MPA in Strengthening Education Quality Governance

The findings reveal that MPA possesses several institutional strengths that support its role in improving education quality. The main strengths include regulatory legitimacy, academic expertise among members, collaborative networks, and the ability to provide policy recommendations based on educational issues identified from field observations.

The involvement of academics and education practitioners within MPA contributes to strengthening evidence-based educational evaluation. Furthermore, collaboration with government institutions, religious education authorities, and community representatives provides opportunities for developing a more inclusive education governance system.

Nevertheless, several challenges limit the effectiveness of MPA. The findings indicate that institutional dependency on government support, limited authority in enforcing recommendations, and variations in coordination with district-level education councils remain important challenges. These conditions demonstrate that regulatory legitimacy alone is insufficient to guarantee institutional effectiveness without adequate organizational capacity and implementation mechanisms. The relationship between institutional strengths and challenges is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Institutional Strengths and Challenges of MPA

Strengths	Challenges
Strong legal foundation through Qanun Aceh No.7/2022	Limited authority to enforce recommendations
Academic capacity of members	Dependence on government support and funding
Collaborative relationship with stakeholders	Unequal coordination across districts
Monitoring and evaluation experience	Limited integrated education data system
Public participation mechanism	Inconsistent implementation follow-up

Synthesis of DEM-Based Evaluation Findings

The synthesis of findings demonstrates that MPA has successfully established an institutional mechanism for educational monitoring and policy recommendation; however, its contribution to education quality improvement remains constrained by implementation gaps. The DEM analysis

confirms that the main challenge of MPA is not related to policy absence but rather to the distance between regulatory expectations and institutional realities.

The findings indicate that improving MPA effectiveness requires strengthening institutional autonomy, developing contextual education quality indicators, improving evidence-based monitoring systems, and ensuring stronger collaboration between provincial and district education stakeholders. The final synthesis of DEM evaluation is illustrated in Figure 3.

