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Decentralization of Education in the Era of Regional Autonomy: Challenges and Opportunities for Strengthening Islamic Education

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ABSTRACT

The policy of regional autonomy implemented since the Reformasi era has brought significant implications for educational governance in Indonesia, including the provision of Islamic Religious Education. Educational decentralization grants broader authority to local governments and educational institutions to manage education in accordance with local needs and characteristics. This article aims to examine the concept of regional autonomy and educational decentralization, as well as to analyze the challenges and opportunities for strengthening Islamic Religious Education within this policy framework. The study employs a library research method by reviewing various sources, including books, academic journals, statutory regulations, and relevant policy documents. The findings indicate that educational decentralization creates opportunities to strengthen Islamic Religious Education through increased managerial autonomy, the development of locally based curricula, enhanced community participation, and potential financial support from local governments. Nevertheless, its implementation still faces several challenges, such as the lack of clarity in the division of authority among different levels of government, limited human resources and regional budgets, and insufficient governmental attention to Islamic educational institutions. Therefore, policy synergy between central and local governments is necessary to ensure that educational decentralization can contribute optimally to the strengthening of Islamic Religious Education.

Keyword: Regional Autonomy; Educational Decentralization; Islamic Education

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the strategic sectors and a central issue in Indonesia's national development agenda. Ruani Oskar, Fahmi Mandala Putra (2025) Initially, the authority to manage education in Indonesia was centrally controlled by the central government. Erdayani Riski & Afandi Syed Agung (2023) However, in the reform era, the government established a regional autonomy policy that brought significant changes in governance, including in the field of education. One of the implications of this policy is the transfer of some educational management authority to local governments through the

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implementation of educational decentralization, which provides space for regions to initiate and manage educational administration according to local needs and characteristics.

Since the implementation of the regional autonomy policy through Law Number 22 of 1999, which was later updated to Law Number 23 of 2014 on Regional Government, there have been significant changes in the governance of education. Decentralization of education grants greater authority to local governments to regulate and manage the education sector in their regions. The main objective of this decentralization is to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and relevance of education to align with local needs and characteristics (Mulyasa, 2002).

In the Republic of Indonesia Law No. 29 of 2003 Article 3 on the National Education System, it is stated that the national education aims to develop the potential of humans to become believers, especially students, independent, creative, democratic, and responsible for everything they do. Tompunu et al. (2023) In shaping students who are faithful, Islamic religious education holds an important position. Because Islamic religious education has a harmonious goal, which is to cultivate noble character, strengthen the spiritual and physical aspects within oneself (Khotimah et al., 2022).

According to Fattah, as quoted by Rahim, although the policy was designed with positive intentions, in practice, it faces various obstacles. One of the fundamental issues is related to the lack of clarity in the division of authority between the central government, provincial governments, and district/city governments, which results in overlapping policies and uncertainty in the implementation of educational programs. In addition, many local governments still face limitations in institutional capacity, quality of human resources, and budgetary support, making it difficult to implement education optimally (Rahim, 2017). The process of educational decentralization does not happen automatically; it continues to face various obstacles, even as it opens up new hopes and possibilities for the future of education in Indonesia (TENGKU et al., 2024).

Thus, the policy of education decentralization will certainly have implications for Islamic education. This study will review the challenges and opportunities of Islamic education with the implementation of the education decentralization policy in Indonesia.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses the library research method. The data collection technique with this method involves reviewing books, literature, notes, and various reports related to the

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researched topic. This method is carried out by reading, understanding, and evaluating sources relevant to the researched topic. In the study of strengthening Islamic religious education through the decentralization of education policy in Indonesia, the library research method can be used to collect data and information from various sources such as books, journals, reports, and related documents. In conducting library research, researchers must ensure that the sources used are relevant and credible, and perform analysis and synthesis of the obtained data to produce accurate and objective conclusions (Saputra et al., 2023).

