

The Policy of Decentralization of Islamic Religious Education in Madrasah Tsanawiyah: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT:

This study discusses the problem of implementing the Decentralization of education in Indonesia, which is often hampered by the lack of attention from regional heads to education. This study aims to analyze the impact of the decentralization of education on the quality of education in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) and to understand the challenges its implementation faces. The method used was a systematic literature review, which collected data from 20 relevant articles from 2020 to 2024, taken from the Google Scholar database. The study results show that the Decentralization of education provides autonomy to local governments and schools to manage education according to local needs. However, there is still a disparity in the quality of education between regions due to differences in budget and infrastructure. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of political commitment from regional heads, capacity building of human resources, and collaboration between central and regional governments to achieve the goal of more equitable and quality education. The study also recommends stricter supervision and community participation in educational decision-making to reduce inequalities.

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ABSTRAK:

Penelitian ini membahas permasalahan pelaksanaan Desentralisasi pendidikan di Indonesia yang seringkali terhambat oleh minimnya perhatian kepala daerah terhadap pendidikan. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis dampak Desentralisasi pendidikan terhadap kualitas pendidikan di Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) dan untuk memahami tantangan yang dihadapi dalam pelaksanaannya. Metode yang digunakan adalah tinjauan literatur sistematis dengan mengumpulkan data dari 20 artikel yang relevan pada periode 2020-2024, diambil dari database Google Scholar. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Desentralisasi pendidikan memberikan otonomi kepada pemerintah daerah dan sekolah untuk mengelola pendidikan sesuai dengan kebutuhan daerah. Namun, masih ada kesenjangan kualitas pendidikan antar daerah karena perbedaan anggaran dan infrastruktur. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya komitmen politik dari kepala daerah, peningkatan kapasitas sumber daya manusia, dan kolaborasi antara pemerintah pusat dan daerah untuk mencapai tujuan pendidikan yang lebih merata dan berkualitas. Studi ini juga merekomendasikan perlunya pengawasan yang lebih ketat dan partisipasi masyarakat dalam pengambilan keputusan pendidikan untuk mengurangi ketidaksetaraan yang ada.

Kata kunci: Desentralisasi, Pendidikan, Pendidikan Islam, Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis

INTRODUCTION

The decentralization of education aims to provide wider authority for local governments to advance regional education in line with the mandate of Law No. 32 and Law No. 33 of 2004 on regional autonomy. It is intended to improve the quality of education, enhance administrative and financial efficiency, and expand access for the community (Fadhli, 2017; Syafii, 2018). Its implementation, however, often faces challenges, particularly when regional heads do not prioritize education in their development agendas, creating inconsistency between policy goals and outcomes. When political leaders focus on infrastructure or other strategic programs, educational autonomy mandated by national policy becomes neglected (Hendra & Fadriati, 2023b; Khumaidi & Hamdani, 2024b; Pakpahan & Hidayati, 2021).

Research on decentralization is important because it relates to equality, governance quality, and regional educational development. Regions with strong political commitment and adequate resources tend to progress more rapidly than those with limited support. This discrepancy may widen disparities in



educational quality and undermine national education objectives. Systematic research is needed to help local governments formulate education policies that are responsive to community needs. It also provides important insights for the central government to evaluate the performance of decentralization implementation..

Decentralization offers opportunities for local innovation, community participation, and faster decision-making processes (Matin et al., 2025; Setiyati et al., 2024). However, its effectiveness depends on governance capacity, political stability, and resource availability at the regional level. Uneven distribution of resources often results in significant quality differences among regions (Daud, 2024). Weak coordination between central and regional governments also contributes to inconsistent implementation. These conditions show that decentralization is influenced by complex administrative and political factors.