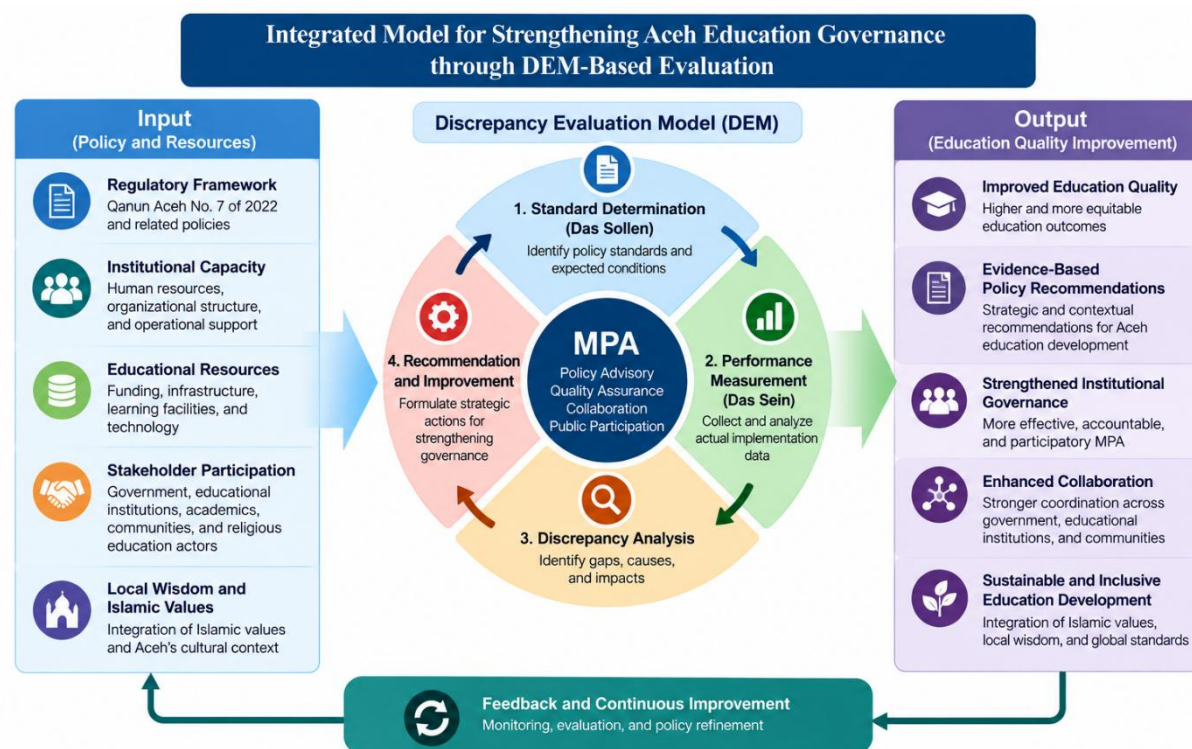


Fig. 3 Integrated Model for Strengthening Aceh Education Governance through DEM-Based Evaluation

Figure 3 demonstrates that sustainable education quality improvement requires alignment between regulatory standards, institutional capacity, implementation mechanisms, and stakeholder collaboration. Through DEM-based evaluation, MPA can function not only as a monitoring institution but also as a strategic driver for continuous improvement of education governance in Aceh.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the principal implementation problem surrounding Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022 is not regulatory absence but the incomplete conversion of formal authority into consistent governance practice. MPA has established recognizable functions in educational monitoring, policy recommendation, stakeholder coordination, and public participation, yet these functions remain unevenly institutionalized. Monitoring continues without a fully integrated quality-data infrastructure; recommendations are generated but their follow-up remains limited; collaboration with government agencies and communities exists but varies across districts; and participation has not been evenly distributed. The DEM analysis sharpens this pattern: Aceh-specific quality standards constitute the most substantial gap, whereas institutional governance, monitoring, and stakeholder collaboration show moderate discrepancies. Resource inequalities involving infrastructure, teacher distribution, funding, digital access, and learning facilities further form part of the implementation environment, although the present evidence does not establish their province-wide prevalence. Taken together, these results suggest that regulatory legitimacy provides MPA with a basis for action,

but the quality of implementation depends on whether institutional authority, information systems, coordination mechanisms, and contextually meaningful standards can operate as an integrated governance architecture.

This interpretation is strongly aligned with recent international research on educational policy implementation. Reform scholarship increasingly distinguishes policy adoption from policy enactment, showing that formal mandates can coexist with partial, heterogeneous, or locally negotiated implementation (Aldridge & McLure, 2024; McLure & Aldridge, 2023; Pham et al., 2025). Pham et al. (2025), for example, found that school-based management reforms in Vietnam produced formally established governance structures while substantive decision-making autonomy remained incomplete and stakeholder participation was uneven. This is strikingly similar to the Aceh case, where MPA possesses formal legitimacy yet cannot independently guarantee the implementation of its recommendations. International research on policy intermediaries further explains this institutional position. Caves and Oswald-Egg (2023) conceptualize intermediaries as network actors whose influence depends on their ability to broker relationships across organizations, while Trinidad (2025) shows that patterns of interorganizational coupling influence the speed, consistency, and constraints of education-policy adoption. MPA therefore appears less as a conventional executive agency than as a regional policy intermediary operating between regulatory authority, government agencies, district institutions, educational providers, and communities. This intermediary location broadens its potential influence but simultaneously makes implementation dependent on actors over whom it has limited direct authority.

The findings on monitoring and data integration likewise resonate with global evidence on evidence-informed educational governance. The present study found that monitoring occurs through visits, discussions, forums, and institutional evaluation, but the monitoring system remains only partially supported by integrated education-quality data. Ansyari et al. (2020) argue that data use produces improvement only when data are connected to systematic processes of interpretation, capacity development, decision-making, and subsequent action. Similarly, He et al. (2020) demonstrate that productive educational data use depends on organizational routines and sustained research-practice relationships rather than data availability alone. Adie et al. (2020) provide an important caution: making data visible does not necessarily translate into improvement when mechanisms for analysis, action, and evaluation are weak. More recently, Decabooter et al. (2024) found that data-based decision-making requires human support, flexible coaching, and collaborative professional structures. These studies clarify the significance of MPA's monitoring discrepancy. The problem is not simply the absence of a database; it is the absence of an integrated data-to-decision-to-follow-up cycle capable of converting monitoring information into traceable governance action. Consequently, establishing a digital education database without institutional routines for interpretation and follow-up would be unlikely to resolve the discrepancy by itself.

