

# **EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN A DECENTRALIZED EDUCATION SYSTEM: A CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN GERMANY**

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze educational governance and policy implementation in public schools within the framework of state decentralization in Germany. The decentralized education system provides high autonomy for public schools in managing resources, curriculum, and teaching and learning processes, but also presents challenges related to uniform standards and equity in education quality. The research method used is a case study with a qualitative approach, involving analysis of policy documents, interviews with principals, teachers, and school boards, and observations of school management and learning practices. The results show that decentralization encourages flexibility, innovation, and multi-actor participation in school governance, which have a positive impact on the effectiveness of policy implementation. Key supporting factors include principal leadership capacity, teacher and community participation, and clear policy guidelines, while inhibiting factors include limited resources, policy variation across Länder, and coordination challenges between actors. This study concludes that decentralization can improve the quality of education governance and services if supported by effective leadership, good coordination, and equitable distribution of resources. These findings provide important implications for policymakers and school administrators in improving education quality in decentralized systems.

**Keywords:**Educational Governance, Implementation of Educational Policy, Decentralization, German Education System and Quality of Educational Services

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is a strategic sector in human resource development and the progress of a nation. The quality of education is largely determined by the effectiveness of governance and the implementation of policies governing the education system. In the context of a country with a federal system of government like Germany, education management is carried out within a strong decentralized framework, with primary authority vested in the state governments (Länder). Each Land has the authority to formulate curricula, evaluation standards, manage schools, and develop teaching staff. This model allows for policy flexibility tailored to local social, cultural, and developmental characteristics.

The decentralization of education in Germany essentially aims to improve governance efficiency, strengthen school autonomy, and encourage local stakeholder participation in educational decision-making. As public institutions, public schools are key actors in translating education policies established by Land governments into daily learning practices. Principals, teachers, and school boards play strategic roles in managing resources, implementing curricula, and ensuring the quality of educational services in accordance with applicable regulations. However, implementing education policies in a decentralized system is not without challenges. Differences in policies between Lands have the potential to create disparities in education quality, assessment standards, and access to educational services between regions. At the public school level, regulatory complexity, limited managerial capacity, and varying administrative and financial support can impact the effectiveness of school governance. Furthermore, demands for public accountability and

transparency in education management are increasing, along with public expectations for equitable quality education. In this context, the implementation of education policies often faces a dynamic between school autonomy and state government control. Schools are required to innovate and be responsive to student needs, while simultaneously complying with regionally established standards, curricula, and evaluation mechanisms. This lack of synchronization between policy objectives and implementation capacity at the school level can hinder the optimal achievement of educational goals.

**Table 1.1 Education Statistics in Germany**

No	Educational Aspects	Main Data
1	Number of schools and students	±40,000 public and vocational schools with ±11 million students and ±798,000 teachers; ±5,800 private schools with ±1 million students (2021/2022)
2	Compulsory education and levels of education	Compulsory education lasts at least 9–10 years, starting from Grundschule to various secondary education paths that differ in each Land.
3	Decentralization of educational authority	Education policy is entirely under the authority of each state (Länder), including curriculum, school structure, and evaluation standards.
4	School autonomy and examination policies	There is no centralized national exam; graduation standards are determined by each Land, including variations in the duration of the Grundschule and secondary education pathways.
5	Challenges for educators	Shortage of ±14,000 teachers; estimated to increase to ±21,000 in 2025 and an imbalance of up to ±56,000 teachers in 2035
6	School dropout rate	Around 52,000 students dropped out of school in 2022; ±12.2% of youth aged 18–24 did not complete their education or training

Source: Deutschland Interactive

These statistics demonstrate that the German education system is large-scale and complex, with a significant number of schools and students. The existence of approximately 40,000 public and vocational schools serving approximately 11 million students underscores the importance of effective education governance, particularly at the public school level, which spearheads education policy implementation. In the context of this research, the sheer scale of the education system reinforces the relevance of the case study of public schools for understanding the dynamics of governance and decision-making at the institutional level. The implementation of 9–10 years of compulsory education, with varying levels of education structure across Lands, reflects the central character of Germany's decentralized education system. This variation demonstrates that the implementation of education policy is not uniform nationally but is heavily influenced by state policies. This provides an important foundation for research analyzing how education policy is formulated, translated, and implemented at the public school level within the framework of Länder authority.

