



Educational Decentralization and Community-Based Education in Indonesia

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Abstract

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The transformation of Indonesia's education system from a centralized to a decentralized model carries significant implications for policy, school management, and local learning processes. Decentralization enables regional autonomy, curriculum adjustment, and community participation in educational governance. Community-based education emerges as an approach that positions communities as active subjects in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of education, emphasizing local wisdom and contextual needs. Using the library research method, this article synthesizes academic literature on educational decentralization and community-based education practices in Indonesia. The findings indicate that decentralization enhances opportunities for local adaptation and community empowerment but faces challenges such as unequal resource distribution, limited regional government capacity, and difficulties in aligning national standards with local needs. Meanwhile, community-based education effectively improves educational relevance, community ownership, and public participation, yet remains constrained by community economic limitations and the lack of formal recognition. It is recommended that policies strengthen regional capabilities, ensure equitable resource allocation, and foster partnerships among government, schools, and communities.



1. Introduction

Since the political reform era, the Indonesian government has encouraged decentralization as part of a strategy to improve the effectiveness and relevance of public services, including in the field of education. A centralized management model, where all authority rests with the central government, is often criticized for being unable to adapt to the geographic, social, cultural, and economic diversity among regions. Educational decentralization provides space for local governments and educational units to manage various aspects of education more independently, especially in developing local curriculum and utilizing local resources (Sumpena et al., 2022). Recent studies indicate that decentralization has the potential to increase access and quality of education, particularly in remote and border areas. For instance, research Karolina et al. (2021) found that despite the implementation of decentralization policies, significant obstacles still arise due to limited educational facilities and low public awareness regarding the importance of basic education. Furthermore, Sari's study (2019) revealed that fiscal decentralization positively influences basic education achievements, such as the school participation rate (enrollment rate), although the gap between regions remains large.

In addition, community-based education has developed as an alternative and complementary approach within the framework of decentralization. This approach positions local actors communities, families, and the school's surrounding society not merely as policy recipients, but also as active partners in the process of educational planning, implementation, and evaluation. Fauziddin et al. (2022) emphasize that community-based education can strengthen the democratization of

education through the integration of local values and the utilization of regional potential, while also increasing the relevance of learning to the local social and cultural context. However, the implementation of both paradigms faces a number of significant challenges. On the one hand, the capacity of local governments including the availability of human resources, facilities, and infrastructure is not evenly distributed across all regions. Aji et al. (2021) found that the gap between provinces in terms of school facilities, the number of educators, and literacy rates remains significant despite the long-standing decentralization policy. This finding confirms that decentralization alone is insufficient without systemic support and proportional resource allocation.

On the other hand, community-based education faces constraints such as limited community economic capacity, lack of formal recognition for non-formal education institutions, and conflicts between national standards and local needs. The integration of local wisdom in community Islamic education is able to strengthen community participation but poses a challenge in maintaining a balance between universal values and local culture that sometimes clash (Dasopang et al., 2022). Contemporary Indonesian education policies, such as the Curriculum and many schools still face obstacles in the form of limited facilities and teacher readiness in utilizing learning technology. Based on the review of these various literatures, it is important to further explore how the paradigm shift from a centralized system towards a decentralized and community-based education system is implemented in practice, what its advantages and challenges are, and how both can be integrated to

realize an Indonesian education system that is more just, contextual, and deeply rooted in local values.

2. Methods

This research utilizes library research as the main method to study the paradigm shift in education from a centralized system towards a decentralized one and the practice of community-based education in Indonesia over the last five years. This method was chosen because it allows for extensive and in-depth tracing of literature through various publicly available academic sources, in order to build a historical and contemporary understanding of the issues being studied. The first stage was literature identification through databases such as Google Scholar, as well as national and international journals that contain empirical or conceptual studies related to educational decentralization, community-based education, local curriculum, community participation, and regional autonomy. The search was conducted using keywords such as: “educational decentralization Indonesia,” “community-based education Indonesia,” “community participation in education,” “local curriculum,” “school autonomy,” “Merdeka Curriculum,” and “community-based non-formal education.”

The second stage was literature selection based on inclusion criteria, namely: (a) published within the last five years; (b) relevant to the theme of decentralization and/or community-based education; (c) presenting comprehensive empirical data (quantitative or qualitative) or conceptual analysis; and (d) available in full text or at least having a clear abstract, method, and research results. Sources that were merely

opinion pieces without data support or that did not explicitly explain the methodology were excluded from the analysis. The third stage was thematic content analysis. Each selected literature piece was read thoroughly, then categorized based on main themes, covering: (1) the impact of decentralization on educational access and quality; (2) the role of the community in educational provision; (3) local curriculum adaptation; (4) barriers to policy implementation; and (5) factors supporting the success of decentralization and community-based education.

Subsequently, synthesis between studies was performed by comparing research results, examining the similarities and differences in findings, and formulating general patterns from various cases. The analysis also considered the geographic context and regional economic level, such as the difference between developed areas and 3T areas (Disadvantaged, Outermost, Frontier), because the literature shows variations in implementation based on regional conditions and resource availability. The final stage is the narrative presentation of the results describing the evolution of the education paradigm, the benefits and challenges of implementation, and policy recommendations based on the literature findings. Since this research does not collect primary data, the validity of the analysis heavily depends on the quality and credibility of the literature sources used.