The concept of decentralization in education refers to the delegation of authority from the central government to regional governments and educational institutions. Scholars such as Darmansah et al. (2025b), Sirozi (2005), Halim (2010), Sufyarmen (2003), Ervannudin and Widodo (2016), Zilfa (2016), and Sari and Trisoni (2023b) explain that this authority includes planning, management, and implementation of educational activities. The delegation is expected to increase accountability at the local level and enable schools to be more responsive to community needs. This concept still requires alignment with national policies to maintain consistency in educational standards. Therefore, decentralization must balance autonomy with national regulatory frameworks.

The objectives of decentralization include reducing the burden on the central government, increasing public participation, strengthening socio-economic development, and fostering national unity (Wahyuningrum, 2006). In the education sector, it also aims to empower regional governments to design and manage education systems more effectively (Sofiani et al., 2024a). Several regulations form the legal foundation of decentralization, including Law No. 22 of 1999, Law No. 32 of 2004, Law No. 25 of 1999, Law No. 33 of 2004, and Law No. 23 of 2014 (Andrea, 2020; Nuradhwati, 2019; Ridwan & Sumirat, 2021b). These laws regulate political, administrative, and fiscal arrangements between levels of government. Their implementation has significant implications for the governance of education across regions.

Given these dynamics, comprehensive analysis of educational decentralization is necessary to understand its effects at the regional level. This study aims to examine how decentralization influences educational services, school management, and the roles of teachers and principals. Using a Systematic Literature Review design, this research analyzes scientific articles and previous studies on decentralization, particularly regarding the leadership of regional heads in education. The study also addresses a significant gap concerning decentralization in Islamic religious education, especially in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs). Three research questions guide this review concerning policy regulation, impacts on MTs, and the challenges and opportunities for strengthening Islamic religious education in MTs.

To guide this review, three main research questions were formulated, namely how Indonesian education decentralization policies regulate and position Islamic religious education in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs); how existing studies describe the impact of education decentralization on the quality and management of MTs and Islamic religious education more broadly; and what challenges and opportunities of education decentralization are identified for strengthening Islamic religious education in MTs.

METHODS

This study only uses openly published articles, so it does not involve human subjects directly and does not require additional ethical approval. All sources are cited according to academic standards. This study uses a systematic literature review approach to analyze the Decentralization of Islamic Religious Education in MTs in the last five years (2020–2024). Research data was obtained from the Google Scholar database, one of the sources of scientific reference searches that is widely used among academics. Search results using the keywords "*Decentralization*", "*Islamic Religious Education*", and "*Madrasah Tsanawiyah*" managed to get 982 articles. The analysis referenced the PRISMA (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis*) guidelines.

