

Implementation of The Scholarship Program Policy in Aligning Higher Education with Regional Workforce Need

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ABSTRACT

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This research is grounded in the competency mismatch between higher education graduates and the needs of the local industry in Cilegon City. The main objective of this study is to analyze and evaluate the implementation of the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program policy in aligning higher education with regional employment needs. This research employs a descriptive qualitative type with a case study approach. The research subjects include the Cilegon City Regional Secretariat's Social Welfare Division (Kesra Setda), scholarship program administrators, partner universities, and scholarship recipient students, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, using interview guidelines and field notes as instruments, which were validated through triangulation. The research method applied is descriptive qualitative research. The main findings indicate that program implementation has run well in terms of disposition and budget, but has faced obstacles in communication and bureaucratic structure, particularly in establishing binding partnerships with local industry. In conclusion, the success of this alignment depends on the upstream-downstream integration of local government commitment, university curricula, and labor market needs. The research implications call for regulatory reform requiring industry sector involvement, from major/program mapping to commitments on employment absorption.

INTRODUCTION

Ideally, a higher level of education directly corresponds to greater opportunities for a person to obtain decent employment, with the education sector playing a crucial role in producing competent, job-ready human resources. However, Indonesia has recently been facing a significant mismatch phenomenon between educational output and labor market needs. This mismatch problem represents a misalignment between the competencies or level of education completed by graduates and the demands and qualifications actually required in the workforce (Rahman et al., 2026).

The world of work is faced with the problem of minimal labor absorption, especially for educated workers. The main cause of unemployment is the gap between the world of education and the world of work. Thus far, the education sector has been producing graduates whose competencies are not well suited to the needs of the workforce, so that the existing opportunities cannot be taken up by workers. The various businesses that have emerged cannot provide greater contributions to the workforce because workers' competencies are not sufficiently aligned. Higher education, as a producer of educated labor, has not been able to make a major contribution to labor absorption. This means there is not yet alignment between the world of education and the world of work. One cause of this problem is the mismatch between the curriculum implemented in universities and the world of work. The competencies instilled in graduates through curriculum implementation have not been optimal (Murwaningsih, T., 2018).

Cilegon is known as an industrial city, home to one of Indonesia's largest manufacturing and petrochemical hubs.

Ideally, this status necessitates a sustainable supply of skilled and well-educated local labor. However, the reality on the ground tells a different story. Statistical data from Banten Province indicates that Cilegon ranked third in unemployment rates in both 2024 and 2025. To address this employment gap, the Cilegon City Government launched a strategic initiative known as the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program. Far more than mere financial aid for education, this program stands as a key municipal priority a tangible, tactical measure designed to produce local graduates who are truly job-ready and capable of being absorbed by the local industry.

Scholarships from local government make a big difference in opening up access to higher education, and the idea is that this access gets matched up with what the region actually needs job wise. As (Asih et al., 2023) put it, scholarships are given to keep students motivated, help them finish on time, and boost their academic performance so eventually they can work in the field they actually want. That's why scholarships, especially ones coming straight from local government, matter so much. This lines up with (Dalla, Kewuel, 2023), who note that most government scholarships are aimed at students who are financially struggling and those who perform well academically. Programs like this are seen as a huge help for Cilegon's economy people get access to higher education without having to stress over tuition. The Cilegon City Government is committed to aligning the qualifications of scholarship recipients with the actual manpower needs of the region.

The success of the grand vision behind the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program is determined not only by the amount of

funds allocated or the number of registered beneficiaries, but also heavily relies on the effectiveness of its implementation process in the field. As a complex policy intervention, aligning (link and match) the academic qualifications of scholarship recipients with the specific demands of the manufacturing and petrochemical industries in Cilegon City is no simple task. This alignment demands intensive communication, regulatory synergy, and a strong commitment among the Cilegon City Government, partner universities, and private sectors as the employers. Information asymmetry regarding the competency standards required by industries often becomes a classic bottleneck, leaving university graduates still struggling to penetrate the local labor market. Consequently, an in-depth study is urgently required to comprehensively review the dynamics of this program's execution, in order to identify the extent to which current policy implementation can bridge the employment gap and genuinely realize the sustainable absorption of local labor.

