

Educational Autonomy and Islamic Education in Indonesia: Opportunities, Challenges, and Implications for Educational Quality

Via Novelia Najmi*, Nurhidayati Nurhidayati

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia

*Correspondence: ✉ velya.via@gmail.com,

<https://doi.org/10.51214/biis.v4i2.1740>

ABSTRACT

Educational autonomy in Indonesia constitutes a strategic milestone in post-1998 educational reform, marked by a transition from a centralized to a decentralized system. This policy reflects the government's commitment to promoting independence, participation, and accountability in educational governance at both regional and institutional levels. This study aims to examine the concept and implementation of educational autonomy while identifying the opportunities and challenges faced by Islamic educational institutions. Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach through library research, the study draws on regulatory and scholarly sources, including legislation, ministerial regulations, and recent academic literature. The findings reveal that educational autonomy provides substantial opportunities for Islamic educational institutions to foster curriculum innovation, strengthen community-based governance, and enhance educational quality in alignment with Islamic values. However, its implementation encounters significant challenges, including regional disparities in capacity, limited human resources, and weak coordination between local governments and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The study concludes that the effectiveness of educational autonomy depends on stakeholder collaboration and institutional readiness to implement autonomy principles in a sustainable manner. This study contributes a policy-oriented framework that positions Islamic educational institutions as active actors in decentralized educational governance.

ABSTRAK

Otonomi pendidikan di Indonesia merupakan capaian strategis dalam reformasi kebijakan pendidikan pasca-1998 yang ditandai oleh pergeseran dari sistem sentralistik menuju desentralisasi. Kebijakan ini mencerminkan upaya pemerintah dalam mendorong kemandirian, partisipasi, dan akuntabilitas pengelolaan pendidikan di tingkat daerah dan institusi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji konsep dan implementasi otonomi pendidikan serta mengidentifikasi peluang dan tantangan yang dihadapi lembaga pendidikan Islam. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif melalui studi kepustakaan dengan memanfaatkan sumber regulatif dan akademik, termasuk undang-undang, peraturan menteri, dan literatur ilmiah mutakhir. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa otonomi pendidikan membuka ruang bagi lembaga pendidikan Islam untuk melakukan inovasi kurikulum, memperkuat tata kelola berbasis masyarakat, dan meningkatkan mutu pendidikan yang selaras dengan nilai-nilai Islam. Namun, implementasinya masih menghadapi kendala berupa kesenjangan kapasitas antarwilayah, keterbatasan sumber daya manusia, serta lemahnya koordinasi antara pemerintah daerah dan Kementerian Agama. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa efektivitas otonomi pendidikan ditentukan oleh sinergi antar pemangku kepentingan dan kesiapan institusional dalam mengimplementasikan prinsip otonomi secara berkelanjutan. Studi ini menawarkan kontribusi berupa kerangka kebijakan yang menempatkan lembaga pendidikan Islam sebagai aktor aktif dalam tata kelola pendidikan desentralistik.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: 26-12-2025

Revised: 09-04-2026

Accepted: 19-04-2026

Keywords:

Decentralization;
Educational
Autonomy;
Education Policy;
Islamic Education;
School-Based
Management.

Histori Artikel

Diterima: 26-12-2025

Direvisi: 09-04-2026

Disetujui: 19-04-2026

Kata Kunci:

Otonomi Pendidikan;
Desentralisasi;
Pendidikan Islam;
Kebijakan
Pendidikan;
Manajemen Berbasis
Sekolah

A. INTRODUCTION

Educational reform in Indonesia has undergone significant transformation since the implementation of decentralization policies in the post-reform era. One of the most prominent outcomes of this transformation is the introduction of educational autonomy, which grants greater authority to local governments and educational institutions in managing curricula, resources, and learning processes. The decentralization of education in Indonesia was legally established through Law No. 22 of 1999 on Regional Government and subsequently reinforced by Law No. 32 of 2004, which formally transferred a range of educational management functions from the central to local governments¹. Educational autonomy is expected to enhance efficiency, responsiveness to local needs, and the overall quality of education. Mulyasa² affirms that school-based management, as an operational expression of educational autonomy, enables institutions to optimize resources in accordance with local priorities. However, the implementation of this policy has also generated various challenges, particularly in ensuring equity and maintaining educational standards across regions.³

Within this context, Islamic education occupies a strategic yet complex position. Islamic educational institutions, such as madrasas and pesantren, operate within a dual framework: they are required to comply with national education policies while simultaneously preserving their distinctive religious values and educational objectives. Nata⁴ notes that the governance of Islamic education in Indonesia is shaped by the intersection of national education law and the institutional authority of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Educational autonomy provides opportunities for Islamic education to develop contextually relevant curricula and institutional management.⁵ At the same time, it exposes these institutions to challenges related to governance capacity, quality assurance, and resource disparities among regions.

Scholars have noted that decentralization in education does not automatically lead to improved educational outcomes. Without adequate institutional readiness, professional human resources, and policy support, educational autonomy may instead widen gaps in educational quality.⁶ This concern is particularly relevant to Islamic education, which historically has faced structural inequalities in funding, infrastructure, and policy attention.⁷ The OECD⁸ further observes that Indonesia's decentralization agenda has produced significant regional disparities in educational outcomes, underscoring the need for more targeted policy interventions.