Stakeholder collaboration presents a similar distinction between formal participation and substantive governance. MPA already collaborates with the Aceh Education Agency, Dayah Education Agency, Ministry of Religious Affairs, district and municipal education councils, educational institutions, academics, and communities, yet the study found unequal coordination and inconsistent participation across regions. Recent governance scholarship suggests that this pattern is common in decentralized educational systems. Gerrard and Savage (2023) show that formal structures for citizen involvement can create the appearance of participation while leaving unresolved questions about who actually possesses decision authority and whose participation is meaningful. Blackmore et al. (2023) likewise demonstrate that autonomy and school-council reforms may produce tensions between representation, expertise, accountability, and genuine participatory parity. Ødegaard and

Gunnulfsen (2024) identify comparable tensions in reform partnerships, where collaborative arrangements may be formally promoted while the power to define priorities remains unevenly distributed. The Aceh findings therefore suggest that MPA should not equate the number of stakeholder forums or participating organizations with participatory governance. Stronger collaboration requires explicit responsibilities, recurring intergovernmental routines, transparent follow-up, feedback to participating groups, and mechanisms through which participation can meaningfully influence policy recommendations.

The high discrepancy in Aceh-specific quality standards is arguably the study's most consequential contextual finding. Although education quality continues to be evaluated predominantly through National Education Standards, Aceh's special-autonomy framework creates legitimate expectations that Islamic values, local knowledge, Dayah education, and regional social conditions should also inform quality interpretation. The challenge is not to replace national standards with an entirely separate Acehnese system, but to determine which locally relevant dimensions should complement nationally comparable indicators. Indonesian decentralization research supports this balance. Dewi (2021) shows that decentralization creates opportunities for local adaptation while outcomes remain dependent on implementation conditions, whereas Arif et al. (2025) demonstrate that bureaucratic capacity and local political arrangements influence whether decentralization produces learning-enhancing policies. Alhapip et al. (2024) similarly emphasize the importance of local-government capability in translating national education reform into regional implementation. Within Aceh itself, Ramli et al. (2025) highlight the educational relevance of local knowledge, while the present study shows that this contextual distinctiveness has not yet been fully translated into a comprehensive quality-assurance framework. Thus, contextualization should be understood as supplementary differentiation within national accountability, not as a retreat from comparability or evidence-based standards.

The findings also refine the role of MPA as an intermediary within an increasingly networked and data-intensive educational governance system. Contemporary studies show that intermediaries do not merely transmit policy but actively broker relationships, knowledge, technologies, and institutional priorities (Nichols & Dixon-Román, 2024; Caves & Oswald-Egg, 2023; Trinidad, 2025). Nichols and Dixon-Román (2024), in particular, demonstrate that digital platforms themselves increasingly become governance intermediaries because they shape how educational actors collect, process, interpret, and act upon data. This is relevant to MPA because the proposed integrated education database should not be conceptualized as a neutral technical instrument. Decisions about indicators, interoperability, access, data ownership, reporting, and interpretation determine what becomes visible to decision makers and which educational conditions remain invisible. The present findings therefore support digital integration, but they also imply that data governance requires clear standards, institutional accountability, human analytical capacity, and attention to the distinctive educational structure of Aceh.

The Indonesian evidence further reinforces the finding that formal regulation cannot substitute for implementation capability. Rokhman et al. (2024), from the requested author profile, found that strengthening educational supervision required a structured management model and explicit development of supervisors' competencies rather than reliance on the formal existence of supervision itself. Although focused on academic supervision rather than regional policy governance, the mechanism is relevant: institutional mandates become consequential only when actors possess operational competencies and procedures through which the mandate can be enacted. A comparable point appears in recent JPI research on competency-oriented school policy, which stresses alignment between formal policy, institutional management, and expected educational quality rather than

policy formulation alone (Siryani, 2025). In this sense, the Aceh case is not primarily an example of policy failure. It represents partial institutionalization: MPA possesses a legal foundation, professional expertise, collaborative networks, monitoring experience, and mechanisms for public engagement, while enforcement authority, integrated data, cross-district coordination, and systematic implementation follow-up remain comparatively weaker.

