

Educational Financing Management in Public Junior High Schools in Deli Serdang Regency

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Abstract

Educational financing management is central to school governance because it determines how financial resources are planned, implemented, evaluated, and communicated to support educational quality. This study aimed to analyze educational financing management at SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu and SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency, Indonesia, focusing on planning, implementation, evaluation, and transparency. Using a qualitative multi-site case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis involving principals, vice principals, treasurers, administrative staff, school committee representatives, and teachers. Data were analyzed through condensation, coding, categorization, within-site analysis, cross-site comparison, and interpretive synthesis, with trustworthiness ensured through triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, persistent observation, and audit trail documentation. The findings show that both schools used RKAS/ARKAS as the main instrument for aligning school needs, budget priorities, expenditure realization, accountability documents, and stakeholder communication. However, SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu adopted a conservative-stability model, while SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan demonstrated a programmatic-adaptive model. This study implies that strengthening SOPs, treasurer competence, ARKAS literacy, program-based evaluation, and stakeholder communication is essential for improving accountable and quality-oriented school financing governance.

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Introduction

Education financing has become a strategic dimension of educational governance because the quality, equity, and sustainability of learning services depend not only on the availability of funds but also on the effectiveness of their planning, allocation, implementation, monitoring, and public accountability. In decentralized education systems, including Indonesia, schools are increasingly required to manage operational resources autonomously while ensuring regulatory compliance, transparent reporting, stakeholder participation, and alignment between budget priorities and students' learning needs (Chano et al., 2025; Handayani et al., 2026; Santosa et al., 2022). Accordingly, strengthening school financial governance through RKAS and ARKAS is essential for enabling Indonesian schools to respond to local needs, improve institutional capacity, and remain competitive within the broader demands of global educational development (Ardi et al., 2021; Sakimin & Prihatin, 2021; Siahaan et al., 2021).

In the context of contemporary school governance, financial management plays a central role in connecting educational goals with institutional capacity, learning services, infrastructure development, teacher support, and student welfare, particularly in public schools that operate under regulatory, social, and fiscal constraints (Gaitan-Angulo et al., 2026; Kapelela et al., 2025; Katureebe

et al., 2023). Therefore, effective education financing requires an integrated management cycle that includes evidence-based planning, rule-compliant implementation, continuous evaluation, and transparent reporting to ensure that school expenditure contributes directly to educational quality, equity, and institutional accountability (Suwarni et al., 2026; Yizengaw & Agegnehu, 2021; Zaini, 2025).

International literature shows that the effectiveness of education financing is closely related to public financial management, school leadership, stakeholder participation, and accountability mechanisms at the institutional level (Chynybaev et al., 2025; Sumiyana & Effendi, 2024; Zaini, 2025). Increased spending alone does not automatically improve educational outcomes when schools lack adequate planning capacity, internal control systems, transparent documentation, and performance-oriented evaluation mechanisms (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2024). In this regard, school principals, treasurers, administrative staff, school committees, and teachers become key actors in ensuring that educational budgets are not only legally spent but also strategically aligned with school development priorities and student learning needs (Handayani et al., 2026; Irfan et al., 2024).

In decentralized education systems, schools are increasingly expected to manage financial resources with greater autonomy while still demonstrating compliance with government regulations, public accountability, and responsiveness to local needs (Chano et al., 2025; Evarist et al., 2025; Matete, 2022). The experience of different education systems indicates that decentralization can strengthen school responsiveness when supported by reliable planning tools, transparent reporting systems, competent leadership, and active stakeholder engagement (Al-Thani, 2024; Berhanu & Gobie, 2023; Wyk & Chauke, 2026). However, decentralization may also create uneven financial management quality across schools when institutional capacity, digital literacy, administrative discipline, and community participation differ significantly from one context to another (Abdillahi, 2025; Khilji et al., 2022; Rahman, 2019).