The Cilegon City Government is committed to matching scholarship recipients' qualifications with what the local job market actually needs. This lines up with the "link and match" idea (Desmayanti et al., 2020), where the goal is to bridge graduates' skills with what employers are actually looking for through good communication, trust, and collaboration, so the workforce that comes out the other end is genuinely productive and competitive. Backs this up too, saying that link and match is basically a strategy to tie education institutions and industry together, so the skills students pick up in college actually stay relevant to what the job market currently needs (Sugiharto, 2024).

Needs analysis is a crucial stage for identifying the various components that drive the urgency of planning and implementing education and job training programs. In this context, Utami et al. (2023) assert that competence represents an individual's work capacity, encompassing knowledge, skills, and work attitudes that align with established standards. In the industrial world, understanding these skills is essential for mapping out the type of work best suited to a person. Through a clear identification of employee qualifications, companies can design more targeted personal development programs through training or further education.

These individual qualifications are generally tested at the requirement stage when a company or industry recruits new workers. Responding to current labor market dynamics, Sadiyah (2021) notes that the majority of businesses have set a minimum bachelor's degree (S-1) as the primary educational qualification requirement. Therefore, every individual is expected to be able to pursue education up to the higher education level in order to meet the qualification standards set by the industrial sector.

The Cilegon City Government currently has several selected study programs that form the priority of the Cilegon Juare scholarship program. These programs were selected based on the results of a survey conducted by the Cilegon City Government with industry stakeholders regarding which study programs have been the priority in job recruitment, or are most relevant and needed by these companies.

Research on scholarship policy implementation and evaluation at the regional level isn't new plenty of researchers have looked into it from different angles. (Dini et al., 2023) studied the Higher Education Achievement Scholarship in Rembang Regency and found that success was mostly measured by how well administrative requirements were met and how fairly the quota was distributed. (Muslim, 2025) evaluated Cilegon's full-scholarship program from 2021-2023,

focusing on periodic impact assessment, budget management, and quantitative achievements over time. (Rika, 2020) looked at how effective a local government scholarship policy (Regulation No. 18/2017 in East Luwu Regency) was for high-achieving and low-income students, focusing on the social justice angle of narrowing the access gap to college.

These earlier studies are useful, but they leave a gap this research wants to fill. Most previous studies treat scholarship policy as a standalone tool either as social assistance or as a way to fulfill people's basic right to education. There hasn't been much deep research into scholarship programs being run as a structural, macro-level tool to bridge the mismatch between what universities produce and what specific industrial regions actually need workforce-wise. This study steps in to fill that gap, shifting the focus from a purely administrative/distributive lens to more of a strategic alignment analysis.

Given all that background and the research gap, this study aims to take a deep look at how the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program policy is being implemented to align higher education with the region's job needs.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach. According to (Sugiyono, 2023), qualitative research is grounded in post-positivist/interpretive philosophy and is used to study things in their natural setting. The method used here is descriptive as Sukmadinata (Nabila, 2025) explains, descriptive qualitative methods aim to describe and portray various phenomena, whether naturally occurring or man-made, focusing on the characteristics, quality, and relationships between the activities involved. The goal is to explore and paint a full, fact-based picture of the social situation on the ground.

This study uses two types of data sources: primary and secondary. According to (Sujarweni, 2022:89), primary data comes straight from the first-hand source or respondents, gathered through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Secondary data, meanwhile, draws on existing documentation from other parties things like academic literature, textbooks, or mass media.

Data was collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. (Sugiyono 2020:224) explains that interviews are used when the researcher wants to do preliminary exploration to figure out what issues need to be studied, and to get a deeper understanding from respondents. (Hasanah, 2017) describes observation as a qualitative data-collection method done by systematically and logically watching phenomena, behavior, or social interactions happening at the research site. And documentation, per (Fadli, 2021), is a highly recommended qualitative data-collection method for getting rich, descriptive data through direct observation of what's happening in the field.