From a policy analysis perspective, decentralization is neither inherently beneficial nor detrimental; its outcomes depend critically on pre-existing institutional conditions and the

¹Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 32 Tahun 2004 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah.

²E. Mulyasa, *Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah: Konsep, Strategi, dan Implementasi* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2022).

³Suyono dan Fadhilah, "Regional Disparities in the Implementation of Educational Autonomy," *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebijakan Publik* 8, no. 4 (2024).

⁴Abuddin Nata, *Kebijakan Pendidikan Islam dan Pendidikan Umum di Indonesia* (Depok: Rajawali Pers, 2021).

⁵M. Fadli dan Suyono, "Evaluating Madrasah Autonomy in Indonesia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 15, no. 2 (2023).

⁶Suyatno, Rahmawati, dan Arifin, "Kemandirian dan Partisipasi dalam Pendidikan," *Jurnal Kebijakan Pendidikan Nasional* 11, no. 1 (2023).

⁷Abuddin Nata, *Manajemen Pendidikan Islam: Mengatasi Kelemahan Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2020).

⁸OECD, *Education Policy Outlook: Indonesia* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022).

quality of governance.⁹ Educational autonomy carries both potential advantages, including greater responsiveness to local needs, institutional innovation, and community participation, and potential drawbacks, including regional inequity, governance fragmentation, and the risk of marginalizing institutions with limited administrative capacity. For Islamic educational institutions, which operate within a historically complex regulatory environment, these contradictory tendencies demand careful policy attention. The present analytical examination is therefore both timely and necessary, given Indonesia's continued commitment to decentralized educational governance and the enduring structural challenges facing Islamic education.

Previous studies on educational autonomy in Indonesia have primarily focused on public schools and administrative efficiency, while limited attention has been given to its implications for Islamic education from a policy analysis perspective.¹⁰ This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive examination of how educational autonomy influences the development, challenges, and quality of Islamic education within the national education system. Therefore, this article aims to analyze the implementation of educational autonomy in Indonesia and examine its opportunities, challenges, and implications for the quality of Islamic education. By adopting a policy-oriented and analytical approach, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on educational reform and provide insights for strengthening Islamic education within the framework of decentralized educational governance.

Recent studies on educational autonomy in Indonesia have largely focused on administrative decentralization, school-based management, and governance efficiency within public education institutions. Mulyasa¹¹ examines how school-based management, as the operational form of educational autonomy, enables educational institutions to improve quality through local initiative and resource optimization. Suyatno, Rahmawati, and Arifin¹² further demonstrate that community participation and institutional independence are positively associated with educational improvement in decentralized settings. Meanwhile, Suyono and Fadhilah¹³ document significant regional disparities in the implementation of educational autonomy across Indonesian provinces, noting that governance capacity and fiscal resources are primary determinants of policy effectiveness. While these studies provide valuable insights into the structural dimensions of educational reform, limited attention has been given to the implications of educational autonomy for Islamic education from a policy-oriented perspective. Islamic educational institutions are often discussed as part of the broader education system without sufficient analysis of their distinctive characteristics, challenges, and policy needs under decentralized governance.

⁹Yusuf Rahman, *Educational Governance and Decentralization: A Comparative Perspective* (Jakarta: Prenadamedia, 2024).

¹⁰Nur Amalia dan Fauzan, "Islamic Integrated School Autonomy in the Post-Decentralization Era," *Journal of Educational Development Studies* 8, no. 3 (2023).

¹¹E. Mulyasa, *Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah: Konsep, Strategi, dan Implementasi* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2022).

¹²Suyatno, Rahmawati, dan Arifin, "Kemandirian dan Partisipasi dalam Pendidikan," *Jurnal Kebijakan Pendidikan Nasional* 11, no. 1 (2023).

¹³Suyono dan Fadhilah, "Regional Disparities in the Implementation of Educational Autonomy," *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebijakan Publik* 8, no. 4 (2024).

Fadli and Suyono¹⁴ examine madrasah autonomy in the post-decentralization period and find that institutional capacity and central-local coordination are critical factors in determining the effectiveness of autonomy for Islamic schools. Their findings highlight governance challenges that are specific to madrasahs, including ambiguous administrative jurisdiction between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and regional governments. Amalia and Fauzan¹⁵ investigate Islamic integrated schools and argue that educational autonomy can support curriculum innovation in Islamic institutions when institutional leadership is strong and community stakeholders are engaged. Rahim¹⁶ analyzes educational modernization in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and demonstrates that autonomy has enabled institutional adaptation to contemporary educational demands while preserving religious identity. Suyatno and Rahmawati¹⁷ further contribute by analyzing quality culture in Islamic educational institutions, showing that decentralization provides structural opportunities for quality improvement but that these are contingent on professional development and governance reform. These studies converge in arguing that educational autonomy has distinctive implications for Islamic education that cannot be fully captured by analyses focused on public schools alone. The present study extends this scholarly conversation by integrating a comprehensive policy analysis framework that connects governance structures, institutional capacity, and educational quality implications, thereby offering a more holistic understanding of how autonomy shapes Islamic education in Indonesia. The novelty of this contribution lies in foregrounding the normative dimensions of Islamic education within the policy analysis, a dimension underexplored in existing literature.

