

AN ANALYSIS OF IRMAN GUSMAN'S THOUGHTS ON THE DECENTRALIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL REGULATION: REALIZING REGIONAL INDEPENDENCE IN THE NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

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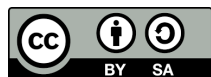
Abstract :

Decentralization of education regulations is a strategic policy within Indonesia's national education system, aiming to grant greater authority to regions to manage education according to local needs and characteristics. Irman Gusman's thinking emphasizes the importance of regional independence as a prerequisite for achieving equity and improving the quality of national education. However, in practice, educational decentralization still faces various problems, such as imbalances in regional capacity, overlapping regulations, and weak coordination between the central and regional governments. This study aims to examine Irman Gusman's thinking on decentralization of education regulations and their relevance in realizing regional independence within the national education system. The research method used is a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through interviews, literature studies, and analysis of education policy documents. The results show that Irman Gusman's thinking emphasizes decentralization as an effort to strengthen the role of regions in formulating education policies, increasing community participation, and optimizing local potential. He believes that decentralization of education regulations must be accompanied by strengthening regional institutional capacity and proportional oversight from the central government. The conclusion of this study states that Irman Gusman's thinking is relevant in the context of national education development, particularly in promoting regional independence, provided it is supported by clear regulations, adequate human resources, and synergy between stakeholders.

Keywords: Irman Gusman; Educational Decentralization; Educational Regulation; Regional Independence; National Education System.

Abstrak:

Desentralisasi peraturan pendidikan merupakan kebijakan strategis dalam sistem pendidikan nasional Indonesia, yang bertujuan untuk memberikan kewenangan yang lebih besar kepada daerah untuk mengelola pendidikan sesuai dengan kebutuhan dan karakteristik lokal. Pemikiran Irman Gusman menekankan pentingnya kemandirian daerah sebagai prasyarat untuk mencapai kesetaraan dan meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan nasional. Namun, dalam praktiknya, desentralisasi pendidikan masih menghadapi berbagai masalah, seperti ketidakseimbangan kapasitas daerah, tumpang tindih peraturan, dan koordinasi yang lemah antara pemerintah pusat dan daerah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pemikiran Irman Gusman tentang desentralisasi peraturan pendidikan dan relevansinya dalam mewujudkan kemandirian daerah dalam sistem pendidikan nasional. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, studi



literatur, dan analisis dokumen kebijakan pendidikan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemikiran Irman Gusman menekankan desentralisasi sebagai upaya untuk memperkuat peran daerah dalam merumuskan kebijakan pendidikan, meningkatkan partisipasi masyarakat, dan mengoptimalkan potensi daerah. Beliau percaya bahwa desentralisasi peraturan pendidikan harus disertai dengan penguatan kapasitas kelembagaan daerah dan pengawasan proporsional dari pemerintah pusat. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini menyatakan bahwa pemikiran Irman Gusman relevan dalam konteks pengembangan pendidikan nasional, khususnya dalam mempromosikan kemandirian daerah, asalkan didukung oleh peraturan yang jelas, sumber daya manusia yang memadai, dan sinergi antar pemangku kepentingan.

Kata kunci: Irman Gusman; Desentralisasi Pendidikan; Regulasi Pendidikan; Kemandirian Daerah; Sistem Pendidikan Nasional.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a key pillar of national development, playing a strategic role in shaping the quality of human resources, strengthening national character, and ensuring the nation's continued progress. In the context of Indonesia, a country with vast geographic, social, cultural, and economic diversity, the implementation of education is inextricably linked to the dynamic relationship between the central and regional governments. The national education system is required not only to maintain national development standards and direction, but also to be responsive to local needs, potential, and characteristics. Therefore, the issue of decentralizing education regulations has become a crucial topic in efforts to realize a just, inclusive, and sustainable education system. Decentralization in education is fundamentally part of a broader agenda of governance reform in Indonesia, which has been gaining momentum since the reform era. Through regional autonomy policies, the government grants regions broader authority to regulate and manage government affairs, including education. This policy is expected to encourage improvements in the quality of public services, accelerate decision-making, and open up space for greater public participation in the education development process. However, in practice, educational decentralization does not always work as expected. Various problems have emerged, ranging from capacity imbalances between regions, overlapping regulations, to new centralization tendencies in the form of uniform national policies that are less adaptive to local contexts (Khumaidi, A., Hamdani, U. L., & Baharuddin, 2025).