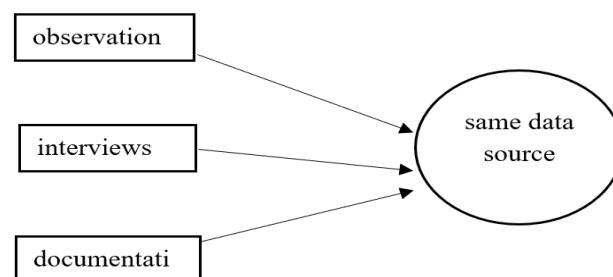


Figure1: Data collection technique (Sugiyono, 2022) Observation, Interviews, and Documentation all feeding into the same data source.

Next, to keep the data trustworthy, the researcher used source triangulation and technique triangulation. Anto et al. (2024) describe data validity as a crucial part of qualitative research, rooted in the concepts of validity and reliability, which need to be matched to the needs and the underlying research paradigm. The last step is data analysis. Following Miles and Huberman (Sugiyono, 2022), qualitative data analysis doesn't happen in a straight line it runs simultaneously and stays interconnected. This cycle covers four main, interacting components data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions.

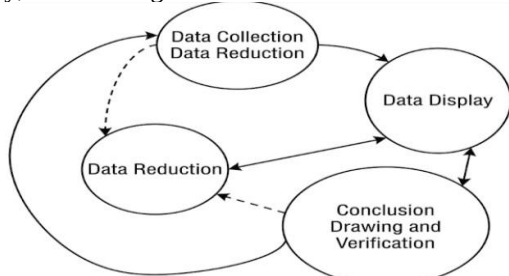


Figure 2. Miles & Huberman's interactive data analysis model

Basically, qualitative data analysis is a dynamic, non-linear cycle where everything stays connected throughout the research process. It starts with collecting field data, which right away gets followed by data reduction sorting, simplifying, and narrowing things down to what's actually relevant to the research focus. After that, the reduced data gets organized into a display format like narrative text or a matrix to make patterns and relationships between variables easier to see. The cycle wraps up with drawing conclusions and verifying them, and those early conclusions aren't set in stone they keep getting tested by revisiting the reduction and display steps, and even collecting more data if things still feel incomplete.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program is laid out in Mayor Regulation No. 20 of 2025, which covers the guidelines for the program. This is a newer version compared to the previous scholarship policy, and it's designed specifically to align higher education with regional job needs. This scholarship is aimed specifically at Cilegon residents who want to continue their education to a higher level. People can apply either through the achievement track or the low-income track. For the low-income track, applicants need proof from the Social Affairs Office (via DTKS/social welfare data). For the achievement track, applicants need a certificate from a city, provincial, or national-level competition.



Figure 3. Cilegon city government's political promises

Based on the image above, the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program is a political promise made by the Cilegon City Government during its campaign, aiming to continue Cilegon's scholarship program from the previous year into an improved version — one that aligns with regional employment needs. Running this program takes a decent chunk of money. In 2025, the Cilegon City Government set aside 3 billion rupiah, and in 2026 that jumped to 4 billion rupiah. The funding comes from Cilegon's regional budget (APBD), which is sourced from local taxes. The Cilegon City Government works together with both industry players and universities to make this program a success. Each side gets something out of it: universities become a go-to reference point for Cilegon residents applying for scholarships, since local companies prioritize hiring from those particular universities. Meanwhile, industry doesn't have to look for talent outside Cilegon, since the city now has homegrown talent that's competitive and ready to be absorbed into the local workforce.



Figure 4. Priority study programs for the Cilegon Juara scholarship program

Based on the image above, the Cilegon Juara Scholarship Program has several study programs designated as priorities for this program. These study programs are based on an HR survey conducted by the Cilegon City Government as part of this scholarship program, in order to align with regional employment needs. The Cilegon City Government wants students who receive the Cilegon Juara Scholarship to be absorbed into the workforce after graduating, so that they do not end up unemployed. Students are given the facilities to study properly during their time at university and are required to take these particular study programs, because these programs are, in fact, highly relevant and in demand within the industrial world

Implementation of the Cilegon Juara Scholarship Program

The initial steps taken by the Cilegon city government in creating this program involved strategic and operational stages carried out to bring a program or policy into reality. The implementation process of the Cilegon Juara scholarship program began by looking at the condition of Cilegon City at the time, when many residents wanted the Cilegon scholarship program to continue running permanently. In 2025, the Cilegon city government changed leadership; previously led by Mr. Heldy along with his deputy, the current mayor of Cilegon is Mr. Robinsar. During the mayoral election campaign, Mr. Robinsar stated that he would continue the Cilegon scholarship program in a better and more effective version. After the campaign period ended and Mr. Robinsar was elected mayor of Cilegon for the 2025–2029 term, he fulfilled his promise to continue the Cilegon scholarship program.