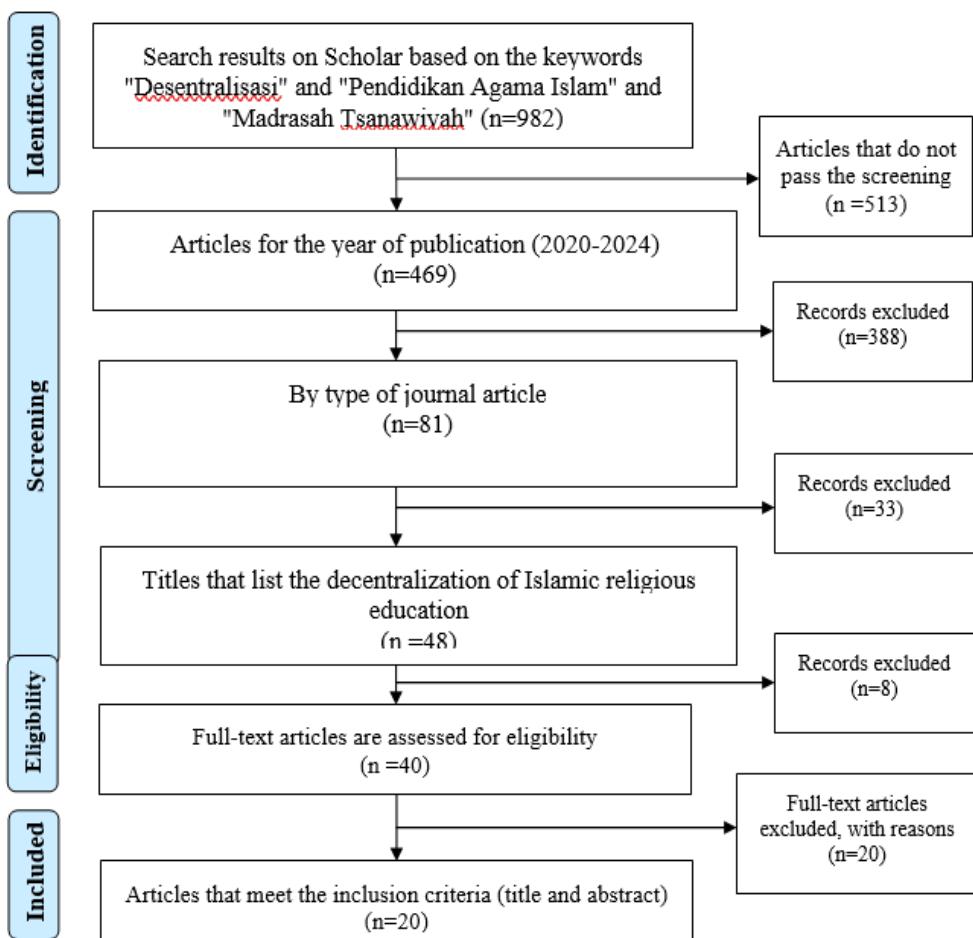
The article selection process is carried out through several stages. At the identification stage, articles were filtered based on the 2020–2024 publication year, so 469 articles were left. The next stage is *screening* by setting the publication type to only journal articles, which resulted in 81 articles. Furthermore, a selection of titles was carried out that explicitly contained the



topic of decentralization of Islamic religious education, so 48 articles were obtained. At the *eligibility* stage, as many as 40 *full-text* articles were thoroughly reviewed, but 20 articles were removed because they were irrelevant or the discussion was too general. Thus, 20 final articles are eligible for analysis. The inclusion criteria for this study are: (1) articles published in 2020–2024, (2) in the form of scientific journal articles, (3) written in Indonesian or English, (4) discussing the decentralization of Islamic religious education, and (5) available in *full-text form*. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria include: articles in the form of proceedings, non-academic research reports, articles with content that does not focus on the decentralization of Islamic religious education, and articles that are not fully accessible.

In this study, no special software was used for data analysis. The analysis process is done manually through systematic reading, grouping by theme, and synthesis of findings from articles that meet the inclusion criteria. The screening and selection process followed the logic of PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) guidelines, starting from identification, screening, eligibility, and final inclusion of studies. The search strategy focused on combinations of keywords related to education decentralization, regional autonomy, Islamic education, madrasah, and policy, using Boolean operators to capture studies in both Indonesian and English that were relevant to the research focus.

Data analysis followed a thematic coding procedure. All included articles were read in full, and segments that discussed (1) policies and regulations, (2) school management and school-based management (SBM), (3) educational quality and regional disparities, (4) local context and curriculum, (5) local leadership and politics, and (6) welfare and regional development were highlighted and coded. Similar codes were then grouped into broader categories, and through iterative comparison the six main themes presented in the findings section were agreed upon. This process ensured transparency and consistency in linking the reviewed articles to the thematic framework of the study.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process