The full authority of the federal states to manage education, including curriculum and evaluation standards, emphasizes the multi-level nature of education governance in Germany. Public schools occupy a strategic position as policy implementers, requiring a balance between institutional autonomy and compliance with federal regulations. This situation is relevant to the focus of this research, which examines the relationship between educational governance and the effectiveness of policy implementation in a decentralized system. The absence of centralized national exams further demonstrates the level of autonomy of education policy in Germany. Graduation standards set by each Federal State have the potential to create variations in educational quality and outcomes across regions. In the context of this research, this situation serves as an important indicator for assessing how regional policy differences influence public school governance practices and educational outcomes.

On the other hand, data on teacher shortages indicate serious challenges in the implementation of education policy. The projected teacher shortage will increase until 2035 and could directly impact the quality of learning and the effectiveness of school management. This indicates that decentralization of authority is not always accompanied by adequate resource capacity at the school level, thus constraining education governance. Furthermore, high dropout rates and the percentage of young people who do not complete their education or training indicate challenges to equity and inclusiveness in the education system. While regional autonomy provides policy flexibility, these data indicate the need for more effective coordination and policy evaluation across Länder. In this study, these conditions can be analyzed as the impact of variations in education policy implementation in a decentralized system.

Research on educational governance and policy implementation in decentralized education systems is becoming increasingly important given the complexity of education management in federal states like Germany. Although the German education system is often viewed as a model of decentralization, granting extensive autonomy to the states (Länder) and schools, various empirical indicators show that this decentralization has not fully guaranteed the equality of quality and effectiveness of policy implementation at the public school level. Therefore, in-depth studies are needed to understand how educational governance is implemented in practice and the extent to which educational policies are effectively implemented at the institutional level.

The urgency of this research is further strengthened by the sheer scale of the German education system, which involves millions of students and hundreds of thousands of educators. State schools, as key public institutions, play a strategic role in translating state education policies into everyday learning and school management practices. However, policy variations across Lands, the absence of centralized national exams, and differences in evaluation standards pose challenges to maintaining consistent educational quality. This research is crucial for identifying how these policy variations impact school governance and educational outcomes. Furthermore, structural challenges such as the growing shortage of educators place significant pressure on the capacity for policy implementation at the school level. Teacher shortages impact not only the learning process but also the effectiveness of school management, educator workload, and the overall quality of education services. In the context of decentralization, differences in the capacity of states and schools to manage human resources have the potential to widen the gap in educational quality. This reinforces the urgency of research examining the relationship between educational governance and the ability of state schools to respond to resource constraints.

The urgency of this research is also driven by the persistent high school dropout rate and the challenges of student integration, particularly at the secondary education level. Although policy autonomy provides flexibility for the Länder to design contextual policies, data shows that not all policies can be implemented effectively at the school level. This research is crucial for uncovering the inhibiting and supporting factors in education policy implementation, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of decentralized education systems. From an academic perspective, this research is urgent because there are still limited studies that specifically examine education governance at the public school level in the context of strong decentralization, particularly through a case study approach. Many previous studies have focused more on macro policy aspects or cross-country comparisons, while the dynamics of policy implementation at the school level as an operational unit often receive less attention. Therefore, this research is expected to fill the research gap and provide theoretical contributions to the development of education governance and public policy studies.