In this situation, the thoughts of national figures regarding the direction and model of educational decentralization become relevant to be studied critically. One figure who has a serious concern for the issue of decentralization and regional independence is Irman Gusman. Mr. Irman Gusman, SE, MBA (Deputy Chairman of the DPD-RI 2004-2009) (Chairman of the DPD RI 2009-2014 & 2014-2016) and currently still serving as a Member of the DPD-RI RI for the Electoral District of West Sumatra 2024-2029, as a figure who has long experience in the world of politics and public policy, Irman Gusman is known to consistently encourage the strengthening of regional roles within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. His thoughts on decentralization are not only limited to aspects of government administration,

but also touch on strategic sectors, including education, which is seen as the main foundation of regional and national development. Irman Gusman's thoughts on the decentralization of educational regulations emphasize the importance of providing broader policy space to regions to formulate and implement educational regulations according to local needs and potential. In his view, education that is overly controlled by the central government risks ignoring the diversity of regional conditions, resulting in ineffective and unsustainable policies. Therefore, decentralizing education regulation is seen as a strategic step to encourage regional independence, strengthen policy innovation, and increase the relevance of education to the social and economic development of local communities.

However, the idea of decentralizing education regulations also raises critical questions, particularly regarding how to maintain a balance between regional independence and national interests (Rizka, A. F., Ramadhan, L. S., Zulaikha, S., & Takdir, M., 2025). The National Education System still requires a regulatory framework capable of ensuring equitable quality, fair access, and a unified national vision. Herein lies the complexity of educational decentralization: how to grant meaningful autonomy to regions without sacrificing national standards and the integration of the overall education system. Irman Gusman's thinking offers an interesting perspective to study, as it positions decentralization not as an abdication of state responsibility, but rather as an effort to strengthen the role of regions within the framework of an integrated national system. An examination of Irman Gusman's thinking is important not only for understanding the normative notion of educational decentralization but also for understanding its implications for educational policy and governance practices in Indonesia. In the context of the challenges of globalization, the industrial revolution, and rapid technological development, regions are required to be more adaptive and innovative in developing their education systems. Regional independence in educational regulation can be a crucial asset in addressing these challenges, provided it is supported by adequate institutional capacity and effective coordination with the central government (Supriyanta, S., 2018).

Furthermore, this study is also relevant in addressing criticisms of the implementation of educational decentralization, which has been deemed suboptimal. By examining Irman Gusman's thinking, this research is expected to provide a conceptual contribution in formulating a more balanced and contextual model of educational regulatory decentralization. These insights can serve as a reflection for policymakers, academics, and education practitioners in designing a national education system that is more responsive to regional needs without losing sight of national direction and goals.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with the aim of understanding in-depth Irman Gusman's thoughts on the decentralization of educational regulations and their implications for efforts to realize regional independence

within the National Education System. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study is not oriented towards measuring numbers or testing hypotheses, but rather on exploring the meanings, ideas, and perspectives that develop from the research subjects. Through this approach, the researcher attempts to interpret social realities and educational policies based on the experiences, views, and narratives conveyed by the informants (Sumpena, I., Nurhamidah, S. N., & Hilman, C., 2022) The primary data collection technique in this study is in-depth interviews. Interviews were conducted semi-structured so that the researcher had clear question guidelines, while still providing flexible space for the informants to develop answers according to their experiences and views. This approach allows the researcher to comprehensively explore Irman Gusman's thoughts regarding the concept of decentralization of educational regulations, the role of regional governments in education management, and his views on the relationship between regional autonomy and the national education system. Furthermore, interviews were also used to capture the context, arguments, and background of the thoughts underlying these ideas (Ngan Sui-Ni., 2023).

Informants were selected purposively, considering their relevance and capacity to the research focus. The primary informant in this study was Irman Gusman, a central figure whose ideas were the object of study. To enrich the data and strengthen the validity of the findings, this study also involved supporting informants consisting of academics, education practitioners, or education policy stakeholders in the regions who have understanding and experience related to the implementation of educational decentralization. Thus, the data obtained was not only sourced from a single perspective but also viewed from a broader perspective. The data collection process was carried out through in-person and online interviews, adjusting to the conditions and availability of informants. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy. Interview transcripts were then analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques, which include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, researchers selected and focused on data relevant to the research theme. Next, the reduced data was presented in the form of a thematic narrative to facilitate researchers in seeing patterns and relationships between concepts. The final stage, drawing conclusions, was carried out by interpreting the meaning of the data critically and contextually.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In Irman Gusman's view, decentralization of education regulations is an integral part of the grand philosophy of Regional Autonomy, which emerged after the 1998 reforms. He emphasized that from the outset, the Regional Autonomy policy was designed not merely as a division of administrative authority between the central and regional governments, but as a national development strategy oriented towards strengthening the regions as the main