Against this background, the present study positions itself as a contribution to the discourse on educational policy and Islamic education by examining educational autonomy not merely as an administrative reform, but as a policy framework with substantive implications for educational quality. By focusing on opportunities, challenges, and quality-related implications, this article seeks to enrich the state of the art and provide a more nuanced understanding of how educational autonomy shapes the development of Islamic education in Indonesia.

B. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach using library research as its primary method. The research is designed to examine educational autonomy policies and their implementation, particularly in relation to Islamic education in Indonesia. Library research is considered appropriate for this study because the analysis focuses on policy concepts, regulatory frameworks, and theoretical perspectives rather than on empirical data collection in the field.

The data sources used in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the following key legal documents: (1) Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National

¹⁴M. Fadli dan Suyono, "Evaluating Madrasah Autonomy in Indonesia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 15, no. 2 (2023).

¹⁵Nur Amalia dan Fauzan, "Islamic Integrated School Autonomy in the Post-Decentralization Era," *Journal of Educational Development Studies* 8, no. 3 (2023).

¹⁶Ahmad Rahim, "Islamic Boarding School Autonomy and Educational Modernization," *Tarbawi: Journal of Islamic Education Policy* 11, no. 1 (2024).

¹⁷Suyatno dan Rahmawati, "Quality Culture in Islamic Educational Institutions," *Journal of Islamic Education Management* 10, no. 2 (2023).

Education System (*Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional*), which establishes the legal framework for educational autonomy at the institutional level; (2) Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government (*Undang-Undang Nomor 23 Tahun 2014 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah*), which defines the distribution of educational authority between central and local governments; (3) Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Islamic Education (*Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 55 Tahun 2007*), which provides the regulatory basis for madrasah and pesantren governance; (4) Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren (*Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2019 tentang Pesantren*), which formally recognizes pesantren as independent educational institutions; and (5) the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Madrasah Reform Strategic Plan 2020–2024.¹⁸ These documents provide the formal and legal foundations for understanding the policy framework of educational autonomy in Indonesia.

Secondary sources comprise academic books, scientific journal articles, and other scholarly works that discuss educational autonomy, educational policy, Islamic education, and educational quality. Key secondary sources include Mulyasa¹⁹ on school-based management, Nata²⁰ on Islamic education governance and policy, Rahman²¹ on educational governance and decentralization, peer-reviewed journal articles from Scopus-indexed and SINTA-indexed journals,²² and comparative international perspectives from the OECD.²³ These sources are used to support the analysis and to position the discussion within a broader academic context.

Data collection was carried out through systematic literature review, including the identification, selection, and classification of relevant sources in accordance with the research focus. The collected data were then analyzed using descriptive-analytical techniques, which involved careful reading, interpretation, and synthesis of policy texts and scholarly arguments. This analytical process aimed to identify patterns, key issues, and implications of educational autonomy for Islamic education.

Through this methodological approach, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of how educational autonomy creates both opportunities and challenges for Islamic educational institutions. The method also enables the analysis of policy implications for improving the quality of Islamic education within the framework of decentralized educational governance in Indonesia.

To strengthen methodological rigor, this study also adopts a policy analysis perspective within the qualitative library research framework. This perspective allows the analysis to

¹⁸Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Madrasah Reform Strategic Plan 2020–2024* (Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Islam, 2021).

¹⁹E. Mulyasa, *Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah: Konsep, Strategi, dan Implementasi* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2022).

²⁰Abuddin Nata, *Manajemen Pendidikan Islam: Mengatasi Kelemahan Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2020); Abuddin Nata, *Kebijakan Pendidikan Islam dan Pendidikan Umum di Indonesia* (Depok: Rajawali Pers, 2021).

²¹Yusuf Rahman, *Educational Governance and Decentralization: A Comparative Perspective* (Jakarta: Prenadamedia, 2024).

²²M. Fadli dan Suyono, "Evaluating Madrasah Autonomy in Indonesia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 15, no. 2 (2023); Nur Amalia dan Fauzan, "Islamic Integrated School Autonomy in the Post-Decentralization Era," *Journal of Educational Development Studies* 8, no. 3 (2023); Ahmad Rahim, "Islamic Boarding School Autonomy and Educational Modernization," *Tarbawi: Journal of Islamic Education Policy* 11, no. 1 (2024); Suyatno dan Rahmawati, "Quality Culture in Islamic Educational Institutions," *Journal of Islamic Education Management* 10, no. 2 (2023).

²³OECD, *Education Policy Outlook: Indonesia* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022).

move beyond descriptive accounts of educational autonomy by examining policy intentions, implementation dynamics, and their implications for Islamic education. By situating educational autonomy within Indonesia's broader decentralization agenda, the study is able to assess how policy design and governance structures influence institutional practices and educational quality.