In Indonesia, school financing management has become increasingly important due to the implementation of school operational assistance schemes and digital budgeting instruments such as RKAS and ARKAS, which require schools to align planning, spending, reporting, and accountability within a regulated financial management framework (ardi et al., 2021; Handayani et al., 2026; Santosa et al., 2022). The RKAS/ARKAS mechanism is intended to help schools prepare needs-based budgeting, ensure expenditure traceability, strengthen administrative order, and support transparent financial governance at the school level (Nur Hayati, 2025; Sakimin & Prihatin, 2021; S. Wahyuni et al., 2025). Nevertheless, previous studies indicate that many schools still face recurring problems in managing education financing, including limited planning capacity, weak documentation, delayed reporting, insufficient stakeholder communication, and uneven use of digital financial management systems (Al-Zyoud et al., 2025; Damaševičius, 2025; Singun, 2025).

The issue becomes more complex in public junior secondary schools because they must maintain daily operational stability, support learning improvement programs, comply with government financial regulations, and respond to diverse community expectations simultaneously (Cappella et al., 2008; Romlah et al., 2023; Shaturaev, 2021). In this context, education financing management is not simply a matter of recording income and expenditure, but a managerial process that reflects the school's ability to identify real needs, prioritize programs, verify spending, evaluate realization, and communicate financial information to stakeholders in an accountable manner

(Siregar et al., 2021; Suwarni et al., 2026; E. S. Wahyuni et al., 2024). A school with strong financial governance is expected to demonstrate consistency between planned programs, budget realization, documentary evidence, and educational outcomes, while a school with weak governance may experience fragmented planning, administrative disorder, and reduced public trust (Geerts, 2024; Nchaga, 2025).

Several previous studies have discussed school financing management from different perspectives, such as the implementation of school operational assistance funds, financial transparency, digital-based financial management, and the role of administrative control in ensuring budget accountability (ardi et al., 2021; Nadir & Hamdi Abdul Karim, 2025; Yizengaw & Agegnehu, 2021). Other studies have emphasized that transparent and participatory school financial management can strengthen public trust, reduce misunderstanding between schools and communities, and increase the legitimacy of school programs (Dori Rusyunizal & Hamdi Abdul Karim, 2025; Meriç & Öz, 2025; Sabaniah et al., 2025). However, most existing studies tend to examine one dimension of school financing separately, such as planning, implementation, reporting, or transparency, without sufficiently explaining how these dimensions interact as an integrated management cycle within different school contexts (Javornik & Klemenčič Mirazchiyski, 2023; Vasel, 2025; Zaini, 2025).

Based on this limitation, the research gap addressed in this study lies in the lack of qualitative multi-site studies that comprehensively compare the interaction among planning, implementation, evaluation, and transparency in public junior secondary school financing management, particularly in local Indonesian contexts with different socio-economic and institutional characteristics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Madhakomala et al., 2022). Previous research has provided valuable insights into BOS management and financial accountability, but it has not fully captured how schools with different contextual orientations develop distinct financing management patterns, such as conservative-stability-oriented management and programmatic-quality-oriented management (Banerjee et al., 2024; Mismariat et al., 2026; Santosa et al., 2022). Therefore, this study aims to describe and analyze education financing management at SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu and SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang Regency, with specific attention to planning, implementation, evaluation, and transparency, in order to identify cross-site patterns, contextual differences, and practical implications for strengthening accountable, efficient, and quality-oriented school financial governance.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative multiple-case study design to investigate educational financing management in two public junior high schools in Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia: SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu and SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan. A qualitative case-study approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to generate a contextualised and in-depth understanding of how educational financing was planned, implemented, monitored, evaluated, and communicated within distinct institutional settings. Rather than measuring financial management through predetermined numerical indicators, the study examined the meanings, routines, decision-making processes, and governance practices enacted by school-level actors. Multiple-case inquiry also enabled an analytical comparison between two schools with different financing-management characteristics, thereby strengthening the interpretive value of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The unit of analysis was the school-level management of educational financing,

particularly the utilisation of the School Activity and Budget Plan (*Rencana Kegiatan dan Anggaran Sekolah* [RKAS]) and the ARKAS digital platform for planning, expenditure administration, monitoring, and accountability reporting.