foundation of Indonesia's progress. According to him, Indonesia will never truly progress if its regions are left behind. Conversely, national progress can only be realized if each region develops optimally according to its respective potential and needs (Atmodiwirio, S., 2000). Irman Gusman explained that one of the main objectives of Regional Autonomy is to strengthen regional capacity in various aspects of development, especially human resource (HR) development. Education, in this context, is seen as a highly strategic sector because it is the main instrument in shaping the quality of Indonesian people. He emphasized that the accumulation of human resource development in the regions is what ultimately shapes Indonesia's progress as a whole. Therefore, regions must be given broad space and authority to regulate their own education policies, so that they can respond to the needs of local communities more appropriately, effectively, and sustainably. This view also aligns with the initial spirit of the formation of the Regional Representative Council (DPD) of the Republic of Indonesia, which from the outset adopted the motto "Developing from the Regions, from the Regions for Indonesia." For Irman Gusman, this motto is not merely a political slogan, but rather a reflection of the belief that regions are not objects of development, but rather the primary subjects of national development. Within this framework, decentralization of education regulations is one concrete manifestation of efforts to position regions as primary actors in educating the nation, as mandated by the constitution (Abdul Azis, A., Naasyiah Azzahra, A., Ayumi, A. B., & Bachtiar, R. F., 2025).

Furthermore, Irman Gusman linked the importance of Regional Autonomy to the historical experience of national development in the past. He recalled that for years Indonesia had implemented a development strategy known as the Development Trilogy, namely national stability, economic growth, and equity. However, in practice, this strategy only succeeded in achieving the first two objectives. Political stability was relatively maintained and economic growth did occur, but the equitable distribution of development outcomes failed to materialize. Social and economic inequality became increasingly apparent, both between regions and between community groups. He described this condition as a highly unequal social pyramid, where a small segment of society at the top enjoyed the majority of development outcomes, while the majority of people at the bottom struggled to improve their standard of living. Social mobility became severely limited, and opportunities to "move up" were enjoyed only by certain groups. According to Irman Gusman, this failure to achieve equality was inseparable from an overly centralized approach to development, where policies were formulated from the center without seriously considering the diversity of regional conditions and needs. In this context, Regional Autonomy was seen as an answer to the past failure to achieve equitable development. By granting regions broad authority to regulate and manage their own affairs, including in the field of education, it is hoped that development will be more equitable and inclusive. Regions will have a better understanding of local issues, allowing the formulation of education policies to be more contextual and relevant to the needs of their communities.

However, Irman Gusman expressed his critical views on the direction of Regional Autonomy policy following the 2014 law revision, which reduced several regional authorities, including those in education regulation. He believes that this policy has the potential to undermine the spirit of decentralization that underlies Regional Autonomy itself. The withdrawal of educational regulatory authority to the central or provincial level is feared to distance the policy-making process from the social realities faced by regions. According to him, education is a sector that is highly sensitive to local contexts. Each region faces different challenges, whether geographically, socially, culturally, or economically. Therefore, when regional authority to regulate education is narrowed, the regions' flexibility to respond to these issues is also reduced. This risks making education policy revert to a uniform, top-down approach, and less effective in addressing the real needs of the community. Irman Gusman emphasized that strengthening the state's role in education should not be interpreted as a centralization of authority. The state is indeed obliged to guarantee national education standards, maintain quality, and ensure equity between regions. However, this role should be carried out through guidance, facilitation, and oversight functions, rather than by excessively revoking regional authority. If a region is unable to manage education optimally, the appropriate solution is capacity building and mentoring, not a reduction in authority. Therefore, Irman Gusman's perspective on the decentralization of education regulations emphasizes the importance of consistency in implementing Regional Autonomy in accordance with its original objectives. Education must be the primary means of creating equality and social justice, and this can only be achieved if regions are given adequate trust and authority. He believes that revisions to the Regional Autonomy policy that curtail regional authority in education require continued critical review to prevent them from hindering efforts to build a progressive, equitable, and socially just Indonesia by strengthening regions as the main pillars of national development (Wulandari, E., Qolby, H. R., Devi, I. S., & Azis, A., 2025)