In addition, this research applies analytical boundary-setting to maintain focus and coherence. The analysis is limited to policies and scholarly discussions that directly relate to educational autonomy and Islamic education in Indonesia. This delimitation is necessary to avoid overgeneralization and to ensure that the discussion remains aligned with the research objectives. Through this approach, the study emphasizes depth of analysis rather than breadth of coverage.

Finally, the validity of the analysis is supported through source triangulation, whereby arguments are derived from multiple types of sources, including legal documents, policy texts, and academic literature. This triangulation enhances the credibility of the findings by ensuring consistency across sources and by reducing the risk of single-perspective bias. Overall, these methodological considerations strengthen the analytical foundation of the study and support its contribution to policy-oriented discussions on Islamic education.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Educational Autonomy in Indonesia

Educational autonomy in Indonesia emerged as an integral part of the broader decentralization agenda following the political reform era. This policy marked a significant shift in the governance of education, as authority that had previously been centralized at the national level was gradually transferred to regional governments and educational institutions. The implementation of educational autonomy was intended to enable local governments to manage education more effectively in accordance with regional characteristics, needs, and priorities, while at the same time improving the quality of educational services.

The legal foundation of educational autonomy in Indonesia is closely related to the enactment of regional autonomy laws and the national education system framework. Through these regulations, local governments are granted authority in areas such as educational planning, budgeting, and institutional management. Schools and other educational institutions are also provided with greater flexibility to design learning programs and manage internal resources. In this context, educational autonomy is positioned as a policy instrument to enhance institutional independence and accountability.

However, the implementation of educational autonomy in Indonesia has revealed various challenges. One of the most prominent issues is the disparity in regional capacity to manage education effectively. Differences in financial resources, administrative competence, and the availability of qualified human resources have resulted in unequal outcomes across regions. While some regions have been able to utilize educational autonomy to improve institutional performance and educational quality, others have struggled to meet basic standards of governance and service delivery.

These disparities have significant implications for Islamic education institutions. Madrasas and pesantren, which often operate with limited financial and infrastructural support, are particularly vulnerable within a decentralized education system. Although educational autonomy provides opportunities for institutional development and innovation, it

also places greater responsibility on local governments and institutions to ensure sustainability and quality. In regions where policy support and resources are inadequate, Islamic educational institutions may face increased challenges in maintaining educational standards.

Furthermore, educational autonomy requires strong coordination between central and local governments to ensure consistency in educational policy implementation. Without effective coordination and supervision, decentralization may lead to fragmentation in educational governance. This condition can weaken national efforts to ensure equitable access and quality education, including for Islamic education. Therefore, educational autonomy should not be understood as the withdrawal of state responsibility, but rather as a reconfiguration of roles and responsibilities among different levels of government.

Overall, educational autonomy in Indonesia represents both an opportunity and a challenge. While it offers flexibility and potential for innovation in educational management, it also demands institutional readiness, policy coherence, and sustained support. In the context of Islamic education, these dynamics underscore the need for careful policy implementation to ensure that educational autonomy contributes positively to the development and quality of Islamic educational institutions.

2. Implementation of Educational Autonomy in Indonesia

The implementation of educational autonomy in Indonesia reflects the practical translation of decentralization policies into the management of educational institutions. At the operational level, educational autonomy grants regional governments and schools broader authority in determining educational programs, managing budgets, and organizing learning activities in accordance with local conditions. This policy framework is intended to encourage responsiveness to regional needs and to strengthen institutional initiative in improving educational quality.

In practice, however, the implementation of educational autonomy varies significantly across regions. Differences in local governance capacity, policy interpretation, and administrative readiness influence how autonomy is exercised. Some regions have been able to optimize autonomy by developing context-sensitive educational programs, strengthening school-based management, and fostering community participation. In such cases, educational autonomy functions as an enabling mechanism that supports institutional development and innovation.

Conversely, in regions with limited administrative capacity and financial resources, the implementation of educational autonomy often encounters obstacles. Weak planning mechanisms, insufficient budget allocation, and limited professional competence among educational administrators hinder effective policy execution. As a result, educational autonomy may lead to inconsistencies in educational service delivery and uneven quality across regions. These conditions illustrate that autonomy alone does not guarantee improvement without adequate institutional support.

The implementation challenges of educational autonomy are also evident in policy coordination between central and local governments. Although authority has been decentralized, the central government retains responsibility for setting national standards and ensuring educational equity. Inadequate coordination and supervision may result in

policy fragmentation, where local practices diverge significantly from national objectives. This situation can undermine efforts to maintain consistent educational quality nationwide.

For Islamic educational institutions, the implementation of educational autonomy presents a complex reality. While autonomy allows madrasas and pesantren to tailor educational programs to local and religious contexts, it also exposes them to the risks associated with uneven policy support at the regional level. The success of educational autonomy for Islamic education therefore depends not only on institutional initiative, but also on coherent policy implementation and sustained support from both central and regional authorities.