3. Results

The paradigm shift in Indonesian education from a centralized to a decentralized system has had a significant impact on various aspects of education, including policy, curriculum, school management, and the level of community

involvement. The impact varies depending on the social, economic, and geographic context in each region. Educational decentralization opens up opportunities for local governments and educational institutions to manage their systems more autonomously, but its effectiveness is strongly influenced by the institutional capacity and resource support available in the respective regions. The implementation of educational decentralization policies has been proven to have a positive impact on improving vocational skills and the economic welfare of students. Through local curricula relevant to the social conditions and economic potential of the community, secondary school students participating in traditional practice-based learning activities showed an increase in vocational abilities and an improvement in family economic conditions.

Furthermore, the dropout rate among students from low-income families decreased significantly (Evans et al., 2020). This finding shows that decentralization, when combined with the relevance of the local curriculum, can play a role in strengthening the link between education and improving community welfare. Nevertheless, the effect of educational decentralization is not evenly distributed across all provinces. Inequality is still visible in the provision of educational facilities, the distribution of teachers, and the school participation rate. Some provinces have educational facilities and resources far below the national average, while other areas are far more advanced and consolidated (Aji et al., 2021). This condition indicates a major challenge in the equitable distribution of decentralization policy outcomes, especially concerning equal access to education and quality of services in various regions of Indonesia. In border areas, a study conducted by Karolina et al. (2021)

highlighted that decentralization policies have not been fully capable of effectively improving educational services.

Factors such as the limited school facilities, lack of qualified teaching staff, and low community awareness about the importance of education remain major obstacles. The geographical and social conditions of border regions suggest that the success of decentralization is highly dependent on infrastructure support, human resources, and affirmative policies from the central government to function optimally in areas with limited support capacity. The role of the community is a crucial factor in the implementation of community-based education. A study by Suharto (2018) on community-based Islamic education showed that traditional institutions like *pesantren* and informal *madrasah* have strong social and historical ties with the local community. These institutions have great potential in democratizing education, integrating local values (local wisdom), and strengthening community participation in the education process.

However, they also face the dilemma of maintaining uniform national standards while preserving the unique local character that forms the community's identity. Lakollo et al. (2020) added that Community Learning Activity Centers (*Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat /PKBM*) as non-formal education institutions can function as effective local empowerment centers if supported by social capital, community participation, and the utilization of surrounding environmental potential. PKBMs play a role in improving community knowledge, skills, and capacity to adapt to local economic and social needs. This finding shows that

community-based non-formal education can be a strategic instrument in expanding access and equity in education outside the formal pathway.

However, the implementation of community-based education still faces a number of major obstacles, especially in the aspects of formal recognition, regulation, and supporting resources. Non-formal education institutions generally lack funding, physical facilities, and teaching staff with adequate pedagogical training (Ishak et al., 2020). Furthermore, national curriculum policies and the accreditation system tend to emphasize uniform national standards, which are often not aligned with local needs and contexts. Consequently, clashes arise between education innovation based on local wisdom and formal regulations that are top-down (Suharto, 2018). Educational decentralization also faces challenges related to transparency, accountability, and the institutional capacity of local governments. Although the program provides greater autonomy for schools to manage learning contextually, many schools in the regions are still constrained by minimal facilities and low teacher readiness in utilizing educational technology.

This condition hinders the optimization of program implementation and has the potential to widen the gap between urban and rural schools (Ernawati et al., 2021). In the context of local curriculum development, various studies report that the adaptation of learning materials that integrate local languages, culture, and local wisdom is able to increase student motivation and the relevance of education to their lives. However, in urban schools that have better resources, a new challenge arises in the form of pressure for high achievement of national standards. As a result, the flexibility in applying local content is often limited (Minniti et al., 2018).

The socio-economic aspect of the community also shows a consistent influence on the success of implementing community-based education. Communities with high levels of social capital, active parental involvement, and strong community support tend to be more successful in carrying out community-based education. They are able to utilize local resources to enrich the learning experience and strengthen the relationship between the school and the social environment. Conversely, communities with weak economic conditions or those in remote areas often face difficulties in providing supporting educational facilities, organizing non-formal learning activities, and maintaining the continuity of alternative education programs (Lakollo et al., 2020; Dasopang et al., 2022).

The synthesis of the reviewed literature indicates that the combination of decentralization policies and community-based education has great potential to build an education system that is more responsive, democratic, and rooted in local social realities. However, the success of its implementation is highly determined by the institutional readiness of local governments, regulatory support that recognizes the existence of local educational institutions, the fair distribution of resources, and a balance between the application of national standards and the specific needs of each region. Without synergistic coordination between the central government, local governments, and the community, the decentralization policy risks deepening existing inequalities, rather than strengthening justice and equity in education throughout Indonesia.

4. Conclusion

The paradigm shift from centralized to decentralized education in Indonesia has opened up significant opportunities for local adaptation, increased relevance, and community participation in education. Community-based education, as part of this paradigm, is able to strengthen the role of the community in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of education, as well as providing more contextual and meaningful learning. Nevertheless, these benefits are not equally distributed. There is a great disparity between regions, especially between advanced areas and disadvantaged areas, and between communities with high economic potential and communities that are less empowered.

Obstacles such as lack of facilities, infrastructure, teacher capacity, inflexible regulations, and the need to balance between national standards and local needs are the main barriers. To achieve a just, democratic, and responsive education system, policies are needed that support the strengthening of local capacity, more equitable resource allocation, and clear accountability mechanisms. In addition, formal recognition of non-formal and community-based educational institutions, as well as support for local innovation and the development of community-based curricula, are important so that education in Indonesia is not only accessible to all but also relevant to their local lives.

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