Practically, the results of this study have urgency for education policymakers at the state level and public school administrators. The research findings can serve as a basis for improving coordination mechanisms, strengthening school governance capacity, and formulating more adaptive and equitable policies in decentralized education systems. Furthermore, this research also has global relevance as a lesson for other countries, including Indonesia, that are implementing or are strengthening educational decentralization. The urgency of this research lies in the need to deeply understand the practices of education governance and policy implementation at the public school level in decentralized education systems. This understanding is an important prerequisite for

increasing policy effectiveness, maintaining educational quality, and ensuring equitable distribution of educational services within the context of an autonomous and diverse education system. Therefore, a study of educational governance and policy implementation within a decentralized education system is crucial for understanding how education policy is implemented at the public school level in Germany. Case studies of public schools can provide an empirical overview of governance practices, the roles of key actors, and the factors supporting and inhibiting policy implementation. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more effective, equitable, and adaptive education policies within the context of a decentralized education system, both in Germany and as lessons for other countries implementing similar models.

### **Identification of problems**

Based on the background, empirical data, and urgency of the research, several main problems can be identified as follows:

1. The German education system implements strong decentralization with educational authority lying with each state (Länder), so that educational policies, curricula, and evaluation standards differ between regions.
2. Differences in education policies between Lands have the potential to cause variations in the quality of governance and education services in public schools.
3. Public schools have a strategic role as implementers of education policies, but the level of readiness and capacity of school governance in implementing state policies is not yet fully equitable.
4. The absence of a centralized national exam means that graduation standards and evaluation of learning outcomes are determined regionally, which has the potential to impact the consistency of education quality between regions.
5. Limited resources, particularly the shortage of teaching staff, pose a serious challenge for public schools in implementing education policies effectively.
6. The continued high school dropout rate and challenges in student integration indicate problems in the implementation of education policies at the school level.
7. Previous research has focused more on macro-level analysis of education policy, while empirical studies on governance practices and policy implementation at the public school level in a decentralized system are still limited.

### **Formulation of the problem**

Based on the identification of the problem, the formulation of the problem in this research is as follows:

1. What form of educational governance is implemented in state schools within the framework of the authority of the federal states (Länder) in Germany?
2. How does the process of implementing state education policies at the public school level work?
3. What actors are involved in education governance and policy implementation in public schools, and what are their roles and interactions?
4. What factors support and hinder the effectiveness of the implementation of education policies in a decentralized education system in public schools?
5. How does the decentralization of education policy affect the quality of school governance and education services in public schools?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Concept of Educational Governance and Educational Decentralization**

Educational governance refers to the structures, processes, and decision-making mechanisms that determine the direction, control, and accountability of an education system (OECD Education Policy Outlook 2022). The emphasis on governance encompasses policies, the roles of central and local government actors, and coordination mechanisms between levels of government in delivering effective education services. In the context of decentralized education, decentralization is often

viewed as a reorganization of authority from the central government to regional or local authorities, with the aim of bringing decisions closer to community needs (local responsiveness), increasing service efficiency, and expanding stakeholder participation in education governance at the school level. Global research shows that educational decentralization implies increased school autonomy, but does not automatically result in improved learning quality without adequate implementation capacity at the local level. Lundgren (2025) argues that educational decentralization is driven by the need to improve school operational effectiveness and optimize policy implementation processes at the executive level, particularly in systems that adopt broad school autonomy.

## **2.2 The Effect of Decentralization on the Implementation of Education Policy**

Gregory Elacqua et al.'s (2021) research on the effects of decentralization on administrative decisions suggests that local autonomy can contribute to improved teacher quality and student learning outcomes when resources are allocated efficiently and according to local needs. This study found that administrative autonomy in Colombia is positively correlated with higher student enrollment, teacher quality, and academic achievement because educational management decisions are closer to the school context. However, other empirical evidence from international studies suggests that decentralization does not always have a significant impact on student learning outcomes globally. An article in the *International Journal of Educational Research* states that educational decentralization does not necessarily produce a consistent positive impact on student achievement, necessitating a more in-depth qualitative approach to uncover the complexities of the local context of policy implementation.