Overall, the implementation of educational autonomy in Indonesia demonstrates that decentralization is a dynamic and context-dependent process. Its effectiveness is shaped by governance capacity, policy coherence, and resource availability. Understanding these factors is essential for evaluating the real impact of educational autonomy on the development and quality of education, particularly within Islamic educational institutions.

3. Educational Autonomy in the Context of Islamic Education

Educational autonomy acquires a distinctive meaning when examined within the context of Islamic education. Islamic educational institutions, particularly madrasas and pesantren, are not merely formal learning spaces but also serve as institutions for moral formation and the transmission of religious values. Consequently, the implementation of educational autonomy in Islamic education must be understood not only from an administrative perspective but also from a normative and value-based framework.

In principle, educational autonomy provides Islamic educational institutions with broader authority to manage curricula, learning models, and institutional governance in accordance with their religious vision and local socio-cultural contexts. This autonomy allows madrasas and pesantren to strengthen their educational identity by integrating religious values with general knowledge, as well as by developing learning approaches that are responsive to the needs of Muslim communities. In this sense, educational autonomy has the potential to support the realization of holistic Islamic education.

Nevertheless, the application of educational autonomy within Islamic education also presents significant challenges. One of the main issues concerns institutional capacity, particularly in relation to governance, financial management, and human resources. Many Islamic educational institutions operate with limited funding and infrastructure, which can restrict their ability to fully utilize the flexibility provided by educational autonomy. Without adequate capacity building and policy support, autonomy may become an additional burden rather than a source of empowerment.

Another important issue is the alignment between national education policies and the distinctive objectives of Islamic education. While Islamic educational institutions are required to comply with national standards, they also seek to preserve their religious character and educational goals. Educational autonomy may create tensions when policy expectations emphasize administrative performance and standardized outcomes, potentially marginalizing the spiritual and moral dimensions that are central to Islamic education.

Furthermore, educational autonomy places greater responsibility on local governments to support Islamic educational institutions within their jurisdictions. In regions where local authorities demonstrate strong commitment and understanding of Islamic education,

autonomy can facilitate institutional development and innovation. Conversely, in regions where policy attention to Islamic education is limited, educational autonomy may exacerbate existing disparities and weaken institutional sustainability.

Overall, educational autonomy in the context of Islamic education should be approached with careful consideration of both administrative and normative dimensions. Autonomy must be accompanied by supportive policies, capacity enhancement, and effective coordination to ensure that Islamic educational institutions are able to maintain their distinctive values while improving educational quality. This balanced approach is essential for ensuring that educational autonomy contributes positively to the development of Islamic education rather than undermining its foundational objectives.

4. Opportunities for Islamic Education

Educational autonomy presents several strategic opportunities for the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. One of the primary opportunities lies in the increased flexibility granted to educational institutions to design curricula and learning programs that are responsive to local needs and aligned with Islamic values. Through autonomy, madrasas and pesantren are able to integrate religious teachings with general knowledge in a more contextual and meaningful manner, thereby strengthening their educational identity.

Another significant opportunity concerns institutional innovation. Educational autonomy enables Islamic educational institutions to develop management models, learning approaches, and extracurricular programs that reflect the socio-cultural characteristics of their communities. This flexibility allows institutions to respond creatively to contemporary challenges, including the demand for quality education that balances academic competence with moral and spiritual formation. In this regard, autonomy can function as a catalyst for institutional renewal and pedagogical improvement.

Educational autonomy also opens space for greater community participation in the management and development of Islamic education. Local communities, religious leaders, and educational stakeholders can be more actively involved in decision-making processes, contributing to the sustainability and relevance of educational programs. Such participation strengthens the relationship between Islamic educational institutions and their social environment, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for educational outcomes.

Furthermore, autonomy provides opportunities for Islamic education to enhance its competitiveness within the national education system. By utilizing flexibility in program development and institutional management, Islamic educational institutions can improve their quality and demonstrate their relevance in addressing contemporary educational needs. This condition allows Islamic education to move beyond a marginal position and to assert itself as an integral component of national educational development.

Overall, the opportunities generated by educational autonomy highlight its potential to support the advancement of Islamic education. When effectively utilized, autonomy can facilitate institutional strengthening, curricular relevance, and community engagement, all of which contribute to improving the quality and sustainability of Islamic educational institutions.

5. Challenges for Islamic Education

Despite the opportunities generated by educational autonomy, its implementation also presents significant challenges for Islamic education in Indonesia. One of the primary challenges relates to disparities in institutional capacity among regions. Differences in financial resources, administrative competence, and the availability of qualified educators affect the ability of Islamic educational institutions to effectively manage autonomy. In regions with limited capacity, autonomy may exacerbate existing inequalities rather than improve educational quality.

Another major challenge concerns governance and accountability. Educational autonomy requires strong institutional management and transparent decision-making processes. However, many Islamic educational institutions face constraints in managerial skills and organizational systems. Without adequate capacity building and supervision, autonomy may lead to inefficiencies, weak accountability, and difficulties in maintaining consistent educational standards.