FINDINGS

Table 1. The article discovery results in Google Scholar

| Authors | Study Focus | Method | Key Findings & Implications |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Aini (2022a) | Decentralization of Madrasah Education Through Regional Autonomy in Indonesia | Using a literature review approach, analyzes existing studies and theoretical frameworks related to regional autonomy and its impact on madrasas. | Regional autonomy gives madrassas freedom in management and decision-making, supporting the implementation of SBM. |
| Hendra & Fadriati (2023a) | Education Decentralization Policy in Improving the Quality of Education | This study uses a qualitative research approach through a literature study. | Decentralization of education improves quality through local government control. |
| Khumaidi & Hamdani (2024a) | Evaluation of the Impact of Education Decentralization Policy on Education Quality in Indonesia | Type of research: Library research. | Decentralization does not automatically improve the quality of education if local politics do not support it. . |
| Nurhamidah & Hilman (2022a) | Title: Education Decentralization Policy and Its Implementation in Education in Indonesia | Using a qualitative approach based on library research. | Decentralization of education does not automatically improve the quality of education. |
| Sari & Yanti (2022a) | Local History and Decentralization of Education in Indonesia | This study uses library research with a qualitative approach. | Decentralization of education allows local governments to be involved in developing more contextual curricula, including local history. |
| Tupan & Setiorini (2022a) | Narrative Review of Publication Content Implementation of Decentralization and Regional | The research used a narrative review method with database searches such as ISJD, Google Scholar, and Microsoft Academic. | Fiscal Decentralization and regional autonomy are limited by human resources and coordination, including bureaucratic culture, |

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|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | Autonomy Policy in Border Areas | management, and public service ethics, and result in policies relevant to local needs. | |
| Idris (2020a) | Educational Planning in the Context of Education Decentralization | This study is a conceptual review using a qualitative approach with a literature review method. | Decentralization of education gives schools and regions autonomy to manage education, including planning, curriculum management, teaching staff, finances, and community relations. |
| Sari & Trisoni (2023a) | Implementation of Decentralization of Education at SMA Negeri 6 Batang Hari | This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, and staff at SMA Negeri 6 Batang Hari. | Research shows that Decentralization of education brings benefits such as improved quality of educational services, efficiency in school management, and equitable access through zoning systems. |
| Suriadi et al. (2023a) | History of the Development of Decentralization and Regional Autonomy in Indonesia | The method used in this study is a literature review, with an in-depth analysis of various written sources, including articles, books, and scientific papers relevant to Decentralization and regional autonomy in Indonesia. | Decentralization in Indonesia has undergone a significant transformation, especially since the Reformation era. |
| Sofiani et al. (2024b) | Education Decentralization Policy and Implementation in Education in Indonesia | The research used a literature review method, collecting data from books, journals, and reports related to educational Decentralization to analyze relevant findings. | The Decentralization of education policy has had positive effects, such as increased student participation and a curriculum more suited to local needs. |

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|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sulistiawi ti et al. (2024a) | Analysis of the Decentralization Policy of the National Education System and Its Impact on Madrasah Education | This study uses a qualitative method with a literature approach. | Decentralization aims to give local authorities authority in education management. |
| Arlen et al.(2024) | The Impact of Education Decentralization on Education Quality | This study uses library research methods for data collection. | Decentralization improves the accessibility and quality of education globally. |
| Rihardi & Yusliwida ka (2020) | Measuring the Zoning System for New Student Admissions in the Era of Education Decentralization | The method used was normative legal research with data collection through literature and interviews with sources competent in the field of education. | The zoning policy has not significantly impacted the number of new students. |
| Rachmad et al. (2023a) | Pengaruh Kebijakan Desentralisasi Terhadap Peningkatan Kesejahteraan Masyarakat Daerah. | This study uses a normative or doctrinal legal approach, focusing on literature research. | Decentralization policies have the potential to improve community welfare through: Increased community participation in decision-making. |
| Bida (2021a) | Decentralization and Local Education Disparity Policy in Southeast Sulawesi Province | This study uses an interactive qualitative approach, with data collection techniques through observation, document study, and in-depth interviews. | Education policies in the regions do not create balance but rather exacerbate disparities. |
| Achmad & Hartono (2021b) | Decentralization of Education Management and Educational Leadership in Improving the Quality of Educational Institutions | This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method. | Decentralization of education gives school principals more authority in managing their institutions. |