Irman Gusman's thinking on the importance of decentralization in the education system stems from the fundamental awareness that Indonesia is a highly diverse country, both geographically, socially, culturally, and in terms of its natural resource potential. Therefore, he believes that the national education system should not be built with a uniform approach imposed from the center to all regions. Education content cannot be the same in every region because each region has different characteristics, needs, and challenges. When the education system is treated uniformly, local potential that could actually be a regional strength is neglected. Irman Gusman emphasized that educational decentralization is a necessity amidst increasingly competitive global dynamics. Education should be a strategic instrument for exploring, developing, and optimizing the potential of natural resources and local wisdom possessed by each region. Each region in Indonesia has its own unique characteristics, whether in agriculture, maritime affairs, tourism, mining, the creative industry, or other leading sectors. This potential should be the primary basis for planning

and developing the education system in the regions, so that education is inseparable from the social and economic realities of the local community. According to Irman Gusman, educational decentralization is not merely interpreted as the transfer of administrative authority from the central government to regional governments. Furthermore, decentralization must address the substantive aspects of education, namely the curriculum content, learning orientation, and the ultimate goal of the educational process itself. Regional education must be able to produce human resources with competencies, skills, and expertise relevant to the needs of their regions. Thus, school and university graduates will not simply become job seekers but also become development actors capable of driving the local economy.

One of the major problems resulting from an overly centralized education system is massive urbanization. Many high school and university graduates in the regions feel they lack the space and opportunities to develop in their home regions. As a result, they flock to large cities, particularly on Java, in search of jobs and a life they perceive as more promising. This phenomenon not only leads to overcrowding and various social problems in large cities, but also causes regions to lose their best human resources. Irman Gusman believes that through decentralization of education based on regional potential, this problem can be minimized. If each region possesses competitive advantages that are seriously developed through the education system, school and university graduates will have a strong bond with their regions. They will no longer feel compelled to leave their hometowns to pursue a future, because their regions themselves are able to provide spaces for self-actualization, employment opportunities, and business opportunities suited to their skills. Furthermore, Irman Gusman emphasized the important role of regional vocational schools and universities as driving forces for local development. These educational institutions should be designed to address the real needs of the regions, rather than simply copying the central educational model. For example, regions with significant potential in the marine and fisheries sector need to develop vocational education and higher education institutions focused on fisheries technology, marine product processing, coastal management, and environmental conservation. Similarly, agrarian regions need to strengthen education in modern agriculture, agro-industry, and food technology. With this approach, education will not only produce graduates with diplomas but also produce truly competent human resources ready to contribute. Irman Gusman believes that education rooted in local potential will generate new innovations relevant to community needs. These innovations will ultimately drive increased productivity, create jobs, and improve the standard of living of local communities.

In his view, educational decentralization also has a strategic dimension in facing the era of globalization and the free market. Amidst increasingly fierce global competition, every region is required to have a competitive advantage to survive and thrive. This advantage is impossible to achieve without the support of an appropriate education system. Education must be able to produce human

resources who possess not only knowledge, but also skills, creativity, and global competitiveness. However, this global competitiveness must remain grounded in local strengths to avoid losing identity and relevance. Irman Gusman emphasized that educational development based on regional potential will also strengthen overall national resilience. When each region possesses its own strengths and advantages, development disparities between regions can be reduced. Development is no longer concentrated in certain areas but is distributed more evenly. This ultimately strengthens national unity, as each region feels it has a significant role and contribution to national development. Decentralization of educational regulations is seen as a strategic step in strengthening regional independence, particularly in managing an education system that is appropriate to local characteristics and needs. In Mr. Irman's view, decentralization is not simply a transfer of authority from the center to the regions, but rather a conscious effort to build education rooted in local wisdom that lives and thrives within the community. He believes that each region in Indonesia possesses a unique wealth of cultural values, history, customs, and social traditions that cannot be simply standardized within a single, rigid national education model.

Mr. Irman emphasized that local wisdom is truly a primary source of strength in the development of cultural values. Therefore, regional education should not only be an instrument for the transfer of knowledge, but also a vehicle for the inheritance of noble values that have stood the test of time. He believes that the ideal education system is one that is capable of developing the whole person, namely someone who is not only intellectually intelligent, but also emotionally mature, morally upright, and has character. When education only emphasizes the cognitive aspect, the resulting individuals are academically superior, but fragile in terms of values and ethics. Furthermore, Mr. Irman criticized the state of national education, which is often called "porous" by various groups. According to him, this fragility is not solely caused by a lack of facilities, infrastructure, or the quality of teaching staff, but rather by a mistaken educational orientation. Education has emphasized the impartation of knowledge, namely filling the mind with various information and theories, without being balanced with holistic education. As a result, a person's level of education is often not directly proportional to the quality of their character and personality. This phenomenon is evident in the large number of college graduates who are academically intelligent but lack integrity, lack ethical standards, and are indifferent to the values of politeness and morality. In the context of increasingly massive globalization, Mr. Irman believes that educational challenges are increasingly complex. The rapid flow of information, technological advances, and the unfiltered influx of global culture have contributed to the erosion of moral values, ethics, and adherence to religious teachings. Students, both at the school and university levels, tend to focus solely on academic achievement—grades, diplomas, and degrees—without truly embracing the meaning of education as a process of character formation. Education ultimately loses its spirit as a means of developing civilized and