## **2.3 Governance Mechanisms and Multi-Actor Involvement in Education**

International studies on education governance emphasize the importance of collaborative mechanisms between the central government, local governments, schools, teachers, students, and communities as a crucial element in successful policy implementation. The study, *Mapping Problems and Approaches in Educational Governance*, states that policy actors, including national and subnational governments, as well as the education community, play an integrated role in shaping the dynamics of education governance in decentralized systems. These findings are in line with the OECD framework which observes a global trend that more and more education systems are incorporating multiple stakeholders in decision-making to ensure local relevance and greater public accountability for educational outcomes.

## **2.4 Challenges and Disadvantages of Educational Decentralization**

International literature also highlights the challenges posed by educational decentralization mechanisms, particularly those related to administrative capacity and the equality of educational services across regions. Conceptually, decentralization aims to increase local flexibility, but in practice, it can widen the gap between regions with substantial resources and those with limited administrative capacity. This means that the ability of regions or schools to implement education policies depends heavily on the availability of locally available human and financial resources. The global trend of the journal *Balancing Centralization and Decentralization in Global Contexts* also emphasizes that although decentralization increases policy responsiveness to the needs of local communities, a balance is needed between national coordination and local autonomy to maintain equality and quality of education *Balancing Centralization and Decentralization in Global Contexts*. (2025). A hybrid approach that integrates national standards with local flexibility is often considered a more sustainable model in modern education governance.

## **2.5 Decentralization in the Context of the Federal Education System (Global Studies and Their Relevance in Germany)**

In a federal system like Germany, educational decentralization is most evident through the full authority of the states (Länder) over curricula, teacher selection, and evaluation standards. This model reflects how the education system can provide local policy space while simultaneously presenting challenges in maintaining equitable quality across regions. Global studies show that local

policy variations must be managed through strong coordination structures to maintain national education goals without sacrificing local flexibility (OECD 2022). Recent research on global decentralization also shows that both developing and developed countries face similar dilemmas in integrating the principles of school autonomy and national accountability, each of which impacts the effectiveness of education policy implementation.

## **METHOD**

### **3.1 Research Approach**

This study uses a qualitative approach because it is suitable for gaining an in-depth understanding of the complex social phenomenon of educational governance practices and policy implementation within the context of educational decentralization in German public schools. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the social processes and meanings experienced directly by educational actors and institutions without diminishing the context of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth, a qualitative approach provides the best framework for examining relatively new or poorly understood phenomena in their social context in a naturalistic manner, because the focus is not on measuring statistical numbers, but on the real experiences of respondents in their own context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **3.2 Type of Research: Case Study**

The type of research used is a case study. The case study approach allows researchers to investigate a phenomenon in detail within a real-world context and within a specific timeframe. Case studies are suitable for research aimed at understanding "how" and "why" a policy or governance is implemented in public schools within a decentralized education system, as well as why there is variation in policy implementation across German Länder (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, case studies allow for the triangulation of multiple data sources, such as interviews, observations, and policy documents, to enrich the understanding of the educational phenomenon under study. This aligns with the practice of case studies in education governance and policy studies, which are often used to explain the dynamics of decision-making in real-world contexts (Education Governance in Action, OECD, 2021).

### **3.3 Research Location and Subjects**

The research will be conducted in several German state schools representing states with varying educational policies to capture implementation dynamics. Subjects will include:

1. Principal and vice principal
2. Senior teachers and school management staff
3. Educational decision makers at the Land level
4. Relevant education policy documents (e.g. Land curriculum, implementation guides, school evaluation reports)

The selection of informants was carried out using purposive sampling, namely selecting respondents who were considered to have the most relevant experience and knowledge regarding the issues being researched.

### **3.4 Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection is done through:

1. Semi-structured interviews – Used to obtain in-depth narratives regarding education actors' experiences in policy implementation, perceptions of education governance, and local challenges faced. This technique allows researchers to comprehensively explore informants' contextual and subjective data (qualitative methods such as interviews are central to qualitative research).
2. Participatory and Non-Participatory Observation – Researchers conduct observations in school meetings, policy planning, and administrative practices to directly observe the dynamics of governance and implementation.

3. Document Analysis – Includes Land policy documents, school guidelines, and evaluation reports to formally map the policy context and compare policy texts with field practices.