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|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kurniawa n et al. (2022a) | Dynamics of Education Management in a Decentralized System | This study uses quantitative methods with primary data collected through surveys and interviews. | Weaknesses in the centralized education system include quality gaps, management efficiency, and a lack of community participation. |
| Widyanto (2022a) | Education politics: Response to decentralization policy in the implementation of secondary education affairs in the city of Surabaya | This study uses a qualitative-descriptive method with in-depth interviews and document analysis as data collection techniques. | The transfer of secondary education management from the city government to the provincial government has raised concerns about the quality of education. |
| Ridwan & Sumirat (2021a) | Education Decentralization Policy in the Era of Regional Autonomy | This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method. | Decentralization of education gives more authority to local governments, but the quality of education remains low in some areas. |
| Darmansa h et al. (2025a) | Opportunities and Challenges in the Implementation of Education Decentralization Policy | This study uses descriptive qualitative methods and a literature review, gathering information from relevant articles to analyze issues and theories. | Opportunities include increased efficiency, effectiveness, and relevance of education programs through community and local government involvement. |

Based on the content analysis of the reviewed articles, six main themes were identified that represent the dominant perspectives in studies related to education decentralization in Indonesia. These six themes are (1) policy and regulation, (2) school management and school-based management (SBM), (3) education quality and regional disparities, (4) local context and curriculum development, (5) leadership and local politics, and (6) welfare and regional development. The key thematic dimensions identified in this review are consolidated to highlight their central insights and challenges within the decentralization framework, as summarized in the table below:

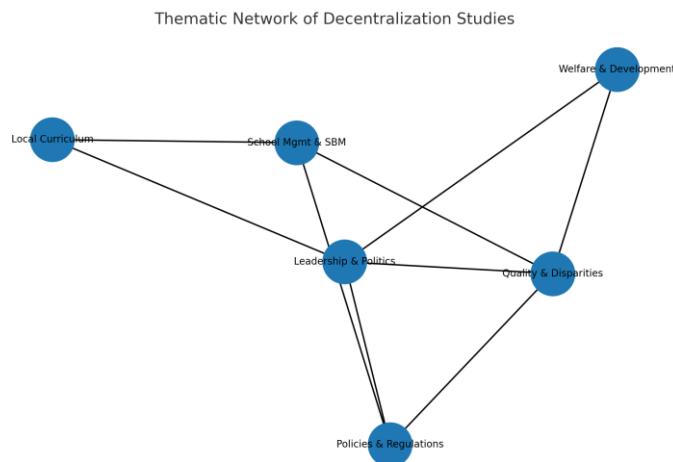
Table 2. Summary of Thematic Findings on Educational Decentralization

| Theme | Core Insights | Key Issues / Challenges | Supporting Studies |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Policies and Regulations | Decentralization is rooted in national laws (Law No. 22/1999; Law No. 23/2014), granting broad autonomy for regions to manage education based on local needs. | Weak derivative regulations, bureaucratic complexity, corruption, and poor governance reduce policy effectiveness. | Aini (2022); Sofiani et al. (2024); Ridwan & Sumirat (2021); Suriadi et al. (2023) |
| School Management & SBM | SBM enhances school autonomy, community participation, and accountability, improving learning quality through localized decision-making. | Limited human resources, uneven teacher competence, and bureaucratic dominance cause SBM to become administrative rather than substantive. | Achmad & Hartono (2021); Hendra & Fadriati (2023); Nurhamidah & Hilman (2022); Sari & Trisoni (2023) |
| Education Quality & | Decentralization does not automatically improve quality; | Regions with low fiscal capacity fall behind; Full Day School policy | Bida (2021); Khumaidi & Hamdani |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Interregional Disparities | disparities persist based on budget, infrastructure, and teacher quality differences. | also creates welfare and equity issues. | (2024); Kurniawan et al. (2022); Sulistiawati et al. (2024); Nur et al. (2024) |
| Local Context & Curriculum | Autonomy enables integration of local wisdom, history, and cultural values into the curriculum, increasing relevance and identity formation. | Limited academic capacity, national curriculum dominance, and lack of regulatory support hamper local curriculum development. | Sari & Yanti (2022); Idris (2020); Aini (2022); Yulianto & Fitri (2021) |
| Local Leadership & Politics | Regional leadership determines decentralization success through political commitment, integrity, and prioritization of education. | Political interests often dominate, causing policy inconsistency and unsustained programs. | Bida (2021); Khumaidi & Hamdani (2024); Widyanto (2022) |
| Regional Welfare & Development | Decentralization can enhance community welfare by increasing participation, improving service access, and accelerating development. | Weak local capacity, poor intergovernmental coordination, and uneven community participation limit welfare gains. | Darmansah et al. (2025); Rachmad et al. (2023); Tupan & Setiorini (2022) |