The scholarship program previously held in Cilegon City was called the Cilegon Full Sarjana Scholarship Program, but in 2025 the Cilegon scholarship program was renamed the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program. This program is implemented specifically for the residents of Cilegon City, and the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program is a special program for higher education, intended for Cilegon City residents who wish to continue their education to a higher level. The Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program exists not only for underprivileged residents of Cilegon City, but also for residents with academic and non-academic achievements, who can also receive assistance from this scholarship program, with the same goal of enabling Cilegon City residents to continue their education to a higher level.

The Cilegon scholarship program has established partnerships with several universities and industries to achieve the goal set by the Cilegon city government, namely aligning higher education with regional employment needs. Currently, the Cilegon city government has partnered with 22 universities, including local public and private universities, along with 10 well-known universities in Indonesia, as well as local ministry affiliated higher education institutions. The Cilegon city government partnered with these 22 universities with the main objective of expanding access to higher education and improving the quality of Cilegon's human resources (HR) to make them more competitive. It should be noted that the selection of these universities was made by the Cilegon city government based on the results of an HRD survey, which found that these universities are a priority in the workforce recruitment process. According to Pramesti et al. (2024), aligning higher education curricula with industry needs is a vital strategic step in producing graduates who are job-ready and competitive in the labor market. The meaning of this statement is that the course materials, skills, and practical experience gained by students during their studies become relevant to the real demands of today's job market. With this alignment or "link and match," students no longer simply graduate holding a diploma, but truly master the specific skills sought by companies.

The Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program has a valid legal basis under Mayor Regulation No. 20 of 2025 concerning the Guidelines for the Cilegon Juare Scholarship, which was ratified on June 18, 2025. The Cilegon scholarship program also has a target regarding who is eligible to receive this scholarship program, namely that those entitled to receive the Cilegon Juare Scholarship are Cilegon City residents who register for the scholarship program through either the achievement track or the underprivileged track. The Cilegon city government states that Cilegon City residents are the ones entitled to receive this Cilegon scholarship, because this scholarship program is a regional government program, in which, according to Damiti et al. (2025), the central government grants a number of authorities to regional governments to regulate and manage their own governmental affairs in accordance with statutory regulations within the Indonesian context. Thus, the government has the right to stipulate that this regional government program regarding the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program is only for residents of the Cilegon City region.

The implementation of this scholarship program is heavily influenced by the dynamics of political, physical, and social factors developing within the community. This is in line with the Political Ecology Theory proposed by Wildavsky (Haliim & Fatkhurrohman, 2025), which states that the political culture

of a region is shaped by the reciprocal interaction between the physical environment and social structures with the values held by the local community. In this context, the success of scholarship program implementation depends not only on technical policy alone, but also on the program's ability to adapt to environmental characteristics, social needs, and the existing local political constellation and Cilegon City currently does need the Cilegon scholarship program to help its residents continue their higher education.

Based on the image above, this is the process flow for participating in the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program, which begins with the registration stage creating an account on the Sicerdas website followed by the second stage, administrative selection, and finally the announcement stage. In terms of the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program, it does not demand much from applicants; the registration process is very easy to follow, as long as the prevailing terms and conditions are met.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program

The Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program has run alongside both supporting factors and inhibiting factors. Based on Van Meter and Van Horn's implementation theory, the main driving factor in this program is the existence of clear regulations serving as an operational compass, in which the direction and objectives of the program have been explicitly outlined. One of the provisions within the Cilegon Juare scholarship program's regulations is to expand access to higher education in a way that aligns with regional labor needs. Marywiyah (2022) adds that, besides having clear guidelines, the sustainability of this program is also supported by strong financial backing and the availability of competent human resources (HR). This means that in the implementation of the Cilegon Juare scholarship program, the recipients of this assistance are individuals who genuinely meet the appropriate qualifications. Andini (2023) reinforces this by stating that an organization's effectiveness in utilizing its assets particularly human resources is a key pillar of policy success. Without structured and capable HR management, strategic targets are essentially impossible to fully achieve.