DISCUSSION

The Concept of Regional Autonomy and Decentralization of Education

In the Indonesian dictionary, regional autonomy is the right, authority, and obligation of a region to manage and govern its own household. According to Koesoemahatmadja, as quoted by Ridwan et al., autonomy means self-regulating and self-governing. Meanwhile, Wajong explains that regional autonomy is a form of freedom to maintain and advance regional interests with its own finances, determine its own laws, and govern itself (Ridwan, 2021). Furthermore, it is reinforced by Law number 32 of 2004 on regional governance, article 1, paragraph 5, which states that regional autonomy is the right, authority, and obligation of autonomous regions to regulate and manage their own governance and the interests of the local community in accordance with the law.

From the various definitions presented above, it can be concluded that regional autonomy is regional independence, where the region has the authority and right to govern and manage its own administration without interference from the central government. With this regional autonomy, the region is free to develop its potential, having the freedom to think and act in making decisions related to its own area.

One of the strategic aspects of regional autonomy is the decentralization of education, which became one of the choices of the Indonesian government after the reform era. According to Agrawal and Ribot, the term decentralization of education is the formal action of the central government to transfer its authority in the field of education to actors and educational institutions at a lower level within an administrative-political region and territorial hierarchy(Agrawal, 1999). Based on Government Regulation number 25 of 2000 concerning the authority of the government and the authority of provinces as autonomous regions in the fields of education and culture, it is stated that the authority of the government includes the following matters:

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1. Establishment of student and learner competency standards, as well as the arrangement of the national curriculum and national learning outcome assessments, along with their implementation guidelines
2. Establishment of subject matter standards.
3. Establishment of requirements for the acquisition and use of academic degrees.
4. Establishment of guidelines for the financing of education administration.
5. Establishment of requirements for the admission, transfer, and certification of students, learners, and university students.

Meanwhile, the authority of the provincial government includes the following matters:

1. Establishing policies on the admission of students from minority, underprivileged, and/or economically disadvantaged communities.

2. Providing assistance in the procurement of core textbooks/educational modules for kindergartens, primary education, secondary education, and non-formal education.

3. Supporting or assisting in the administration of higher education, aside from curriculum regulation, accreditation, and the appointment of academic staff.

4. Considering the opening and closing of higher education institutions.

5. Organizing special schools and training centers or teacher training.

6. Organizing provincial museums, historical heritage sites, archeology, historical studies and traditional values, as well as the development of regional languages and cultures.

Decentralization of education is a policy of granting authority and responsibility to local governments to regulate and manage the education system in their regions. With this policy, decisions related to education policy, school management, and the allocation of educational resources are made by local governments, not the central government. The goal of education decentralization is to provide freedom and independence to local governments in developing an education system that meets the needs and characteristics of the local community. With decentralization, local governments can adjust education policies, curricula, and school management according to the conditions and challenges in their regions (Wahyudi & Lutfi, 2019).

With the decentralization of education, local governments can tailor learning strategies to local characteristics and aspirations, thereby improving the quality and

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relevance of education. This policy also includes local-based management, delegation of authority, and curriculum innovation. Sofiani et al. (2024) This policy is also expected to improve access to education, especially in remote and marginalized areas. Community participation in decision-making is also expected to grow in shaping education policies and providing valuable input.

The concept of decentralized education management is known as School-Based Management (SBM). SBM represents a paradigm shift in education management from a centralized system to a decentralized one. In this paradigm, the authority of education management, which was previously centralized at the central government level, both at the micro and macro aspects, is transferred to the level of educational units. Thus, schools are given a greater role and responsibility in managing resources, planning programs, and making educational decisions according to the needs and conditions of each school (Ridwan, 2021).

Decentralization provides flexibility to school principals and teachers in managing education at the local level. They can be more flexible in designing learning strategies that meet the needs of students in their environment. Enhancing teachers' capacity through training and professional development can also be a focus to improve the quality of teaching (Sofiani et al., 2024). Local governments can design authorities to create scholarship and educational financing assistance programs aimed at students from low-income families, so that every child has an equal opportunity to access educational services. The policy plays a role in expanding access to education while also increasing student participation in the learning process.