The thematic relationships among the six identified domains of educational decentralization are synthesized to illustrate their interconnections within the broader governance context, as shown in the figure below:



Figure 2. Thematic Network of Decentralization Studies

Implementation Of Education Decentralization Policy

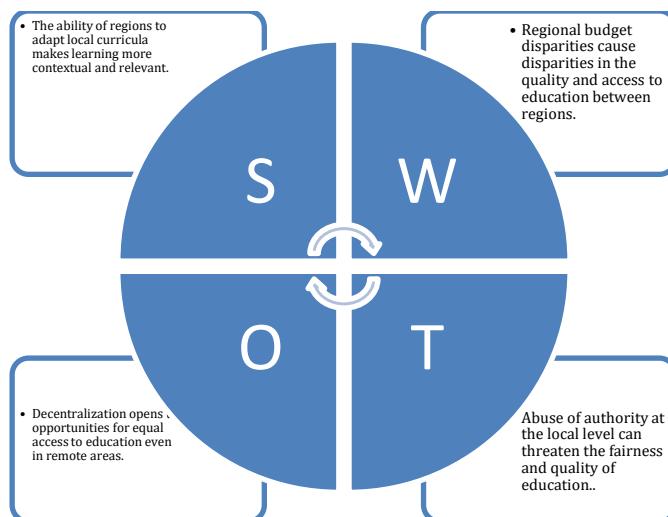
The implementation of the education decentralization policy in Indonesia, based on a comprehensive analysis of 20 *literature review* articles, shows complex dynamics. This policy gives local governments and schools autonomy to manage education, including locally-based curriculum development, school-based management (SBM), and technology integration (Aini, 2022a; Hendra & Fadriati, 2023a). One of its main advantages is increased responsiveness to local needs, where local governments can adjust curricula and educational programs according to the social, cultural, and economic context of their respective regions (Sari & Yanti, 2022a; Sulistiawati et al., 2024a). Decentralization encourages a more humane and participatory approach, such as strengthening religious values in madrassas and community involvement in education management (Kurniawan et al., 2022a). However, the success of this policy is highly dependent on the political support of regional heads, budget availability, and human resource capacity (Khumaidi & Hamdani, 2024a).

Although it has been running for decades, implementing the Decentralization of education has not fully progressed due to various structural challenges. The disparity in the quality of education between regions is still a significant problem, mainly due to budget gaps (APBD), infrastructure inequality, and the low quality of teachers (Sofiani et al., 2024b). The lack of political commitment and budget support from local governments (Bida, 2021a),

weak coordination between the central and regional governments, and the potential for corrupt practices (Tupan & Setiorini, 2022a) further hinder policy effectiveness. As a result, the goal of creating an equitable and quality education system throughout Indonesia has not been optimally achieved.