Theoretically, the findings extend the Discrepancy Evaluation Model beyond conventional program-level evaluation by demonstrating that its standards-versus-performance logic can identify where policy authority loses operational coherence within a regional governance system; DEM is therefore most analytically useful when combined with policy-implementation and intermediary-governance theory rather than treated as a self-sufficient explanatory theory. This refinement shifts attention from merely detecting gaps toward explaining why they persist through differences in authority, data infrastructure, interorganizational dependency, and regional capacity. Pedagogically, the evidence suggests that MPA's quality-assurance role should connect governance monitoring more directly with conditions that affect teaching and learning, including teacher distribution, professional support, infrastructure, digital access, Dayah and school contexts, and locally meaningful quality indicators. However, the study did not measure student engagement, emotional well-being, media literacy, online behavior, or identity formation; claims concerning those outcomes would therefore be unsupported. Policy-wise, Aceh should prioritize clearer operational authority for MPA, an interoperable and ethically governed education-data system, formal mechanisms for responding to recommendations, consistent provincial–district coordination, and an Aceh quality-indicator framework that complements rather than replaces national standards. Such reforms should be accompanied by explicit accountability for whether monitoring evidence actually leads to corrective action.

The principal novelty of this study lies in applying DEM to a regional education-governance intermediary within Indonesia's special-autonomy system rather than to a curriculum, instructional program, or individual school. Previous discrepancy-based studies have primarily used the model to identify differences between expected and observed program implementation (Divayana et al., 2021, 2022; Suyasa & Divayana, 2021), whereas the present study maps discrepancies between a legally established regional mandate and the institutional conditions through which that mandate is enacted. This application produces a more differentiated account of policy implementation: one dimension can exhibit a high discrepancy while others remain moderate, thereby avoiding a binary judgment of “implemented” versus “not implemented.” More importantly, the study positions MPA as an intermediary whose effectiveness depends simultaneously on regulatory legitimacy, operational authority, knowledge and data systems, coordination networks, stakeholder participation, and contextual quality criteria. In doing so, it connects evaluation theory, decentralized education governance, evidence-informed decision-making, and Aceh's distinctive Islamic and special-autonomy context within one analytical framework.

The conclusions remain bounded by the qualitative naturalistic design and by the institutional level of analysis. The study represents a specific regional-governance setting and therefore does not demonstrate that equivalent discrepancy patterns exist in other Indonesian provinces or autonomous regions. Although multiple internal and external stakeholders were included, students, parents, classroom teachers, and wider local communities were not represented to the same depth; consequently, the findings privilege governance-level perspectives. Moreover, the categories “moderate” and “high” are qualitative discrepancy classifications rather than statistically estimated scores, and the study did not measure whether MPA activities changed school performance or student outcomes. Future research should therefore compare MPA with analogous regional

institutions, incorporate school- and community-level stakeholders, construct measurable indicators for each DEM dimension, and use longitudinal mixed-method or comparative designs to examine whether improvements in institutional authority, data integration, coordination, and contextual quality standards are followed by observable changes in education quality. Network analysis could additionally map intergovernmental relationships, while implementation studies could trace specific MPA recommendations from formulation through governmental response to school-level enactment.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2022 has provided a formal institutional basis for MPA to perform monitoring, policy-recommendation, coordination, and public-participation functions, but important discrepancies remain between the regulatory standards and their operational implementation. DEM identified a high discrepancy in the availability of Aceh-specific quality standards and moderate discrepancies in institutional governance, evidence-based monitoring, and stakeholder collaboration. The study therefore locates the principal implementation problem in the translation of formal authority into consistent institutional practice rather than in the absence of regulation itself. Theoretically, the study extends the use of DEM from conventional program evaluation to the analysis of a regional education governance institution; practically, it identifies institutional authority, integrated quality data, contextual indicators, and intergovernmental coordination as priority areas for strengthening MPA's governance functions. Because educational outcomes were not directly measured, these findings should be interpreted as evidence about governance implementation and its potential quality implications rather than as proof that MPA has already improved educational quality.

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