The participants comprised 12 informants purposively selected from the two research sites. Each school was represented by a principal, vice principal, school treasurer, head of administrative affairs, teacher, and school committee representative. Purposive sampling was employed because all participants possessed direct knowledge of, or responsibility for, the planning, implementation, supervision, reporting, or communication of school financial activities. The sampling process also followed the principle of maximum variation by incorporating managerial, administrative, pedagogical, and community perspectives. Participants were eligible when they had been involved in school budgeting, BOS/BOSP fund administration, RKAS/ARKAS preparation, expenditure verification, financial reporting, or stakeholder oversight for at least one academic year. This participant composition enabled the study to capture both formal governance procedures and everyday financial-management practices across the two schools.

Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide covering budget formulation, RKAS/ARKAS preparation, allocation priorities, fund disbursement, expenditure verification, reporting procedures, evaluation mechanisms, and transparency practices. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. Observations focused on administrative routines, coordination meetings, document-management practices, and communication between school leaders, treasurers, teachers, and committee representatives. Documentary evidence was examined to corroborate interview accounts and observational data. The reviewed materials included RKAS and ARKAS records, school work plans, budget-realisation reports, accountability documents, transaction evidence, meeting minutes, administrative archives, and relevant BOS/BOSP financial-management documents. The use of multiple data sources was intended to facilitate methodological triangulation and minimise reliance on individual perceptions alone.

Data collection and analysis proceeded iteratively. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, while observation notes and documentary extracts were compiled into a structured case database. The analytical procedure involved data condensation, initial coding, categorisation, within-case analysis, cross-case comparison, and interpretive synthesis, following interactive qualitative-data-analysis principles (Miles et al., 2020). First, all data were read repeatedly to identify meaningful units associated with four analytical domains: financial planning, implementation, evaluation, and transparency. Codes were subsequently organised into broader thematic categories and compared across the two schools to identify convergent practices, contrasting governance patterns, and context-specific challenges. Analytical matrices were used to connect evidence from interviews, observations, and documents. Themes were refined through continuous comparison with raw data, consistent with rigorous thematic-analysis procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness was enhanced through source triangulation, technique triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, persistent observation, and maintenance of an audit trail. Information obtained from principals, treasurers, administrative personnel, teachers, and committee representatives was compared with observational and documentary evidence. Preliminary interpretations were discussed with selected informants to verify whether the findings accurately

represented institutional practices. Reflexive notes, coding records, analytical memos, and documentation of interpretive decisions were retained to support dependability and confirmability. Ethical safeguards included obtaining formal permission from both schools, securing informed consent from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, anonymising participants' identities, and withholding sensitive financial information that could expose individuals or institutions. These procedures were applied to protect confidentiality and uphold the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Result and Discussion

Profile of Data Sources and Analytical Focus

The findings of this study were derived from interviews, field observations, and document analysis conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu and SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan. The analysis focused on four main dimensions of educational financing management: planning, implementation, evaluation, and transparency. These dimensions were examined through the use of RKAS/ARKAS, school work plans, financial realization reports, accountability documents, transaction evidence, meeting minutes, and stakeholder communication practices. The results show that both schools used RKAS/ARKAS as the central instrument for managing educational financing, although the orientation and intensity of financial governance differed between the two sites.

Table 1. Data sources and analytical focus of the study

Data source	Information examined	Contribution to findings
Principal and vice principal interviews	Strategic planning, school priorities, decision-making, stakeholder coordination	Explained the direction and rationale of financing management
Treasurer and administrative staff interviews	Budget realization, transaction records, reporting, documentation	Clarified the technical procedures of financial implementation and accountability
School committee and teacher interviews	Participation, transparency, program relevance, school needs	Provided stakeholder perspectives on financing priorities and openness
School documents	RKAS/ARKAS, school work plans, realization reports, SPJ documents, meeting minutes	Verified whether financing practices were aligned with formal plans and regulations
Field observations	Administrative routines, coordination practices, document storage, communication patterns	Strengthened the interpretation of actual practices in each school

Overall, the data indicate that educational financing management in both schools was not limited to the technical administration of school funds. It represented a broader governance process through which schools translated institutional priorities into financial decisions, implemented expenditures according to regulatory requirements, evaluated the use of funds, and communicated financial information to relevant stakeholders.