dignified human beings. Therefore, Mr. Irman views the integration of local wisdom into the national education system as a necessity. Local wisdom should not be positioned as a complement or symbolic additional content, but must become a substantive part of the curriculum and educational practices. By incorporating local values into the learning process, education is expected to produce graduates who possess not only scientific integrity but also personal integrity. Academic integrity encompasses academic honesty, intellectual responsibility, and critical thinking skills, while personal integrity reflects a life attitude based on morals, ethics, and cultural values. Mr. Irman also highlighted the absence of character education from the formal curriculum as a factor distancing the younger generation from the foundations of the nation's cultural values. Yet, character education plays a crucial role in instilling exemplary behavior, politeness, respect for parents and teachers, and concern for others. He reminded us that the nation's founders laid a strong foundation for nationalism, rooted in noble cultural and moral values. When character education is neglected, the younger generation will become increasingly disconnected from the roots of their own history and national identity.

In line with this, Mr. Irman also emphasized the importance of reviving Pancasila Moral Education in the school curriculum. For him, Pancasila is not merely a state ideology to be memorized, but rather life values that must be internalized from an early age through education. Pancasila Moral Education is expected to shape students who are truly proud to be Indonesian citizens, possess noble character, and uphold the nation's dignity. Through this education, national values can be instilled contextually and relevant to students' daily lives. In Mr. Irman's view, ideal education is one that preserves the teachings of parents, teachers, religious teachings, and various advice and good practices that exist in society. Education must not break the chain of values between the older and younger generations. Instead, education must be a bridge connecting the nation's past, present, and future. Thus, decentralizing education regulations based on local wisdom will not only strengthen regional independence but also provide a solid foundation for the sustainable development of national character. Ultimately, Mr. Irman believes that educational success cannot be measured solely by graduation rates, rankings, or academic achievement, but rather by the extent to which education can produce Indonesians who are knowledgeable, moral, have character, and are cultured. Decentralization of education, which allows regions to develop their own local wisdom, is an important path to realizing this ideal, while simultaneously addressing the challenges of the times without losing the nation's identity.

The implementation of decentralized education regulations in Indonesia presents unique challenges for regional governments. One issue that is often highlighted is the limited authority held by regions, particularly in the area of religious education. In this context, although regional schools play a crucial role in providing education to children, policies related to religious education remain under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This raises the question of how regions can continue to contribute effectively to character

building and educational development, given their limited scope. However, upon closer examination, the real problem lies beyond limited authority. Even with the authority they have, many regional schools are unable to implement education optimally. According to the resource person, the key to educational success lies in the role of teachers. Teachers are not merely instructors of subject matter but also central figures in shaping the character and personality of students. They bear a significant responsibility in instilling moral values, discipline, and an understanding of religious teachings in their students. However, a common misconception in society is that education is solely the responsibility of teachers. This view ignores the fact that education begins at home. Parents are the primary educators who lay the foundation for a child's development. Moral values, social behavior, and adherence to religious norms and teachings should be introduced and instilled at home. Schools then serve as a place to deepen and strengthen this education. One of the obstacles teachers face in shaping students' character is limited time and resources. In a single class, teachers must deal with a large number of students, so individual attention to each child is often limited. Furthermore, teacher well-being is also a factor that impacts their performance. This pressure makes it difficult for teachers to fulfill their role as character educators optimally, even with high intentions and competence (Ridwan, I., & Sumirat, I. R., 2025).

Therefore, parental involvement is crucial. Schools and parents must build a harmonious partnership in educating children. Parents' role extends beyond simply escorting their children to school or supervising their learning activities at home, but also through actively instilling values consistent with the formal education provided at school. This includes adherence to religious teachings, instilling positive values in daily life, and developing character consistent with societal norms. With synergy between teachers and parents, education can be more effective. Schools provide educational materials, guide, and direct children's academic development, while families provide a strong moral and character foundation. In this way, children not only become academically intelligent but also develop positive personalities, discipline, and adapt to prevailing social and religious values. In this interview, Irman Gusman shares his critical yet constructive views on the Indonesian education system, particularly regarding the roles of the central and regional governments. According to him, one of the major mistakes in education policy in the country is the current practice of centralization. "Centralization of education is a flawed policy," he stated firmly. He emphasized that education cannot be standardized across Indonesia because each region's social, cultural, and environmental conditions differ. Irman Gusman explained that a uniform approach would be ineffective because students grow up in diverse backgrounds. Each region has unique characteristics, both in terms of its natural environment and its human resource potential. Therefore, he argued, education must be able to adapt to local conditions in order to develop a superior and competitive generation. "The backgrounds of students cannot be standardized. Therefore, a new strategy is needed to decentralize the education system, not only limited to financing but

also touching on the content or educational materials themselves," he explained.