Decentralization also allows for the development of a more inclusive curriculum that meets local needs. Azan et al. (2021) Emphasis on local-based learning and recognition of cultural diversity can provide a more meaningful learning experience for students, thereby contributing to the overall improvement of education quality. In addition, the decentralization of education encourages increased community participation in the management of education. Through mechanisms such as school committees and local education forums, the community has the opportunity to engage in the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of educational programs in their area. Such involvement allows the education policies adopted to be more in line with the needs, conditions, and aspirations of the local community.

Islamic Religious Education in the National Education System

Ahmad D. Marimba defines education as a teaching process consciously carried out by educators toward the physical and spiritual development of students, with the main

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goal of shaping their personality. Education in this sense contains elements of guidance, assistance, or leadership that are carried out intentionally and systematically. The educational process involves several key elements, namely the presence of an educator who acts as a guide or director, the presence of learners as the ones being guided, and the goals to be achieved through the guidance activities. In addition, the implementation of education is also supported by the use of certain facilities and tools that serve as media to effectively achieve educational goals (Marimba, 2007).

Abuddin Nata, as quoted by Khotimah et al., defines education as an activity carried out by adults who possess knowledge and skills to be transferred to others gradually. The educational process is carried out consciously, based on intention, attention, and thorough planning to achieve the predetermined learning objective.(Khotimah et al., 2022).

Islamic Religious Education, as stated by Zakiyah Darajat, is a developmental process aimed at changing individual attitudes and behaviors to align with Islamic teachings in order to shape a Muslim personality. Therefore, the formation of noble morals and commendable behavior, as well as submission to Allah SWT reflected in faith, becomes the main objective of Islamic education. These goals align with the values derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. Thus, Islamic education is directed toward the realization of a total submission to Allah SWT in the lives of individuals, society, and humanity as a whole (Olfah, 2024).

In the Indonesian Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 Chapter I Article 1, it is explained that religious education is education that provides knowledge and shapes the attitudes, personalities, and skills of students in practicing their religious teachings, which is carried out at least through subjects/courses in all paths, levels, and types of education. Meanwhile, religious education is education that prepares students to perform roles that require mastery of knowledge about religious teachings and/or to become experts in religious knowledge and practice their religious teachings.

The Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia on Religious Education and Religious Education is the result of a joint agreement among stakeholders representing religious communities, namely Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Each religious representative has validated the formulation of legal norms that were drafted in accordance with the characteristics and teachings of their respective religions. Thus, religious education and religious instruction serve to prepare students to become members of society who understand and practice the values of their religious teachings, as well as play a role in shaping individuals with religious competence, including becoming experts in the field of religious studies (Samrin, 2015).

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In Law number 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system, religious education is specifically regulated in article 30, which states that:

1. Religious education is organized by the government and community groups of religious adherents, in accordance with the laws and regulations.

2. Religious education plays a role in preparing students to become community members who understand and practice the values of their religious teachings or become religious scholars.

3. Religious education can be organized through formal, non-formal, and informal education pathways.

4. Religious education includes diniyah education, pesantren, pasraman, and other similar forms. In this case, religious education is the responsibility of the government in society. In addition to the official madrasah schools established by the government, such as MIN, MtsN, or MAN, the community can also organize religious education, whether formal (pesantren, madrasah), non-formal (military learning grounds, Taman Pendidikan Al-quran (TPQ), majelis taklim), or informal (madrasah diniyah).

That article shows that the position of Islamic education is an important part of the national education system. Religious education focuses on shaping a student into a better and stronger individual in their devotion to God the Almighty. Religious education also plays a significant role in helping students develop their abilities to become a spiritual bastion of religious values, possess noble character, and embody Muslim character (specifically Islamic religion).