Educational Financing Planning

Planning was the first and most strategic stage in the management of educational financing in both schools. The two schools relied on RKAS/ARKAS as the main planning instrument to connect school needs, program priorities, available funding, and regulatory requirements. The planning process generally began with the identification of school needs from different units, including curriculum, student affairs, infrastructure, and administration. These needs were then discussed internally,

adjusted to the available budget ceiling, aligned with funding regulations, and finalized through coordination with the school committee.

At SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu, financing planning was characterized by a cautious and stability-oriented approach. The school prioritized essential operational needs and learning continuity, particularly because of the socio-economic characteristics of the surrounding coastal community. Planning was therefore directed toward ensuring that core educational services could continue without disruption. The school tended to avoid overly ambitious programs and emphasized administrative safety from the beginning of the budgeting process.

In contrast, SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan demonstrated a more programmatic and adaptive planning orientation. The school placed stronger emphasis on program relevance, measurable targets, and the alignment of financial planning with quality improvement. This school showed a higher tendency to connect budgeting decisions with learning programs, student services, and stakeholder support. Thus, while both schools followed similar formal procedures, their planning orientations reflected different institutional capacities and contextual conditions.

Table 2. Cross-site findings on educational financing planning

Aspect of planning	SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu	SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan	Cross-site interpretation
Main planning instrument	RKAS/ARKAS as the primary budgeting guide	RKAS/ARKAS as the primary budgeting guide	Both schools used RKAS/ARKAS as the formal basis for financing decisions
Needs identification	Focused on urgent operational and instructional needs	Focused on program needs and quality improvement priorities	Both schools began planning from school needs, but the depth of program analysis differed
Priority setting	Conservative, realistic, and service-stability oriented	Programmatic, adaptive, and quality-oriented	Planning orientation reflected different institutional contexts
Stakeholder involvement	Conducted through formal committee meetings	Conducted through committee meetings and more intensive cross-field communication	Stakeholder involvement existed in both sites, but was more proactive in the second school
Administrative orientation	Strong emphasis on safe accountability documents	Strong emphasis on program alignment and measurable implementation	Both schools valued accountability, but with different managerial emphases

These findings indicate that planning quality was shaped not only by the availability of funds, but also by the capacity of the school to translate institutional needs into prioritized, documented, and accountable programs. The similarity between the two schools lies in the use of RKAS/ARKAS as a formal planning mechanism, while the difference lies in how the mechanism was interpreted and operationalized.

Implementation of Educational Financing

The implementation of educational financing in both schools referred to the realization of planned activities and expenditures based on RKAS/ARKAS. The schools implemented financing gradually, depending on the availability of funds, program urgency, and administrative readiness. Expenditure was not carried out arbitrarily; each spending decision was first checked against the approved RKAS/ARKAS to ensure that the activity, budget component, and supporting documents were aligned with the plan.

At SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu, implementation emphasized caution, gradual realization, and protection of essential services. The school tended to prioritize expenditures that directly supported teaching and learning, routine operations, and urgent infrastructure needs. When funds were limited or disbursement did not fully match the timing of school needs, activities were implemented in stages. This pattern shows that the school sought to maintain operational stability while avoiding financial decisions that could create accountability risks.

At SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan, implementation was more programmatic and coordinated across school units. Budget realization was directed not only to maintain routine services, but also to support learning quality, student activities, and school improvement programs. Internal coordination among school leaders, treasurers, administrative staff, and program coordinators was more visible in this school. Nevertheless, implementation remained tied to regulatory compliance and documentation requirements.