Educational autonomy also poses challenges in relation to curriculum implementation and quality assurance. While autonomy allows flexibility in curriculum development, it simultaneously demands alignment with national education standards. Islamic educational institutions must balance the integration of religious values with compliance to standardized learning outcomes. This balancing process can be difficult, particularly when policy frameworks prioritize measurable academic performance over moral and spiritual dimensions of education.

Furthermore, the role of local government is crucial in determining the success or failure of educational autonomy for Islamic education. Variations in policy commitment and support at the regional level significantly influence institutional sustainability. In areas where local governments lack understanding or prioritize other educational sectors, Islamic educational institutions may receive insufficient support, leading to marginalization within the decentralized system.

Overall, these challenges indicate that educational autonomy is not inherently beneficial for Islamic education without adequate structural support. Autonomy must be accompanied by effective governance mechanisms, capacity enhancement, and consistent policy coordination to prevent the widening of disparities and to ensure that Islamic education can develop sustainably within the decentralized educational framework.

6. Implications for the Quality of Islamic Education

Educational autonomy has significant implications for the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia. When supported by adequate institutional capacity and coherent policy implementation, autonomy can serve as a strategic instrument for improving educational quality. Greater flexibility in institutional management enables Islamic educational institutions to adapt learning processes, curricula, and governance structures to local needs while maintaining alignment with national education standards.

One important implication of educational autonomy is its potential to enhance institutional responsiveness and innovation. Islamic educational institutions that are able to utilize autonomy effectively can develop learning models that integrate academic competence with moral and spiritual formation. This integration contributes to a more holistic conception

of educational quality, in which cognitive achievement is complemented by ethical development and religious understanding.

However, the impact of educational autonomy on educational quality is not uniform across institutions. In contexts where managerial competence, professional educators, and resource availability are limited, autonomy may fail to produce meaningful improvements in quality. Instead, it may intensify existing challenges related to governance, accountability, and curriculum implementation. This condition underscores the importance of capacity building and continuous professional development for educators and administrators in Islamic education.

Educational autonomy also implies the need for a balanced relationship between central oversight and local initiative. While autonomy encourages institutional independence, the role of the central government remains essential in ensuring equity, quality assurance, and policy coherence. Effective supervision and supportive regulation are necessary to prevent fragmentation and to maintain consistent educational standards across regions.

Overall, the implications of educational autonomy for the quality of Islamic education highlight that autonomy should be viewed as a conditional opportunity rather than a guaranteed solution. Its positive impact depends on institutional readiness, policy support, and sustained coordination among stakeholders. When these conditions are met, educational autonomy can contribute meaningfully to the improvement of Islamic education quality within Indonesia's decentralized education system.

7. Policy Implications for Islamic Education Governance

The implementation of educational autonomy carries important policy implications for the governance of Islamic education in Indonesia. As Islamic educational institutions operate within a decentralized education system, governance structures must be capable of translating policy flexibility into institutional improvement. Educational autonomy therefore requires not only regulatory delegation, but also governance arrangements that ensure accountability, coordination, and sustainability within Islamic education.

One significant policy implication concerns the role of government institutions, particularly the coordination between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and regional governments. Islamic educational institutions are administratively affiliated with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, while many governance and funding responsibilities fall under regional authorities due to decentralization. This dual governance structure necessitates clear policy coordination to prevent overlapping authority, policy fragmentation, and inconsistencies in implementation. Without effective coordination, educational autonomy may generate administrative ambiguity that weakens institutional performance and policy outcomes.

Educational autonomy also implies the need for strengthened governance capacity at the institutional level. Islamic educational institutions are expected to manage greater authority over curricula, finance, and organizational development. This condition requires policy support in the form of leadership training, managerial capacity building, and governance standardization. Policies that prioritize capacity enhancement enable Islamic educational institutions to utilize autonomy effectively rather than perceiving it as an administrative burden. In this regard, governance reform should be understood as an integral component of educational autonomy.

Another important implication relates to policy frameworks for quality assurance. While autonomy encourages institutional flexibility, it must be balanced with mechanisms that ensure educational quality and equity. National quality standards remain essential to prevent disparities across regions and institutions. Policy instruments such as accreditation systems, monitoring frameworks, and performance evaluation should be designed to accommodate the distinctive characteristics of Islamic education, including its moral and spiritual objectives. Quality assurance policies that are overly standardized may risk marginalizing these dimensions, whereas adaptive frameworks can support holistic educational quality.

Educational autonomy further requires policies that address resource disparities among Islamic educational institutions. Decentralization often amplifies inequalities due to variations in regional fiscal capacity and political priorities. Policy interventions at the national level are therefore necessary to ensure equitable resource distribution, particularly for Islamic educational institutions in underdeveloped regions. Financial assistance schemes, targeted grants, and infrastructure development programs represent policy measures that can mitigate structural inequalities and support institutional sustainability under decentralized governance.

In addition, educational autonomy has implications for stakeholder participation in Islamic education governance. Autonomy opens opportunities for greater involvement of communities, religious leaders, and educational stakeholders in decision-making processes.²⁴ Policies that encourage participatory governance can enhance institutional legitimacy, social accountability, and community ownership of Islamic education.