Another supporting factor is the effectiveness of communication between the Cilegon City Government and the various parties involved. Effendy (in Anwara & Yudiono, 2026) defines communication as the process of exchanging information to influence attitudes, opinions, or behavior, whether face-to-face or through other media. Therefore, in this program, communication is not merely about delivering messages, but a vital tool for aligning perceptions, building mutual understanding, and strengthening teamwork. The Cilegon City Government carries out good communication in terms of collaboration related to the Cilegon Juare scholarship program, namely by partnering with industry through CSR forums, and with universities the selection of these universities being based on the results of a survey conducted with the Cilegon City Government through an HR survey identifying which universities are a priority for companies. The attitude of the program implementers is also highly determinative of success; currently, the Cilegon Juare Scholarship implementation team has worked solidly, demonstrating a sense of responsibility, commitment, and good adaptability while running the program. The management of the Cilegon Juare scholarship program has consistently shown a good attitude toward scholarship recipient students whenever they experience obstacles within the program, and the scholarship management team has been very responsive in helping and seeking solutions.

The Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program is currently fully the responsibility of the Public Welfare division, and is no longer the responsibility of the Education Office, due to the division of governmental authority based on Law No. 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government. Under this regulation, the authority of the Education Office at the regency/city level is limited only to managing basic education (early childhood education, elementary school, and junior high school) as well as non-formal education, while authority over higher education falls under the central government. Therefore, the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program, which targets university students, is administratively categorized as a social assistance program or a grant for improving community welfare, so that operational and budgetary responsibility is fully transferred to the Public Welfare (Kesra) Division of the Regional Secretariat, which, by nomenclature, functions to facilitate basic social services and social welfare for the community at the regional level.

The Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program serves as a real solution that eases the financial burden on Cilegon residents in accessing higher education without needing to worry about single tuition fees (UKT). The smoothness of this program is also inseparable from the responsiveness of the implementation team in helping students resolve various obstacles that arise in the field. Habibah et al. (2020) note that when policy implementers hold attitudes aligned with the policy's objectives, this can almost certainly guarantee the success of implementation. Conversely, indifferent attitudes or misalignment among implementers can render the entire process of policy socialization and application ineffective.

The Cilegon city government and the Cilegon scholarship program implementation team are committed to running the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program until the end of the current mayor's term, and this scholarship program will not stop midway. Therefore, to ensure the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program does not come to a halt, the government has taken several measures and is committed, no matter what happens, to keeping the program running, provided that the program implementers also share the same commitment as the Cilegon city government. This aligns with Habibah et al. (2020), who state that if implementers have good disposition, they will carry out the policy or program well as intended by the policymakers, whereas if implementers hold attitudes different from those of the policymakers, the implementation process of a policy or program will also fail to run effectively. Thus, to this day, the Cilegon scholarship program implementation team has carried out its duties very well in supporting the success of the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program, with the team consistently helping to find solutions whenever scholarship recipient students encounter obstacles within the program.

Nevertheless, this program also faces several obstacles in the field. One of the main challenges is the lack of proper socialization regarding this new policy, leaving some members of the public still confused and assuming this program is the same as the previous version of the scholarship. Maq-daniyah (2026) argues that this confusion creates an information gap and reflects low legal literacy among the public, which is further compounded by the fact that the program's regulatory documents are not even yet available on the official website of the Cilegon City Legal Documentation and Information Network (JDIH). In addition, this program also runs into the classic public policy obstacles of limited time and budget management; scholarship funds are often disbursed

late, forcing students to use their own personal money first in order to pay tuition fees on time before government assistance arrives.

Another obstacle is the uneven dissemination of information about this program across all segments of Cilegon society. Although the city government has held socialization sessions in eight sub-districts, inviting representatives from high school/vocational school students, general public understanding of this program remains relatively low. So far, awareness of the program has been limited mainly to young people who seek out information independently through the city government's official Instagram account. Besides the issue of information dissemination, this program also still lacks support in terms of implementation and stakeholder engagement; for example, there is still no clear and structured internship program in place for scholarship recipient students to date.