Table 3. Cross-site findings on educational financing implementation

Aspect of implementation	SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu	SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan	Cross-site interpretation
Basis of expenditure	Approved RKAS/ARKAS and urgent operational needs	Approved RKAS/ARKAS and program priorities	Both schools used RKAS/ARKAS to control expenditure
Spending pattern	Gradual, cautious, and focused on core services	Programmatic, adaptive, and coordinated	Implementation reflected different managerial orientations
Internal verification	Verification of activity relevance, budget items, and transaction evidence	Verification of program relevance, budget components, and supporting documents	Internal control was present in both schools
Administrative control	Strong focus on transaction evidence, recording, and SPJ readiness	Strong focus on documentation and program-based reporting	Documentation was central to accountability in both sites
Dominant orientation	Stability and administrative safety	Program achievement and quality improvement	Both orientations supported accountability, but through different strategies

The findings suggest that effective implementation of school financing requires a balance between flexibility and compliance. Flexibility is needed because school needs often change during implementation, while compliance is necessary to ensure that every expenditure can be traced, justified, and reported. Both schools attempted to maintain this balance, although SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu leaned more toward administrative caution, while SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan leaned more toward program-based realization.

Evaluation of Educational Financing

Evaluation was carried out to assess the extent to which financial realization was consistent with the approved RKAS/ARKAS and whether the use of funds supported school programs effectively. In both schools, evaluation was not only understood as a final reporting activity, but also as an ongoing control mechanism. The schools compared planned and realized expenditures, checked the appropriateness of spending components, reviewed transaction evidence, and corrected administrative weaknesses before they became reporting problems.

At SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu, evaluation strongly emphasized administrative compliance and document completeness. The school used evaluation as a preventive mechanism to ensure that financial reports, transaction evidence, and accountability documents were consistent. Evaluation also helped the school determine which activities needed to be postponed, adjusted, or prioritized when the available funds were not sufficient to implement all planned activities at the same time.

At SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan, evaluation was more closely connected to program achievement. The school assessed whether budget realization contributed to learning activities, student services, and priority programs. Evaluation therefore served two purposes: maintaining administrative accountability and ensuring that school financing remained aligned with institutional goals. This programmatic evaluation orientation made financial monitoring more closely related to school performance.

Table 4. Cross-site findings on educational financing evaluation

Aspect of evaluation	SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu	SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan	Cross-site interpretation
Evaluation basis	Comparison between RKAS/ARKAS and budget realization	Comparison between RKAS/ARKAS, realization, and program outputs	Both schools evaluated financing based on planning documents
Main evaluation focus	Administrative order, evidence completeness, and reporting safety	Program achievement, budget relevance, and accountability	Evaluation orientation differed in depth and managerial use
Control mechanism	Preventive control through document checking	Periodic monitoring through cross-field coordination	Both schools used evaluation to prevent reporting problems
Follow-up action	Adjustment of activity stages and administrative correction	Program adjustment and improvement of implementation strategy	Evaluation produced corrective actions in both sites

Aspect of evaluation	SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu	SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan	Cross-site interpretation
Dominant orientation	Compliance-based evaluation	Program-based evaluation	Both forms of evaluation contributed to financial accountability

These findings show that evaluation becomes more meaningful when it functions not only as a reporting requirement, but also as a managerial tool for improving financing decisions. Evaluation helped both schools identify gaps between plans and realization, strengthen document discipline, and prepare better planning for the next budget period.

Transparency of Educational Financing

Transparency was reflected in the schools' efforts to communicate financial information to relevant stakeholders and to provide accountable documentation. Both schools developed transparency through internal meetings, school committee forums, and document traceability. Transparency was not merely understood as the announcement of financial information, but also as the ability to explain the relationship between planned programs, realized expenditures, and supporting evidence.

At SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu, transparency tended to be formal and functional. Financial information was usually shared through official meetings and committee discussions, especially during the preparation of RKAS/ARKAS and the reporting of budget realization. The school emphasized the importance of clear but procedurally controlled communication to avoid misunderstanding. Transparency was also supported by the availability of administrative documents in the treasurer's or administrative office.

At SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan, transparency was more proactive and programmatic. The school communicated financial information in relation to program priorities and school improvement activities. Stakeholders were given space to understand what programs were financed, how they were implemented, and what evidence supported the realization. This pattern shows that transparency was used not only to fulfill administrative obligations, but also to build trust and strengthen stakeholder support.