### **3.5 Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis in this study was carried out systematically through the following steps:

1. Data Organization – Organizing all data collected from interviews, observations, and documents into a digital and structured format.
2. Data Reduction – Selecting relevant information related to education governance and policy implementation to answer research questions.
3. Coding and Categories – Identifying major themes that emerge in the data to form analytical categories.
4. Data Triangulation – Comparing data from various sources (interviews, observations, documents) to strengthen the validity of findings.
5. Drawing Conclusions – Developing a narrative of findings based on thematic analysis and linking it to the theoretical framework on education governance and decentralization.

This analytical approach follows the principles of qualitative research which focuses on understanding the social context and interpreting data holistically.

### **3.6 Validity and Reliability of Research**

Data validity and reliability are maintained through several strategies:

1. Data Source Triangulation, namely comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documents to strengthen the findings.
2. Peer Debriefing, where research is consulted with methodological experts to ensure the appropriateness of the approach.
3. Audit Trail, documentation of research steps is stored systematically so that it can be traced back to evaluate the validity of the research process.
4. Member Check, confirmation of temporary results with informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretation is in accordance with the participant's experience.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The form of educational governance applied in state schools within the framework of the authority of the federal states (Länder) in Germany**

Educational governance in Germany is heavily influenced by the country's federal structure, where each state (Länder) has full authority to determine educational policy, including curriculum, teacher selection, evaluation standards, and school resource management (OECD, 2022). In this context, public schools are not only implementers of educational policy but also central points for implementing local and contextual decisions. In general, educational governance in German public schools encompasses administrative structures, decision-making mechanisms, and the roles of educational actors. Principals in public schools hold strategic responsibility for implementing state policy. Principals have authority over staff management, timetable development, teacher performance evaluation, and oversight of curriculum implementation (school-based governance) (Lundgren, 2025). This level of autonomy allows schools to adapt teaching practices and internal management to student needs and local characteristics, while adhering to Länder guidelines.

Furthermore, collaborative structures between educational actors are a crucial part of school governance. Teachers, school councils, and vice-principals play an active role in decision-making related to teaching and learning activities, student assessment, and school program development. This participation aligns with the principle of distributed leadership, where responsibility is not solely concentrated on the principal but is strategically shared to make decisions more responsive to the needs of students and the local community (Elacqua et al., 2021). Meanwhile, educational governance in state schools is also heavily influenced by Land regulations and policy frameworks. While schools have operational autonomy, strategic decisions such as curriculum development, graduation standards, and teacher recruitment remain under the authority of the state government. This creates a hybrid governance mechanism, where school autonomy goes hand in hand with

compliance with Land regulations. OECD research (2022) shows that this governance model allows for local flexibility while maintaining consistent educational standards across regions, although variations remain between Länder.

Practically, this form of governance presents both challenges and opportunities. The main challenge arises from the disparity in resource capacity between schools, such as the number of teachers, learning resources, and administrative support, which can impact the effectiveness of policy implementation. Meanwhile, the opportunity lies in the fact that school autonomy provides space for innovation in educational management, curriculum adaptation to local needs, and the development of relevant and contextual learning programs. In his research on educational decentralization, Lundgren (2025) emphasized that the success of educational governance depends heavily on the capacity of principals and staff to utilize autonomy effectively.

Thus, the form of educational governance in German state schools can be described as a combination of:

1. Operational autonomy at the school level, which allows for local policy adaptation;
2. Compliance with Land regulations, including curriculum, evaluation standards, and teacher selection;
3. Collaboration between educational actors to ensure quality of service and accountability;
4. Flexibility for educational innovation, while maintaining general uniformity of national standards.

Overall, the governance of education in German public schools within the framework of Länder authorities reflects a balanced decentralization model, in which local autonomy and regional policy coordination complement each other to ensure the successful implementation of education policies that are effective and responsive to the local context.