In Gusman's view, educational decentralization is not merely granting financial authority to regional governments, but also providing the flexibility to adapt the curriculum and educational materials to the potential and needs of each region. This, he believes, will enable each region to develop specific strengths that align with its local characteristics. He added that the orientation of education should not only be to meet uniform national standards, but also to develop expertise relevant to the region's resources and needs. For example, Gusman highlighted regions that have strengths in certain natural resource sectors. He stated that education in these regions should be directed towards developing experts who understand and are able to develop the potential of these natural resources. In this way, the younger generation in those regions can have a competitive advantage in global competition. According to him, current competition occurs not only between regions in Indonesia, but also between regions in various countries. By developing expertise according to local potential, regions will be able to compete more effectively at the international level. Irman Gusman emphasized that if regional education is directed towards developing local potential, the debate about whether the Central Government is too restrictive or whether regional educational authority is still limited will be irrelevant. "Because the orientation is not on the question of central or regional, but rather on how to build competitive advantages in each region," he said. In other words, the focus should be on tangible results and benefits for human resource development, not solely on bureaucratic structures or political authority. Gusman's view illustrates a vision of education that is adaptive and responsive to local needs. He emphasized that educational decentralization is key to creating superior human resources, capable not only of meeting national standards but also of competing globally. Education, he argued, should be a strategic tool for optimizing regional potential so that each region can produce experts who excel in their respective fields (Aini, M., 2022).

In an in-depth discussion about the challenges of education in Indonesia, the speaker emphasized that the current national education paradigm needs to be revised. He highlighted the still very real gap in education quality between regions, particularly evident in the results of the National Examination. Data shows that the top ten schools with the best results are almost always located on the island of Java, while other regions lag far behind. This phenomenon demonstrates that uniform educational standards through the National Examination do not always reflect the potential and needs of each region. According to the speaker, the main problem lies in the approach that equates exams and learning materials across Indonesia, without considering the uniqueness and potential of local resources. "A uniform National Examination is actually not in line with my concept of building competitive advantages in each region," he said. He emphasized that school graduates who take the National Examination are not directed to develop their own regions, but are instead forced to go to big cities, especially in Java, to find work. The current system places more emphasis on achieving national report card scores and

diplomas, which often do not reflect students' true abilities or potential. In his view, every child is born with special talents and potential by God Almighty. However, the current education system has not been able to optimally explore and develop these talents. Many students' unique abilities are neglected due to a uniform curriculum, a focus on exam material, and a lack of alignment with local needs. As a result, upon graduation, they face difficulties finding jobs that align with what they learned in school. Widespread job advertisements in the mass media highlight the gap between the education they receive and the needs of the local labor market, with most jobs not matching the competencies of school and college graduates. The resource person emphasized the importance of designing an education system that focuses on developing students' potential, aligned with the environment and resources of each region. With this approach, each student can be trained to master skills relevant to local potential, whether in agriculture, fisheries, the creative industry, energy, or other natural resources. He believes that if education is built on local strengths and characteristics, the issue of inter-regional educational disparities will significantly diminish. Children will no longer be compared based on national exam scores, but rather on their ability to make a real contribution to their respective regions.

In this context, educational decentralization is a key strategy. By granting greater autonomy to local governments in determining curriculum and educational programs, schools can tailor learning to local resource potential and community needs. For example, regions rich in certain natural resources can direct students to master skills that support the management of those resources. Thus, school and university graduates in each region will possess relevant competencies, be work-ready, and able to build the local economy. This concept will also foster competitive advantage for their respective regions, as each region possesses a skilled workforce suited to its conditions and environmental potential. The resource person emphasized that improving the quality of education should not be measured solely by national scores and rankings. More importantly, however, is how the education system optimally develops individual potential and addresses the real needs of the region. Education must be a tool for empowerment, not simply a means of academic selection. By developing education based on children's potential and local characteristics, Indonesian children will be better prepared to face the challenges of the workforce and play an active role in the development of their own regions. Finally, the resource person emphasized the need for a shift in the national education paradigm: from a system that pursues uniformity and high scores on the National Examination, to one that fosters competitive advantage in each region through the development of individual potential. If this vision is achieved, there will no longer be an educational gap, as every child, regardless of where they are born, will have an equal opportunity to develop according to their talents and become a driving force for development in their region. The education system will no longer simply produce graduates who are nationally competitive, but will also produce individuals capable of maximizing local

potential and developing it, thereby bringing tangible benefits to their communities and the local economy.