Taken together, the findings of this study reveal that educational autonomy in Indonesia creates a differentiated landscape for Islamic educational institutions. On one hand, the policy framework offers genuine opportunities for curriculum innovation, community engagement, and institutional empowerment—consistent with the arguments advanced by Amalia and Fauzan²⁵ and Rahim²⁶. On the other hand, structural inequalities in regional fiscal capacity and governance competence limit the realization of these opportunities, as corroborated by Suyono and Fadhilah²⁷ and the OECD²⁸. These findings align with broader comparative research on educational decentralization, which consistently demonstrates that decentralization produces heterogeneous outcomes contingent on pre-existing institutional conditions.²⁹ The distinctive contribution of this study is its explicit attention to the normative dimensions of Islamic education—including its moral, spiritual, and communal objectives—which existing administrative analyses of decentralization have largely neglected. By foregrounding these dimensions, this study argues that quality in Islamic education cannot be adequately evaluated through standardized academic metrics alone, but requires a holistic framework that incorporates ethical formation and religious value transmission. This insight

²⁴Ahmad Latief dan Nurhayati, "Transparency and Accountability in Decentralized Education Management," *Journal of Public Education Policy* 7, no. 1 (2023).

²⁵Nur Amalia dan Fauzan, "Islamic Integrated School Autonomy in the Post-Decentralization Era," *Journal of Educational Development Studies* 8, no. 3 (2023).

²⁶Ahmad Rahim, "Islamic Boarding School Autonomy and Educational Modernization," *Tarbawi: Journal of Islamic Education Policy* 11, no. 1 (2024).

²⁷Suyono dan Fadhilah, "Regional Disparities in the Implementation of Educational Autonomy," *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebijakan Publik* 8, no. 4 (2024).

²⁸OECD, *Education Policy Outlook: Indonesia* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022).

²⁹Yusuf Rahman, *Educational Governance and Decentralization: A Comparative Perspective* (Jakarta: Prenadamedia, 2024).

has direct implications for the design of quality assurance policies and educational governance structures in Islamic education. Furthermore, the study's policy analysis perspective reveals that sustainable improvement in Islamic education quality under decentralized governance depends on the coherent alignment of three conditions: institutional capacity, policy support, and effective coordination. This tripartite framework constitutes a theoretical contribution that can inform both academic inquiry and policy development in the field of Islamic educational governance.

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that educational autonomy constitutes a significant policy shift in Indonesia's education system, with profound implications for the development of Islamic education. The policy offers greater flexibility for educational institutions to manage curricula, governance, and learning processes in accordance with local contexts, presenting Islamic educational institutions with genuine opportunities to strengthen institutional identity, integrate religious values with general knowledge, and respond more effectively to community needs. However, the effectiveness of autonomy is highly dependent on institutional capacity, governance competence, resource availability, and policy coherence. Disparities among regions result in uneven outcomes, and without adequate structural support, autonomy risks exacerbating existing inequalities. A balanced relationship between institutional independence and regulatory oversight therefore remains indispensable. Based on these findings, three recommendations are proposed. First, policy makers should strengthen institutional capacity through targeted training and equitable resource allocation to enable Islamic educational institutions to utilize autonomy effectively. Second, stronger central-local coordination is necessary to ensure policy coherence and prevent governance fragmentation. Third, quality assurance frameworks should be redesigned to accommodate the distinctive holistic objectives of Islamic education, integrating moral and spiritual dimensions alongside academic performance indicators.

References

- Arar, Khalid, Rania Sawalhi, dan Munube Yilmaz. "The Research on Islamic-Based Educational Leadership since 1990: An International Review of Empirical Evidence and a Future Research Agenda." *Religions* 13, no. 1 (2022): 42. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010042>
- Badan Akreditasi Nasional Sekolah/Madrasah. *Panduan Sistem Penjaminan Mutu Pendidikan*. Jakarta: BAN-S/M, 2023. [google](https://www.google.com/).
- Bandur, Agustinus, Mohammad Hamsal, dan Asnan Furinto. "21st Century Experiences in the Development of School-Based Management Policy and Practices in Indonesia." *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 21, no. 1 (2022): 85–107. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10671-021-09293-x>
- Barton, Greg, Ihsan Yilmaz, dan Nicholas Morieson. "Authoritarianism, Democracy, Islamic Movements and Contestations of Islamic Religious Ideas in Indonesia." *Religions* 12, no. 8 (2021): 641. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080641>
- Bjork, Christopher. "Local Responses to Decentralization Policy in Indonesia." *Comparative Education Review* 47, no. 2 (2003): 184–216. <https://doi.org/10.1086/738769>

