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The Sekolah Rakyat Program in Eradicating Extreme Poverty An Analysis of Cross-Sectoral Coordination and Targeting Accuracy

Miskari

Email : miskari.ahmad@gmail.com

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Pontianak

Abstract

Sekolah Rakyat (People's School) is a boarding education program for children from poor and extremely poor families that began operating in July 2025 under the coordination of the Ministry of Social Affairs. In about one year, the program expanded from 100 to 182 schools with more than 43,000 students and is targeted to reach 500 schools by 2029. This study analyzes the institutional design of Sekolah Rakyat, the pattern of cross-sector coordination in its implementation, and the challenges of targeting accuracy. It employs a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach through analysis of policy documents, official data, and literature. The findings show that Sekolah Rakyat has strengths because it integrates education, care, nutrition, and health services in a single boarding system targeting families in deciles 1 and 2 of the National Single Socio-Economic Data. However, its operation outside the main structure of the national education system creates coordination challenges with the education ministry and regional governments, teacher shortages, dependence on data accuracy, and limited scale relative to the number of poor children. This study recommends a stronger legal basis, integration of Sekolah Rakyat with the national education system and regional governments, layered target verification, and graduation and family support schemes.

Keywords: *people's school, extreme poverty, cross-sector coordination, targeting accuracy, social policy*

INTRODUCTION

Intergenerational poverty is one of the most difficult social problems to break. Children from poor families tend to have lower access to education, suffer from malnutrition, and are more vulnerable to dropping out of school, so their chances of escaping poverty are small. Human capital theory positions education as an investment that increases a person's future productivity and income (Becker, 1964). Sen (1999) broadens this view by asserting that development is essentially the expansion of capabilities, namely the real freedom of people to lead the lives they value, and education is one of the basic capabilities.

The government responded to this problem through the Sekolah Rakyat (People's School) program. The idea was first presented to the public on 9 January 2025 at the Bogor Palace (Infopublik, 2026) and later became part of efforts to reduce poverty and eliminate extreme poverty as directed in Presidential Instruction Number 8 of 2025. Sekolah Rakyat is designed as a free boarding school for children from poor and extremely poor families, with integrated education, care, nutrition, and health services. Its implementation is coordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

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The program has grown rapidly. In August 2025, the Ministry of Social Affairs targeted 165 pilot Sekolah Rakyat sites for the 2025/2026 academic year, 100 of which were already operating (NU Online, 2025). By the end of December 2025, Sekolah Rakyat operated in 166 locations with a capacity of 15,820 students (Tirto, 2025). By mid-2026, the number had risen to 182 schools (Infopendidikan, 2026), and in August 2026 Sekolah Rakyat was reported to have reached around 43 thousand children (Antara, 2026). The government targets 500 schools with more than 400 thousand students by 2029 (Metro TV News, 2026a).

Nevertheless, rapid expansion raises a number of questions. After one year of operation, the Ministry of Social Affairs evaluated the shortage of teachers at Sekolah Rakyat (Metro TV News, 2026b). The Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia submitted eight recommendations for improving governance and regulation to the Ministry of Social Affairs in December 2025 and monitored their follow-up in May 2026 (Ombudsman RI, 2026). The Minister of Social Affairs himself emphasized that data validity is the key to the program's success (JPNN, 2026). These problems show that the success of Sekolah Rakyat depends heavily on the quality of cross-sectoral coordination and targeting accuracy.

Studies on social policy and child protection show that state interventions for children from vulnerable families must pay attention to administrative and legal dimensions. Laraszaty et al. (2022) show that children who are not administratively registered risk losing access to public services, while Hasibuan et al. (2024) and Fikri et al. (2024) show that children's social vulnerability often leads to legal problems if not addressed early. From the bureaucratic side, Armayanti et al. (2025) emphasize that development programs require adaptive institutions. Accordingly, this study formulates three research questions:

1. What is the institutional design of the Sekolah Rakyat program?
2. What is the pattern of cross-sectoral coordination in the implementation of Sekolah Rakyat, and what challenges does it face?
3. How can the targeting accuracy and sustainability of Sekolah Rakyat as an instrument for eradicating extreme poverty be strengthened?

This study aims to analyze the institutional design of Sekolah Rakyat, identify coordination and targeting challenges, and formulate policy recommendations for the central government, regional governments, and school administrators.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design. The data are secondary, consisting of policy documents, official program progress data published by the Ministry of Social Affairs and other government institutions between January 2025 and October 2026, reports of the public service oversight body, and scholarly articles. The legal aspects of the policy, such as the status of policy instruments and the division of government affairs, were examined using a statutory approach (Tanjung, 2024).