### **The process of implementing state education policy at the public school level**

The process of implementing education policy in German state schools begins with policymaking at the Land level. Each state has full authority to determine the curriculum, graduation standards, evaluation mechanisms, and school management guidelines (OECD, 2022). These policies are designed to adapt to the social, cultural, and economic context of each Land, so while basic educational principles are similar, their implementation can vary across regions. State schools serve as the spearhead of implementation, interpreting these guidelines into daily learning practices and school management. Furthermore, the implementation process at the school level involves the principal as the primary administrator. The principal is responsible for developing operational plans, allocating resources, and ensuring that teachers and school staff implement Land policies in accordance with applicable guidelines. Lundgren (2025) emphasized that the effectiveness of implementation depends heavily on the principal's leadership capacity in integrating policies with local school conditions, including the availability of teaching staff and educational facilities. The principal also serves as a liaison between the Land administration and the school community, so effective communication is key to ensuring policies are implemented as intended.

In addition to school leadership, teachers and the school board also play a strategic role in the implementation process. Teachers not only implement the curriculum but also adapt learning methods to student needs and report results and challenges to the principal. The school board, which includes teachers, parents, and community representatives, provides input on local policies and supports internal decision-making. Elacqua et al. (2021) state that multi-actor participation in school management improves accountability, policy relevance, and learning quality, especially in systems that prioritize school autonomy. The implementation process is also supported by official documents and monitoring mechanisms from the Land. Schools receive curriculum guidelines, evaluation standards, and performance indicators to be achieved. The Land government conducts periodic evaluations of public schools through inspections, performance reporting, and assessments of graduation standards. This mechanism ensures that, despite schools' operational autonomy, policy implementation remains aligned with established standards, thus maintaining educational quality. The OECD (2022) emphasizes the importance of combining autonomy and oversight to optimize learning outcomes in decentralized systems.

Finally, the policy implementation process in German public schools is dynamic and adaptive. Schools often face challenges such as limited teacher resources, varying administrative capacities, and specific student needs. Therefore, principals and teachers are required to adapt learning strategies, redistribute resources, and innovate in school management to ensure the effective implementation of Land policies. This process reflects the principle of hybrid governance, where local flexibility and adherence to state policies complement each other to achieve optimal educational goals (Lundgren, 2025; OECD, 2022).

**What actors are involved in educational governance and policy implementation in public schools, and what are their roles and interactions?**

Educational governance in German public schools involves several key actors working collaboratively within a framework of federal education governance. Because educational authority rests with each state (Länder), these actors have interconnected roles in ensuring that educational policies are implemented effectively, responsively, and appropriately within the local context.

1. State Government (Land)

Land governments are the primary actors in establishing education policy. They are responsible for curriculum development, evaluation standards, teacher recruitment, and resource allocation. Furthermore, Land governments monitor and evaluate public schools through inspections, performance assessments, and administrative audits (OECD, 2022). Their interaction with schools is top-down, but also consultative through regular meetings with principals and local education boards to adapt policies to local needs.

2. Headmaster

The principal plays a central role as the manager and implementer of policies at the school level. The principal is tasked with planning operational activities, allocating resources, supervising teachers, and ensuring the implementation of the curriculum and school evaluation standards. The principal also serves as a liaison between the school administration, teachers, students, and the school community. Lundgren (2025) emphasized that the quality of the principal's leadership is crucial for the effectiveness of education policy implementation. The principal's interactions are multidirectional, both receiving direction from the school administration and conveying input and school needs to the school level.

3. Teacher

Teachers play a direct role in implementing educational policies, particularly in student learning and evaluation. They implement the curriculum according to Land guidelines, adapt learning methods to student needs, and report the results to the principal. Furthermore, teachers participate on school councils or academic committees to provide input on internal policies and learning innovations (Elacqua et al., 2021). Teacher interactions with the principal are collaborative, while interactions with students are instructional and mentoring.

4. School Board and Education Committee

School councils typically consist of teachers, parents, student representatives, and sometimes community leaders. These councils serve as a consultative and oversight mechanism, providing input on internal policies, school development programs, and resource allocation. Their role is crucial in ensuring that school decisions reflect the interests of all stakeholders. Their interactions are participatory with the principal, teachers, and parents.