Table 5. Cross-site findings on educational financing transparency

Aspect of transparency	SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu	SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan	Cross-site interpretation
Communication forum	Internal meetings and school committee meetings	Internal meetings, committee forums, and cross-field communication	Both schools used formal forums to communicate financing information
Information shared	General program plans and budget realization	Program priorities, realization, and supporting evidence	The second school showed more structured information sharing
Document traceability	RKAS/ARKAS, realization records, and transaction evidence	RKAS/ARKAS, realization records, program documents, and transaction evidence	Document traceability strengthened accountability in both schools

Aspect of transparency	SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu	SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan	Cross-site interpretation
Stakeholder response mechanism	Clarification through formal procedures	More responsive clarification through stakeholder communication	Transparency was more proactive in the second school
Dominant orientation	Formal-procedural transparency	Proactive-programmatic transparency	Both patterns contributed to public trust, although through different approaches

The findings indicate that transparency in school financing depends on both communication and documentation. Communication allows stakeholders to understand how school funds are used, while documentation enables the school to prove that financial decisions are traceable and accountable. The combination of these two elements strengthens trust between the school and its stakeholders.

Integrated Cross-Site Synthesis

The cross-site synthesis shows that both schools implemented educational financing management through similar formal stages: planning, implementation, evaluation, and transparency. However, the two schools differed in managerial orientation. SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu tended to adopt a conservative, cautious, and stability-oriented model. This model prioritized continuity of core services, administrative safety, and careful financial control. Meanwhile, SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan showed a more programmatic, adaptive, and quality-oriented model, with stronger emphasis on program alignment, cross-field coordination, data-informed decisions, and proactive transparency.

Table 6. Integrated model of educational financing management in the two schools

Dimension	SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu	SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan	Emerging model
Planning	Realistic, cautious, and focused on essential needs	Programmatic, adaptive, and quality-oriented	Context-based planning through RKAS/ARKAS
Implementation	Gradual realization and administrative caution	Program-based realization and stronger coordination	Controlled budget execution
Evaluation	Compliance-oriented and document-based	Program-oriented and improvement-based	Continuous financial monitoring
Transparency	Formal-procedural and document-supported	Proactive-programmatic and stakeholder-oriented	Accountable and traceable communication
Overall orientation	Stability and accountability safety	Quality improvement and adaptive governance	Contextual school financing governance

The synthesis confirms that there is no single model of educational financing management that fits all school contexts. A school with more limited social and economic support may prioritize stability and administrative security, while a school with stronger stakeholder support and

institutional capacity may develop more programmatic and adaptive financing practices. Nevertheless, both models require the same governance foundation: accurate planning, controlled implementation, continuous evaluation, and transparent communication

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that educational financing management in SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu and SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan is not merely an administrative process, but a form of school-level governance that integrates planning, implementation, evaluation, and transparency. Both schools used RKAS/ARKAS as the main reference for financial decision-making, although the two sites showed different managerial orientations. SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu tended to apply a conservative and stability-oriented model, while SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan demonstrated a more programmatic, adaptive, and quality-oriented model. This finding supports the argument that the effectiveness of educational financing is not determined only by the amount of funding available, but also by the quality of planning, allocation, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms used by schools (Susisofianti & Hamdi Abdul Karim, 2025; Suwarni et al., 2026; Zaini, 2025).

The planning findings are consistent with Handayani et al. (2026), who emphasize that educational finance should be connected to program priorities, resource allocation, and measurable educational goals. In this study, both schools placed RKAS/ARKAS as the central planning instrument, but the depth of program-based planning differed between the two sites. SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu prioritized essential operational needs and administrative safety, whereas SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan connected budgeting more explicitly with school quality improvement. This difference shows that financial planning at the school level is strongly influenced by institutional capacity, stakeholder support, and contextual needs. Therefore, the present study extends previous school finance literature by demonstrating that the same budgeting instrument may produce different governance patterns depending on the school context.

The findings also correspond with Goczek et al. perspective that educational investment produces meaningful outcomes only when resources are managed effectively and directed toward improving educational quality (Goczek et al., 2021). The two schools in this study did not differ primarily in terms of having or not having a formal financial planning document, since both used RKAS/ARKAS. Rather, the difference appeared in how each school translated financial resources into operational stability or program improvement. This confirms that school financing should not be understood simply as budget absorption, but as a strategic process of linking resources to educational services, learning continuity, and institutional accountability.