The analytical framework draws on three perspectives. First, the capability approach, which assesses policy by the expansion of real opportunities for the poor (Sen, 1999). Second, human capital theory, which positions education as a long-term investment (Becker, 1964). Third, policy coordination theory, which stresses that cross-sectoral programs require alignment of goals, division of roles, and mechanisms for exchanging information among institutions (Peters, 2018). The data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing with source triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Institutional Design of the Sekolah Rakyat Program

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Sekolah Rakyat is designed with three main features. First, the program targets children from poor and extremely poor families in deciles 1 and 2 of the National Single Socio-Economic Data (DTSEN). Second, the schools are boarding schools, so the state takes over part of the functions of childcare, nutrition, and health services for the children. Third, the program is coordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs rather than by the ministry responsible for education, with other ministries involved in providing buildings, curricula, and teaching staff.

This design has advantages from the capability perspective. Children from extremely poor families often face layered barriers, ranging from transport costs, the need to help support the family economy, and inadequate nutrition to home environments that do not support learning. The boarding model allows the state to address these barriers at once. The first-semester evaluation led by the Sekolah Rakyat Formation Team assessed students' physical and health aspects, psychosocial aspects and talent development, and academic achievement, and used a Social Return on Investment approach to measure its social impact (Tirto, 2025).

However, the boarding model also carries risks that need to be managed. Separating children from their families over a long period may affect their emotional bonds and social identity. The principle of the best interests of the child requires that boarding life still provides room for children's relationships with their parents, for example through visiting schedules, regular communication, and parental involvement in school activities. In addition, boarding caregivers and assistants need child protection competencies so that dormitories are safe from violence and bullying.

The institutional development of the program since 2025 is presented in Table 1. The data show that the number of students nearly tripled within one year, in line with the increase in permanent buildings. By mid-2026, there were 93 permanent Sekolah Rakyat ready to operate, 81 continuing pilot schools, and 8 new pilot schools, with permanent school construction under way in 104 locations (Infopendidikan, 2026).

Table 1. Development of the Sekolah Rakyat Program

Time	Development	Source
January 2025	The Sekolah Rakyat idea presented to the public	Infopublik (2026)
July–August 2025	Operations begin; 100 of 165 pilot sites running	NU Online (2025)
December 2025	166 locations with a capacity of 15,820 students	Tirto (2025)
Mid-2026	182 schools: 93 permanent, 81 continuing pilots, 8 new pilots	Infopendidikan (2026)
August 2026	Around 43 thousand children reached	Antara (2026)
2029 target	500 schools with more than 400 thousand students	Metro TV News (2026a)

Source: Compiled from official government news (2025–2026).

On the other hand, placing Sekolah Rakyat under the coordination of the Ministry of Social Affairs raises institutional problems. In the regional government system, basic education falls under the authority of district/city governments and secondary education under provincial governments. Centrally managed Sekolah Rakyat lie outside this division of affairs. This tendency is consistent with the centralization of policy noted by Rambe et al. (2024). Centralization may speed up implementation, but it risks creating a parallel education system disconnected from regional education planning.

2. Cross-Sectoral Coordination and Its Challenges

The implementation of Sekolah Rakyat involves many actors. The Ministry of Social Affairs acts as the coordinator and is responsible for the program. The ministry in charge of public works is involved in constructing permanent buildings. The education ministry plays a role in curricula and learning standards. Statistics Indonesia manages DTSEN, which serves as the basis for targeting. Regional

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governments provide land and support recruitment. This complexity requires a strong coordination mechanism, since every link in the chain can become a bottleneck (Peters, 2018).

The first coordination challenge concerns teaching staff. After one year of operation, the Ministry of Social Affairs evaluated the teacher shortage in a meeting involving all Sekolah Rakyat principals (Metro TV News, 2026b). Teacher shortages in boarding schools have a greater impact than in ordinary schools because teachers and caregivers also play a role in character building and psychosocial support for students. The performance of teaching and educational staff is also strongly determined by discipline and organizational work culture, as shown by Batubara and Rambe (2025) in the context of public organizations.

The second challenge concerns governance and regulation. The Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia submitted eight recommendations for improving the governance and regulation of Sekolah Rakyat, which the Ministry of Social Affairs accepted for gradual improvement (Ombudsman RI, 2026). These recommendations indicate that the program's regulatory framework is not yet fully adequate to guarantee service standards, complaint handling, and accountability. A program that relies on a presidential instruction and ministerial policies requires a stronger legal basis so that its sustainability does not depend on changes in leadership.

The regulatory problem also concerns the academic status of graduates. Because Sekolah Rakyat are run under the coordination of the Ministry of Social Affairs, there must be certainty that the curriculum standards, assessment, accreditation, and diplomas issued are equivalent to those of formal educational units in the national education system. Without such certainty, Sekolah Rakyat graduates risk facing administrative obstacles when continuing their education or applying for jobs. This certainty requires formal coordination between the Ministry of Social Affairs and the ministry responsible for education, preferably set out in a binding regulation.