5. Students and Parents

Students and parents are actors involved indirectly but significantly in the policy implementation process. Their involvement in feedback, evaluation of school programs, and participation in education committees enable schools to adapt learning practices to student needs. The OECD (2022) emphasizes that parental and community participation enhances accountability and the success of policy implementation.

6. Other Supporting Actors

In addition to the main actors, other supporting parties, such as education consultants, teacher training institutions, and non-governmental organizations, assist in providing capacity building, training, and innovation in education programs. They interact with school principals, teachers, and the Land government to provide evidence-based recommendations and solutions to implementation challenges.

### **What factors support and hinder the effectiveness of the implementation of education policies in a decentralized education system in public schools?**

The process of implementing education policy in German public schools is heavily influenced by several factors that can both support and hinder its effectiveness. The first supporting factor is the principal's leadership capacity. Principals who possess strong managerial skills, instructional leadership, and communication skills are able to effectively translate state (Länder) policies into school operational practices. Lundgren (2025) emphasizes that competent principals can optimize school resources, motivate teachers, and create a learning environment that supports the achievement of education policy goals. The second supporting factor is multi-actor participation in education governance. The involvement of teachers, school boards, parents, and local communities allows the implementation process to be more responsive to local needs and creates high accountability. Elacqua et al. (2021) show that collaborative interactions between education actors improve the quality of decision-making, strengthen policy implementation, and reduce the risk of misinterpretation of policy guidelines.

Furthermore, official government documentation and guidelines are crucial. These documents provide clear direction on the curriculum, evaluation standards, and performance indicators that schools must achieve. The OECD (2022) emphasizes that systematic and structured guidelines help schools implement policies consistently while facilitating performance monitoring and evaluation. On the other hand, several inhibiting factors can reduce the effectiveness of policy implementation. One major obstacle is limited human resources and facilities. Teacher shortages or an imbalance in teacher distribution between regions can disrupt curriculum implementation and learning quality. Furthermore, limited educational facilities and administrative support in some schools hinder optimal policy implementation (OECD, 2022).

The second barrier is the diversity of policies across states. Differences in evaluation standards, educational duration, and curriculum structure across states create challenges for schools in transitional areas or for teachers moving between states. This can make it difficult to adapt instructional and evaluation practices to new policies, especially when adequate adaptation mechanisms are lacking (Lundgren, 2025). Furthermore, communication and coordination challenges between education actors also pose obstacles. Lack of coordination between the Land government, principals, teachers, and school boards can lead to miscommunication regarding policy priorities, implementation procedures, or resource allocation. Elacqua et al. (2021) emphasize that weak coordination can reduce implementation effectiveness and lead to misalignment between policy and practice in schools.

Overall, the effectiveness of education policy implementation in German public schools is influenced by the balance between supporting factors, such as strong leadership, multi-actor participation, and clear guidelines, and inhibiting factors, such as limited resources, policy diversity across Lands, and coordination challenges. Successful implementation depends heavily on schools' ability to optimize supporting factors while minimizing the impact of obstacles through effective adaptation, innovation, and collaboration strategies.

### **How does the decentralization of education policy affect the quality of school governance and education services in public schools?**

The decentralization of education policy in Germany, which places primary authority in the hands of each state (Länder), has significantly impacted the quality of school governance and educational services at the public school level. Decentralization grants public schools a high degree of autonomy in internal management, from curriculum planning and resource allocation to teaching staff management. Lundgren (2025) states that this autonomy allows school principals to adapt

management strategies to local needs, making governance more flexible, responsive, and context-based. Furthermore, decentralization encourages innovation and multi-actor participation in education governance. Teachers, school boards, parents, and local communities can play an active role in decision-making, from teaching methods to evaluating school programs. Elacqua et al. (2021) show that this participation improves accountability, the quality of decision-making, and the relevance of policies to student needs. In other words, decentralization creates an environment where decisions come not only from the central government or the Land Office, but also from actors directly involved in the day-to-day education process. In terms of educational services, decentralization provides flexibility in adapting curricula and learning methods. Public schools can implement educational programs tailored to student characteristics, local socioeconomic conditions, and community needs. The OECD (2022) confirms that this flexibility can improve learning effectiveness, student satisfaction, and teacher engagement in professional development. These adaptive educational services contribute to the optimal achievement of educational goals, including the quality of learning and equitable access to education.