Several shortcomings remain in policy implementation, particularly regarding regional readiness and supervision, as regions with limited capacity struggle to manage educational autonomy while central bureaucratic dominance weakens school independence (Idris, 2020b). Limited empirical evidence on the practical impact of decentralization and low community participation further reduce policy effectiveness (Darmansah et al., 2025b). Strengthening local government capacity, ensuring equitable budget allocation, enhancing stakeholder collaboration, and improving supervisory mechanisms are therefore essential (Arlen & Trisoni, 2024). Without these reforms, educational decentralization risks deepening inequality rather than improving national education quality. Based on the synthesized findings presented above, the following section introduces a SWOT analysis to further clarify the internal and external factors that shape the implementation of educational decentralization, as illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 3. Analysis SWOT



DISCUSSION

The findings of the six main themes indicate that implementing educational decentralization in Indonesia is a multidimensional process that intertwines policy, management, equity, curriculum, leadership, and welfare. Regulatory frameworks have provided legal space for autonomy, yet bureaucratic complexity and weak governance often hinder effective execution. School-Based Management has created opportunities for participatory decision-making and transparency, though disparities in human resources limit its full potential (Madjid et al., 2021). At the same time, decentralization has not automatically reduced inequality, as gaps in funding, infrastructure, and teacher quality continue to shape uneven educational outcomes. On the other hand, local curriculum development offers the chance to integrate cultural wisdom and contextual relevance into learning.

In contrast, strong and committed local leadership has proven to be a decisive factor in sustaining progress. Beyond formal education, decentralization is also linked to broader regional development and social welfare, reflecting the need for synergy between central and local governments and active community participation. The impact of these dynamics on education can be seen in the persistence of disparities between regions, variations in school governance practices, and differences in the effectiveness of local leadership, which influence the quality, accessibility, and equity of educational services across Indonesia.

Despite these challenges, the benefits of decentralization for education remain significant. Autonomy provides opportunities for schools and local governments to innovate curriculum design, ensuring that learning materials are more relevant to local culture, social context, and community needs. It also encourages stronger accountability in school governance through transparency and community participation, leading to more responsive and trustworthy educational institutions. In addition, decentralization facilitates equitable access to education by enabling affirmative policies for disadvantaged regions, promoting teacher capacity-building through localized training, and actively empowering communities to support schools. Ultimately, these benefits create an adaptive, inclusive, and context-sensitive education system that better prepares students to face local and global challenges.

From the perspective of Islamic education, the reviewed studies that explicitly address madrasah education show that decentralization policies intersect with the dual authority of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and local governments (Aini, 2022b; Sulistiawati et al., 2024b). Regional autonomy creates space for Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) to adapt curricula, programmes, and resource allocation to local needs, but also exposes madrasah to disparities in political commitment and fiscal capacity between districts.

Research on planning and management in MTs underscores that successful decentralization of Islamic religious education depends heavily on the instructional and administrative leadership of madrasah principals, who must translate national competency standards and religious goals into school-level plans within the regional policy framework (Khumaidi & Hamdani, 2024b; Setiyati, 2019). Integrating school-based management with Islamic values enables MTs to position Islamic religious education not only as a subject, but as the moral foundation of school culture and daily practice.

At the same time, the evidence indicates persistent challenges for Islamic religious education in decentralized systems, including uneven teacher qualifications, limited professional development for Islamic education teachers, and competition for local budgets with other sectors of education (Arlen & Trisoni, 2024; Widyanto, 2022b). These findings suggest that strengthening Islamic religious education in MTs under decentralization requires coordinated policy support from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and local governments, targeted capacity-building for MTs leaders and teachers of Islamic religious education, and accountability mechanisms that value both academic and religious outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that educational decentralization in Indonesia offers significant opportunities for innovation, curriculum relevance, and community participation. However, its success remains constrained by resource disparities, bureaucratic complexity, and inconsistent local leadership.

This study has several limitations. The analysis relies solely on secondary data through literature review, which limits contextual insights from field realities. The focus on the Indonesian context also restricts broader

generalization, and the absence of quantitative synthesis, such as meta-analysis, prevents a more systematic identification of cross-study patterns.

Future research should combine literature review with empirical data collection, such as surveys or interviews, and incorporate comparative international perspectives for a more comprehensive understanding. Subsequent studies also examine the long-term impacts of decentralization on student learning outcomes, teacher professional development, and community empowerment, thereby providing more substantial evidence to support more effective and equitable education policies.

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