The third challenge concerns the role of regional governments. Regional governments have the closest knowledge of the conditions of poor children in their areas, yet their role in Sekolah Rakyat is mostly limited to providing land. In fact, the long-term success of the program depends on the continuity of assistance to students' families in their home areas, which falls under the authority of regional social affairs offices and other regional agencies. Armayanti et al. (2025) emphasize that bureaucratic institutional transformation is a prerequisite for development programs to run effectively, including in the division of roles between the center and the regions.

The fourth challenge concerns scale. Members of Commission VIII of the House of Representatives consider the number of Sekolah Rakyat participants still very small compared with the number of poor people, so the program needs to be expanded so as not to remain a mere policy symbol (NU Online, 2026). This criticism is important because boarding programs require a high cost per student. Without a clear scaling strategy, Sekolah Rakyat risks reaching only a small share of poor children, while most others continue to rely on regular schools of uneven quality.

3. Strengthening Targeting Accuracy and Program Sustainability

Targeting accuracy is a prerequisite for the success of Sekolah Rakyat. Using DTSEN as the basis for targeting is a step forward because it unifies previously scattered data. However, DTSEN is dynamic and requires periodic updating. Targeting errors can take two forms: children who are not eligible entering the program (inclusion error) and eligible children not being reached (exclusion error). For a boarding program with limited quotas, both types of error are equally harmful.

Targeting accuracy is also related to civil registration. Children from extremely poor families often lack complete civil registration documents, for instance because their parents' marriage was not registered. Laraszaty et al. (2022) show that civil registration is part of the legal protection of children. If target verification relies solely on administrative data, the most vulnerable children are at risk of not

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being recorded. Therefore, target verification needs to be layered, namely through DTSEN, field verification by social workers, and confirmation by village or urban village governments.

Program sustainability also requires attention to the phase after students graduate. Sekolah Rakyat will effectively break intergenerational poverty if its graduates can continue their education or enter the labor market, while their families are also assisted to escape poverty. The Minister of Social Affairs has emphasized the importance of integrating Sekolah Rakyat with other assistance programs so that beneficiary families can graduate from poverty status (Achmad Nurhidayat, 2026). This approach is in line with the view that social policy should strengthen the social structure of families and communities, not merely provide services to individuals (Tanjung and Yamamah, 2023).

Character and values education is also an important part of sustainability. Sekolah Rakyat accommodate children from diverse social, cultural, and religious backgrounds, so the boarding curriculum needs to instil values of togetherness, tolerance, and social responsibility. Tanjung and Yamamah (2023) show that religious and political values have a strong influence on the formation of social structures in Indonesia. In the context of Sekolah Rakyat, these values can be directed towards forming graduates who are not only academically capable but also sensitive enough to drive change in their home communities.

Based on this analysis, this study formulates an agenda for strengthening Sekolah Rakyat, presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Agenda for Strengthening the Sekolah Rakyat Program

Aspect	Challenge	Recommendation
Legal basis	The program relies on a presidential instruction and ministerial policies	Regulation in a presidential regulation containing service standards and division of roles
Integration with the education system	Runs outside the division of regional education affairs	Alignment of curricula, accreditation, and student data with the national education system
Teaching staff	Shortage of teachers and caregivers	Planning of teacher needs, placement incentives, and caregiving training
Targeting accuracy	Dependence on DTSEN accuracy	Layered verification through DTSEN, social workers, and village governments
Sustainability	Unclear post-graduation scheme and family assistance	A graduation scheme for students and families integrated with other social protection programs
Scale	Coverage still small relative to the number of poor children	A roadmap for gradual expansion supported by regional governments

Source: Author's formulation based on the analysis.

From a preventive standpoint, Sekolah Rakyat also has the potential to reduce children's vulnerability to involvement in risky behavior and criminal offences. Fikri et al. (2024) and Hasibuan et al. (2024) show that children who lose care and access to education are more vulnerable to coming into conflict with the law. A structured boarding environment can be a protective factor, provided that care is delivered according to child protection principles and respects the child's relationship with the family.

CONCLUSION

Sekolah Rakyat is a promising social policy innovation because it combines education, care, nutrition, and health for children from poor and extremely poor families in a single boarding system. The program grew rapidly from 100 to 182 schools with more than 43 thousand students in about one year. However, its implementation under the coordination of the Ministry of Social Affairs and outside

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the division of regional education affairs gives rise to coordination challenges, teacher shortages, dependence on data accuracy, governance recommendations from the Ombudsman, and limited scale.

This study recommends strengthening the legal basis through a presidential regulation containing service standards and a division of roles, integrating Sekolah Rakyat with the national education system and regional governments, layered target verification, planning of teacher needs, and a graduation scheme for students and families. Further research should empirically measure the impact of Sekolah Rakyat on learning outcomes and the welfare of students' families, including in West Kalimantan and North Sumatra.

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