However, decentralization also poses challenges to the uniformity and quality of governance. Policy variations across Länder can result in differences in educational standards, resource inequalities, and disparities in learning outcomes between regions. Schools in Länder with higher capacity tend to have more efficient governance and better educational services than schools in regions with limited resources. This suggests that decentralization must be balanced with oversight mechanisms, capacity support, and evaluation standards to ensure equitable education quality (OECD, 2022; Lundgren, 2025). Overall, decentralization of education policy has a positive impact on the quality of school governance and education services by increasing autonomy, innovation, and the participation of local actors. However, the success of decentralization depends on the ability of schools to utilize their autonomy effectively, the support of local governments, and coordination between actors to minimize disparities in education quality across regions. With the right approach, decentralization can create a responsive, adaptive, and high-quality education system in public schools.

## **CLOSING**

### **Conclusion**

Based on the results of the research analysis, several main conclusions can be drawn regarding educational governance and policy implementation in German state schools within the framework of educational decentralization (Länder):

1. **Decentralized Governance of Public Schools**

Public schools in Germany implement a governance system that combines operational autonomy with adherence to state (Länder) policies. The principal plays a central role in managing resources, leading teachers, and adapting Land policies to local needs. Teachers, school boards, parents, and the community actively participate in decision-making, creating a responsive and collaborative distributed leadership mechanism.

2. **Policy Implementation Process at School Level**

The implementation of education policies in public schools is carried out through a combination of interviews with educational stakeholders, the application of curriculum guidelines, and monitoring and evaluation. This process is adaptive, with schools adjusting learning practices, resource allocation, and management strategies to suit local characteristics and student needs. The success of implementation is greatly influenced by the leadership capacity of the principal, teacher participation, and the support of documents and guidelines from the local government.

3. **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Policy Implementation**

Key supporting factors include competent principal leadership, multi-actor participation, and clear policy guidelines. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors include limited human resources and facilities, policy diversity across Länder, and coordination challenges between actors. This combination of supporting and inhibiting factors impacts the quality of school governance and the effectiveness of education services.

4. The Impact of Decentralization on the Quality of Education

Decentralization of education policy has had a positive impact on flexibility, innovation, and the participation of local actors in public schools. However, decentralization also has the potential to create disparities in quality between regions if not balanced with effective oversight mechanisms, capacity support, and coordination. With appropriate use of autonomy, decentralization can significantly improve the quality of school governance and education services.

**Suggestion**

Based on the research findings, several strategic suggestions can be put forward to improve the effectiveness of governance and implementation of education policies in German state schools:

1. Capacity Building for Principals and Teachers

The Land Government needs to strengthen leadership training and teacher professionalization programs to improve managerial and pedagogical capacity, so that principals and teachers can optimize their autonomy effectively.

2. Strengthening Multi-Actor Participation

The active involvement of teachers, school boards, parents, and communities in policy decision-making and evaluation processes needs to be expanded. This will improve the accountability, relevance, and quality of policy implementation at the school level.

3. Adjustment and Harmonization of Policies Between Lands

Although decentralization provides flexibility, there needs to be a mechanism for coordination and harmonization of minimum standards between Länder to prevent disparities in the quality of education and ensure the equality of education services.

4. Effective Utilization of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Public schools need to systematically utilize evaluation, assessment, and audit data to assess the effectiveness of policy implementation and make continuous adjustments to learning strategies or school management.

5. Strengthening Infrastructure and Resource Support

The Land Government must ensure the distribution of teachers, facilities, and educational resources is even across regions to reduce disparities in policy implementation and the quality of educational services.

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