- Brooks, M. C., J. S. Brooks, A. Mutohar, dan I. Taufiq. "Principals as Socio-Religious Curators: Progressive and Conservative Approaches in Islamic Schools." *Journal of Educational Administration* 58, no. 6 (2020): 677–695. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-01-2020-0004>
- Chotimah, C., S. Z. Qudsy, dan M. Yusuf. "Superficial Implementation of Religious Moderation in Islamic Educational Management." *Cogent Education* 12, no. 1 (2025): 2442235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2442235>
- Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839915580941>
- Creswell, John W. *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Boston: Pearson, 2021. [google](https://www.google.com/).
- Fossati, Diego. "When Conservatives Support Decentralization: The Case of Political Islam in Indonesia." *Regional & Federal Studies* 33, no. 2 (2023): 209–233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2021.1951252>
- Hasan, Kamaruddin, dan Hamdan Juhannis. "Religious Education and Moderation: A Bibliometric Analysis." *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (2024): 2292885. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2292885>
- Ikhrom, I., I. Abdullah, R. Kafipour, Z. Mubaraq, dan A. Sutyono. "Intolerance in Islamic Textbooks: The Quest for an Islamic Teaching Model for Indonesian Schools." *Cogent Education* 10, no. 2 (2023): 2268454. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2268454>
- Indra, Rona, Mahyudin Ritonga, Martin Kustati, dkk. "High School Education in a Variety of Regional Autonomy: Paradigm and Challenges." *Education Research International* 2022 (2022): 9887162. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/9887162>
- Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia. *Madrasah Reform Strategic Plan 2020–2024*. Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Islam, 2021. [google](https://www.google.com/)
- Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia. *Panduan Penyusunan Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan*. Jakarta: Kemendikbud, 2022. [google](https://www.google.com/).
- Kosim, Mohammad, Faqihul Muqoddam, Faidol Mubarok, dan Nur Quma Laila. "The Dynamics of Islamic Education Policies in Indonesia." *Cogent Education* 10, no. 1 (2023): 2172930. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2172930>
- Lestari, Nur. "Digital Literacy and Moral Education in Madrasah Curriculum." *Journal of Islamic Educational Studies* 7, no. 2 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.59784/jtlm.v1i1.2>
- Maemonah, M., H. Zuhri, Masturin, dkk. "Contestation of Islamic Educational Institutions in Indonesia: Content Analysis on Social Media." *Cogent Education* 10, no. 1 (2023): 2164019. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2022.2164019>
- Mukhibat, M., M. Effendi, W. H. Setyawan, dan M. Sutoyo. "Development and Evaluation of Religious Moderation Education Curriculum at Higher Education in Indonesia." *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (2024): 2302308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2302308>
- Mulyasa, E. *Menjadi Kepala Sekolah Profesional*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2021. [google](https://www.google.com/).
- Mulyasa, E. *Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah: Konsep, Strategi, dan Implementasi*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2022. [google](https://www.google.com/).
- Nata, Abuddin. *Manajemen Pendidikan Islam: Mengatasi Kelemahan Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia*. Jakarta: Kencana, 2020. [google](https://www.google.com/)

- Nata, Abuddin. *Kebijakan Pendidikan Islam dan Pendidikan Umum di Indonesia*. Depok: Rajawali Pers, 2021. [google](#).
- OECD. *Education Policy Outlook: Indonesia*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022. [google](#).
- Parker, Lyn, dan R. Raihani. "Democratizing Indonesia through Education? Community Participation in Islamic Schooling." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 39, no. 6 (2011): 712–732. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143211416389>
- Rahim, Ahmad. "Islamic Boarding School Autonomy and Educational Modernization." *Tarbawi: Journal of Islamic Education Policy* 11, no. 1 (2024).
- Rahman, Yusuf. *Educational Governance and Decentralization: A Comparative Perspective*. Jakarta: Prenadamedia, 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1164476>
- Raihani. "Education for Multicultural Citizens in Indonesia: Policies and Practices." *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 48, no. 6 (2018): 992–1009. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1399250>
- Rohman, A., A. Isna, M. M. Taruna, dkk. "Challenges in Islamic Education Curriculum Development: A Comparative Study of Indonesia, Pakistan, and India." *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 23, no. 6 (2024): 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.23.6.23>
- Rondinelli, Dennis A., James S. McCullough, dan Ronald W. Johnson. "Analyzing Decentralization Policies in Developing Countries: A Political-Economy Framework." *Development and Change* 20, no. 1 (1989): 57–87. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.1989.tb00340.x>
- Suyatno, dan Rahmawati. "Quality Culture in Islamic Educational Institutions." *Journal of Islamic Education Management* 10, no. 2 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.38073/jimpi.v4i1.1928>
- Suyatno, Wantini, Sukiman, dan Y. Rachmawati. "Progressive Islamic Education: Bridging the Gap of Islam, Indonesianness, and Modernity." *The Qualitative Report* 27, no. 3 (2022): 682–699. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.4782>
- Wiyono, Bambang Budi. "The Effect of Self-Evaluation on the Principals' Transformational Leadership, Teachers' Work Motivation, Teamwork Effectiveness, and School Improvement." *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 21, no. 6 (2018): 705–725. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2017.1318960>
- Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 55 Tahun 2007 tentang Pendidikan Agama dan Pendidikan Keagamaan. [google](#).
- Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 18 Tahun 2019 tentang Pesantren. [google](#).
- Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional. [google](#)
- Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 23 Tahun 2014 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah. [google](#).