The role of school leadership found in this study is aligned with Leithwood et al. (2020), who argue that successful school leadership is strongly related to organizational direction, internal coordination, and the management of school conditions. In both schools, principals, treasurers, administrative staff, and school committees played important roles in ensuring that financing decisions followed RKAS/ARKAS and remained accountable. However, the findings reveal that leadership capacity operates differently across contexts. In SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu, leadership was more visible in maintaining financial caution and preventing administrative risk. In SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan, leadership was more visible in coordinating cross-field programs and aligning budget realization with school improvement. This comparison suggests that financial leadership in schools must combine compliance, coordination, and strategic orientation.

The implementation findings support previous studies on BOS fund management, which show that school financing implementation must be based on technical guidelines, formal planning documents, expenditure verification, and accountability reports (Sodiq et al., 2026). Similar to these studies, the present research found that both schools implemented financing gradually, verified expenditure components, and emphasized transaction evidence, recording, and SPJ readiness. However, this study adds a comparative insight by showing two different implementation models. SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu emphasized controlled and gradual expenditure to protect core services, while SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan used budget realization more programmatically to support learning quality and student services. This finding indicates that implementation quality is not only measured by compliance with procedures, but also by the extent to which spending decisions are linked to educational priorities.

The evaluation findings are also relevant to Cigna et al. (2024), who highlight the importance of monitoring, administrative discipline, and strategy in managing school operational funds. In this study, evaluation was conducted by comparing RKAS/ARKAS with budget realization, checking the suitability of expenditure components, reviewing transaction evidence, and making corrective adjustments. At SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu, evaluation was more compliance-based and document-oriented, while at SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan, evaluation was more closely related to program achievement and follow-up improvement. This finding strengthens the view that evaluation should not be treated merely as a final reporting obligation, but as a continuous managerial control mechanism. Schools need evaluation systems that can simultaneously ensure regulatory compliance and assess the relevance of financial realization to educational outcomes.

The transparency findings Tina Yanti (2021) study, which emphasizes that transparency and accountability are essential in RKAS-based BOS management. Both schools in this study built transparency through internal meetings, committee forums, and document traceability. However, the transparency pattern differed between the two sites. SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu applied a more formal-procedural transparency model, where information was shared through official forums and supported by administrative documents. SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan demonstrated a more proactive-programmatic transparency model by explaining the relationship between programs, budget realization, and supporting evidence to stakeholders. This finding extends previous research by showing that transparency is not only about opening access to financial information, but also about making financial decisions understandable, traceable, and meaningful for stakeholders.

The study also supports Evendi Saputra et al. (2025), who argue that digital-based financial management can strengthen transparency, documentation, and accountability in school finance. The use of RKAS/ARKAS in both schools shows that digital instruments have become important tools for improving budget planning and financial reporting. Nevertheless, this study reveals that digital systems alone are not sufficient. The effectiveness of ARKAS depends on the capacity of school actors to input accurate data, align budget items with real needs, verify expenditure, and communicate financial information to stakeholders. Therefore, the contribution of this study lies in showing that ARKAS should be understood as a socio-technical governance instrument, not merely as an administrative application.

The findings may also be compared with Lavonen (2017) discussion of educational governance in Finland, where school autonomy and trust-based accountability play an important role in supporting educational quality. Although the Indonesian school financing context differs from

Finland, this study shows that school-level autonomy in managing resources must be accompanied by accountability, transparency, and stakeholder participation. SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan reflects a more proactive form of financial governance that is closer to program-based accountability, while SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu reflects a more cautious model that prioritizes stability and compliance. This comparison suggests that decentralization in school finance requires differentiated support, because schools have different capacities to transform autonomy into strategic financial management.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrated multi-site analysis of educational financing management across four interrelated dimensions: planning, implementation, evaluation, and transparency. Previous studies have often examined these dimensions separately, such as focusing only on BOS implementation, transparency, or financial accountability. This study provides a more comprehensive explanation by showing how the four dimensions interact in real school governance. Another novelty is the identification of two contextual models of school financing governance: a conservative-stability model represented by SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu and a programmatic-adaptive model represented by SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan. This distinction enriches the literature on school-based financial management by demonstrating that different schools may use the same formal instrument, RKAS/ARKAS, but produce different managerial patterns due to differences in context, leadership, stakeholder support, and institutional capacity.