Impact of the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program

This program has generated real impact for the Cilegon City Government. Starting with its target beneficiaries, this scholarship is specifically aimed at eligible residents of Cilegon City, whether through the achievement track or the underprivileged (poor) track. This restriction is highly logical given that the program is a local policy exclusively intended for Cilegon residents. Haryati (2020) explains that welfare is essentially a condition in which material, spiritual, and social needs are met, thereby enabling a person to live decently and carry out their social functions properly. In other words, the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program is used as a strategic instrument by the regional government to break the chain of poverty and improve community welfare through expanded access to higher education. This program does not accept anyone other than residents of Cilegon City; it exists to improve the welfare of Cilegon's people so that they can be competitive and excel compared to people from outside the region.

This scholarship program also builds strategic collaboration with universities and the industrial sector. Rahardjo (in Hakim et al., 2020) defines collaboration as a form of inter-organizational relationship whether inter government relations, strategic alliances, or multi-organizational networks involving two or more stakeholders working together. Through this kind of synergy, all parties involved can pool their resources to achieve shared goals that would be difficult to reach individually. The Cilegon Juare Scholarship is designed to create sustainable impact, both now and in the future. The immediate benefit for current Cilegon students is the removal of financial barriers; students from the achievement track can study without worrying about tuition fees (UKT), while students from the underprivileged track not only receive a tuition fee waiver but also a living cost allowance.

The long-term impact of this program is reflected in the strengthening of regional competitiveness through the concept of "link and match." Astuti et al. (2025) note that link and match programs are specifically designed to align the workforce's skills with what the labor market actually needs. Through this approach, the Cilegon City Government connects the outcomes of higher education with the needs of local industry.

The hope is that after scholarship recipients complete their studies, they can be quickly absorbed into the workforce particularly within the Cilegon region thereby directly helping to reduce the regional unemployment rate in the future. In the long run, the sustainability of the Cilegon Juare Scholarship

Program will be a determining factor shaping the socioeconomic landscape of Cilegon City going forward. The future policy impact of the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program will manifest in strengthened regional competitiveness through the realization of the link and match concept, in line with Astuti et al. (2025), who state that link and match programs are designed with the aim of improving workforce competencies to match labor market needs, whereby the Cilegon city government aligns higher education with regional employment needs so that once students graduate and complete their studies, they can be absorbed into the workforce. This can lead to a significant reduction in the open unemployment rate, decreased industry dependence on labor from outside the region, and the creation of more inclusive, knowledge-based regional economic growth.

This scholarship program is independently funded through the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD), sourced from regional taxes. This regional revenue is reallocated into productive programs, one of which is the Cilegon Juare Scholarship, for the benefit of the local community. Noviyanti & Dermawan (2021) describe scholarship schemes like this as a government instrument to support both academically strong students and those facing financial hardship. Through this policy, the Cilegon City Government is committed to ensuring access for high-achieving and underprivileged residents alike, so they can pursue education up to the higher education level. Because the funding source for this scholarship program comes from the APBD, the funds prepared by the Cilegon City Government are not as large as scholarship programs funded by the national budget (APBN), however, it can be assured that the funds given to scholarship recipient students are genuinely helpful in covering tuition costs and assisting with living expenses, even though the amounts are not large.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program has run well through the synergistic collaboration built among the regional government, partner universities, and the industrial sector in aligning higher education with local employment needs. Nevertheless, the program still faces challenges in the form of bureaucratic obstacles in the fund disbursement process, as well as the need for stricter standardization of academic monitoring to ensure the consistent quality of program recipients. As a concrete solution to address these challenges, the regional government is advised to reform the fund disbursement administration scheme through one-door digitalization to minimize the recurring bureaucratic barriers each semester. In addition, regular optimization of tripartite coordination is needed to develop a student academic performance monitoring system that is directly integ. Rated with internship programs at partner industries. Through this improvement in operational management and strengthened oversight, the Cilegon Juare Scholarship Program can minimize technical obstacles in the field, maintain graduate quality, and ensure the sustainability of regional human resource investment that is optimally ready to be absorbed by the Cilegon industrial labor market.

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