The National Education System Law (UU Sisdiknas) of 2003 is one of the government's efforts to strengthen and advance religious education in Indonesia. This is reflected in the explicit position of religion as regulated in the National Education System Law (UU Sisdiknas). Through these provisions, secondary and higher education are directed to prepare students to be able to perform roles and positions that require an understanding of religious teachings, and to enable them to develop into experts in the field of religious studies. Through these provisions, religious education is not only placed as part of the mandatory curriculum but is also aimed at equipping students at the secondary and higher education levels to be able to undertake roles and positions that demand an understanding and mastery of religious teachings. Additionally, the National Education System Law (UU Sisdiknas) provides space for the development of religious education aimed at producing human resources with scientific competence in the field of religion, so that religious education functions not only as a means of faith development but also as a vehicle for the development of scientific knowledge and religious professionalism (Akhmad & Mubarok, 2023).

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Challenges and Opportunities of Islamic Education in the Era of Decentralization

Islamic education always encounters challenges, obstacles, and also changes (Priatmoko, 2018). Various government policies in an effort to strengthen religious education can be seen in Law Number 2 of 1989 concerning the National Education System, which emphasizes that the curriculum at every type and level of education must include Pancasila Education, Religious Education, and Citizenship Education. Furthermore, with the advent of the reform era, the administration of education in Indonesia has entered a new chapter in the aspect of educational management. This was marked by the implementation of regional autonomy policies that also legitimized educational autonomy through Law Number 22 of 1999. Educational autonomy is understood as the authority of regions to manage and develop educational units, so that educational institutions in the regions have a greater role in the administration and development of education according to local needs and potential (Basri & Arifin, 2021).

In the context of the implementation of Law Number 33 of 2004, there is a discourse suggesting that Islamic educational institutions should also be decentralized, particularly in terms of management, by placing them under the authority of the local Education Office. The management scheme is expected to strengthen the position of Islamic education, especially in terms of financing, as it allows Islamic educational institutions to receive budgetary support from the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD). However, on the other hand, there is a view that Islamic education should remain under the coordination of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, with a deconcentration mechanism through the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs at the provincial level, and still receive funding support from the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD). This debate indicates that Islamic education is seen as a strategic regional asset with an important role in the administration of education and the development of human resources. However, in practice, the development of Islamic educational institutions still faces various limitations and concerning conditions.(Rahim, 2017) As stated by Azyumardi Azra, the existence of Islamic education has a significant contribution to enlightening the nation's life and should receive adequate support and guidance. However, until now, the government's role in the development of Islamic educational institutions is still considered relatively limited (Azra, 2002).

Saepul mentioned several factors that cause the implementation of educational autonomy to not proceed as expected as follows:

1. The unclear rules of the game regarding roles and work procedures at the district and city levels.

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2. The management of the public sector, including educational management, is not yet ready to be implemented autonomously due to limited human resources and inadequate facilities.

3. Educational funding and the regional budget (APBD) are insufficient.

4. The lack of attention from both the central and local governments to involve the community more in educational management.

As for the opportunities in the education decentralization policy, as stated by Mahfud Djunaedi, they are:

1. Education managers in madrasahs have the opportunity to formulate the institution's goals in accordance with national objectives.

2. Education managers have the autonomy to formulate and develop the curriculum in accordance with the goals and needs of the community in a particular area or the one they serve.

3. Education managers in madrasahs have the opportunity to create a teaching and learning environment that supports the implementation and development of the established curriculum.

4. Education managers have the autonomy to develop an evaluation system that is considered appropriate and accurate, both in terms of student learning achievements and the overall implementation of education.

CONCLUSION

The regional autonomy and education decentralization policies have a significant impact on the implementation of Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia. Decentralization opens up opportunities for strengthening Islamic education through increased management autonomy, the development of contextual curricula, enhanced community participation, and potential financial support from local governments. However, the implementation of this policy still faces various challenges, such as the unclear division of authority between the central and regional governments, limited human resources and budget, and the lack of government attention to the development of Islamic educational institutions. Therefore, stronger policy synergy between the central government, regional governments, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs is needed so that the decentralization of education can run effectively and optimally contribute to strengthening the role of Islamic Religious Education as an integral part of the National Education System.

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