The theoretical implication of this study is that educational financing management should be conceptualized as an integrated governance cycle rather than a linear administrative sequence. Planning, implementation, evaluation, and transparency influence one another and jointly determine the quality of school financial accountability. Weak planning may create implementation problems, weak implementation may complicate evaluation, and limited transparency may reduce stakeholder trust. Therefore, this study contributes to the development of a contextual framework for school financing governance in decentralized education systems, especially in developing-country contexts where schools are required to manage public funds while facing different levels of managerial capacity.

The practical implication of this study is that schools need to strengthen financial management through clear standard operating procedures, systematic needs analysis, internal expenditure verification, document discipline, and program-based evaluation. School principals and treasurers should be trained not only in technical reporting, but also in strategic budgeting, financial communication, and evidence-based decision-making. Schools should also develop simple and accessible communication mechanisms so that stakeholders can understand the relationship between planned programs, budget realization, and supporting evidence. This is particularly important because transparency will be more effective when it is supported by both clear documentation and understandable communication.

The policy implication of this study is that education authorities should not assume that all schools have the same capacity to implement RKAS/ARKAS and manage school financing effectively. Schools with more limited resources and stakeholder support may need assistance in basic financial planning, administrative discipline, and document management. Meanwhile, schools with stronger institutional capacity may need support to develop program-based budgeting, data-informed evaluation, and impact-oriented financial governance. Policy support should therefore be differentiated, continuous, and capacity-oriented. Strengthening ARKAS literacy, treasurer

competence, principal financial leadership, and committee participation should become part of school financial governance reform.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the study was conducted only in two public junior high schools in Deli Serdang Regency, so the findings are not intended for statistical generalization to all schools. Second, the qualitative multi-site design provides deep contextual understanding, but it does not measure the quantitative relationship between financing management and student achievement, school performance, or cost-effectiveness. Third, the data were mainly obtained from interviews, observations, and school documents, so the study did not conduct an independent financial audit of all transactions. Fourth, the study focused on school-level actors and did not deeply examine the perspectives of district education officials, parents outside the school committee, or students as beneficiaries of school financing. Future research should involve more schools, include district-level policy actors, combine qualitative findings with financial performance indicators, and examine how financing management affects learning quality and educational equity.

Conclusion

This study concludes that educational financing management in SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu and SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan is implemented through an integrated governance cycle consisting of planning, implementation, evaluation, and transparency, with RKAS/ARKAS serving as the central instrument for aligning school needs, budget priorities, fund realization, accountability documents, and stakeholder communication. The findings show that both schools share similar formal mechanisms, including needs identification, budget prioritization, regulatory alignment, expenditure verification, financial reporting, and committee involvement; however, they differ in managerial orientation. SMP Negeri 3 Pantai Labu tends to adopt a conservative-stability model that prioritizes essential services, cautious spending, administrative order, and safe accountability reporting, while SMP Negeri 4 Percut Sei Tuan demonstrates a more programmatic-adaptive model that emphasizes data-informed planning, cross-field coordination, program-based realization, and proactive transparency to support school quality improvement. These findings indicate that effective school financing is not determined solely by the availability of funds, but by the capacity of schools to transform financial resources into accountable, traceable, and context-responsive educational services. The study contributes to the literature on school-based financial management by demonstrating that the same formal budgeting instrument may generate different governance patterns depending on institutional capacity, leadership, stakeholder participation, and local school context. Practically, the findings imply the need to strengthen financial management SOPs, treasurer competence, ARKAS literacy, program-based evaluation, and transparent communication mechanisms so that school financing becomes more efficient, accountable, and oriented toward educational quality. Nevertheless, because this study was limited to two public junior high schools in one regency and employed a qualitative multi-site design, the findings should be interpreted as analytically transferable rather than statistically generalizable; therefore, future studies are recommended to involve broader school contexts, include district-level policy actors, and combine qualitative insights with quantitative indicators of financial performance and educational outcomes.

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