Based on the interviews conducted, informants emphasized that education is not solely the responsibility of teachers or school institutions. Education is viewed as a social process involving all elements of society. In the context of decentralized education regulations, the role of local communities and stakeholders is crucial because education policies are no longer entirely centralized, but rather provide greater space for regions to manage and develop their education systems according to local characteristics, needs, and potential. Informants explained that education must be a shared responsibility of all parents, local governments, community leaders, religious leaders, cultural figures, and various other community components. Each party has a strategic role in creating a conducive and meaningful educational environment for students. Thus, education does not only take place in the classroom, but also lives and develops within the community. Within the framework of educational decentralization, local governments hold a crucial position as policymakers and facilitators. Local governments are expected to be able to formulate education regulations and policies that are relevant to the social, cultural, and economic conditions of the local community. However, the success of these policies will not be achieved without the active support of the community and local stakeholders. Therefore, synergy between local governments and communities is the main foundation in implementing effective educational decentralization (Saragih, P. Y., Br Depari, F. W. S., Puspitasari, D., & Shandi, K., 2025)

Furthermore, informants emphasized that the success of educational decentralization is largely determined by a collective awareness that all stakeholders in the regions have an obligation to provide education, not just in the sense of academic instruction, but also in a holistic sense. Holistic education encompasses the formation of character, moral values, social ethics, and the strengthening of students' cultural and spiritual identities. These values cannot be fully taught through a formal curriculum but rather develop through social interactions and the example set by the surrounding environment. The role of parents, for example, is not limited to ensuring children attend school, but also includes guiding, accompanying, and modeling good behavior in daily life. Parents are the first and foremost educators of children, so their involvement is crucial for the success of their children's education. In the context of decentralization, schools and local governments need to open up broad spaces for parental participation so they can actively participate in the educational process. Community leaders, religious leaders, and cultural figures also have an equally important contribution. They serve as role models capable of instilling noble values in the younger generation. The exemplary behavior demonstrated by these figures serves as a highly effective educational tool, as students learn not only from what is taught but also from what they see and experience in everyday social life. Informants emphasized that when positive values are put into practice by stakeholders, character education will naturally grow within the community.

Based on the interview results, Irman Gusman views the application of the concept of regional independence in the field of education as the main essence of the implementation of regional autonomy itself. According to him, the ideal goal of regional autonomy in the education sector is not simply the delegation of administrative authority from the central government to regional governments, but rather a strategic effort to create independent, superior human resources (HR), capable of competing globally. Education, in this case, is the main instrument in shaping the quality of human resources produced by schools and universities in the region. Irman Gusman emphasized that regional independence in education is ideally reflected in the region's ability to produce graduates with high competitiveness. This independence does not only mean being able to organize education independently, but more importantly, being able to create a competitive advantage that characterizes graduates from each region. This advantage must be consciously and systematically designed through regional education policies that are oriented towards the needs of the times and local potential. In the context of the challenges of globalization, Irman Gusman highlighted that today's competition for the workforce is no longer solely local or national. Graduates of schools and universities in the regions compete not only with graduates from other regions in Indonesia but also with graduates from various countries around the world. Globalization and the openness of the labor market allow foreign professionals to enter and seek employment in Indonesia. Therefore, regional education cannot be conventional and closed, but must be adaptive, progressive, and globally oriented. According to Irman Gusman, this situation demands a paradigm shift in the implementation of regional education. Education cannot simply focus on academic achievement or mastery of theory, but must be directed at developing real competencies relevant to the needs of the workplace and global developments. In this regard, every student in the regions must be optimally equipped through education that can optimally develop their talents, interests, and potential. One important aspect emphasized by Irman Gusman is the management of regional natural resource potential as a basis for developing graduates' competitive advantages. He believes that each region in Indonesia has different characteristics, natural resources, and economic potential. This potential should be the primary foundation in formulating regional education policies. Through education that is integrated with local potential, students not only understand theory, but are also able to manage and develop their regional resources creatively, innovatively, and sustainably (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional & Balitbang, 2000)

With this approach, regional education not only produces job seekers but also creates entrepreneurs, innovators, and professionals with specific expertise aligned with their region's strengths. Irman Gusman emphasized that when students are equipped with skills relevant to local potential, they will have added value that is not easily imitated by graduates from other regions or countries. This is what is meant by true competitive advantage. Furthermore, Irman Gusman sees that regional independence in education also has

implications for graduates' ability to play a role at the international level. Indonesian graduates, he believes, must not only be able to survive and compete domestically but also have opportunities to work in other countries. In fact, he emphasized that with proper educational management, Indonesian graduates can fill the workforce needs in countries that lack the natural resource advantages and specific competencies that Indonesia possesses. From this perspective, regional education is a strategic tool to improve Indonesia's bargaining position at the global level. Regional autonomy in education must be utilized to produce human resources who are confident, competitive, and possess a clear identity of excellence. Irman Gusman believes that failure to utilize educational autonomy will result in regions being left behind and only becoming markets for labor from outside.

Based on the interview results, the informant believes that the positive and negative impacts of decentralization of education regulations cannot be seen solely from the educational system or policies implemented. According to him, the main determining factor for the success or failure of educational decentralization lies in the behavior, capacity, and commitment of educational stakeholders in each region. In other words, educational decentralization is not an automatic guarantee of achieving equal access to education, but rather an opportunity that depends heavily on the quality of its implementation at the local level. The informant emphasized that an education system, no matter how well designed, will not produce positive impacts if run by stakeholders who are incompetent, unprofessional, or who do not care about the interests of students. Under these conditions, decentralization of education regulations has the potential to cause negative impacts, such as disparities in the quality of education between regions, ineffective budget management, and weak educational services for the community, especially in underdeveloped areas. Conversely, the informant also emphasized that even an education system that is initially less than ideal can provide significant benefits if managed by competent, integrated, and visionary educational stakeholders. Competent stakeholders are capable of innovating, improving policies, and adapting systems to meet the needs of regions and students. In this context, decentralizing education regulations opens up space for creativity and flexibility for regions to develop more relevant and inclusive education.

Regarding the positive impact of decentralization of education regulations on equal access, the informant viewed that decentralization provides opportunities for regions to provide education tailored to local characteristics and potential. Regions are no longer entirely dependent on uniform policies from the central government but can instead design educational programs that address the needs of local communities. This has the potential to increase access to education, both in terms of the availability of educational institutions, the relevance of the curriculum, and the affordability of educational services for the community. However, the informant also cautioned that decentralization can have negative impacts if not accompanied by prepared human resources and good governance in the regions. Differences

in capacity between regions can widen the educational gap. Regions with strong education stakeholders and adequate resources tend to experience rapid progress, while regions with low capacity risk being left behind. In such situations, the goal of equal access to education is difficult to achieve. To clarify his view, the informant cited the example of the education system in the United States. He explained that in the United States, college graduates generally do not need to move to another state to find work. This occurs because each state is able to develop an education system aligned with the resource potential and economic needs of its respective region. Education is designed to support regional development, enabling graduates to directly contribute and be absorbed in their home regions. According to informants, the education system in the United States is based on developing the potential of natural resources and local strengths in each state. Students are encouraged to conduct research related to their region's potential, enabling them to develop into experts in fields relevant to their needs. This approach not only improves the quality of graduates but also promotes equitable employment opportunities and development across regions.

This experience, which the informant gained firsthand while studying in the United States, demonstrates that educational decentralization can have a positive impact on equitable access and quality of education if managed properly. Education based on local potential can create strong links between educational institutions, the workplace, and regional development. Thus, decentralization not only expands access to education but also ensures that it has real utility for the community. In the Indonesian context, the informant believes a similar principle should be applied. Decentralization of education regulations needs to be directed at strengthening the capacity of education stakeholders in the regions, so they can design and manage quality and equitable education. Without improving stakeholder quality, decentralization risks becoming a burden, not a solution. Based on the interview results, Irman Gusman expressed a critical and visionary view on how education policy in Indonesia should be improved to meet global challenges. According to him, the fundamental problem in the current national education system is the tendency to standardize education systems and curricula across all regions, without considering the diverse natural, social, and economic resources possessed by each region in Indonesia. Irman Gusman emphasized that the education system cannot be completely standardized through a single national curriculum applicable to all regions. He believes that such a uniform approach has the potential to hinder the emergence of regional excellence and reduce the competitiveness of graduates. However, he does not completely reject the existence of a national curriculum. He believes that for general subjects related to the nation's strategic interests – such as state education, state finance, foreign policy, and defense and security – national standardization remains necessary. This is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia and preserving the values of Pancasila as the nation's ideology (Koswara, et al., 2009).

Beyond these strategic areas, Irman Gusman emphasized the importance of a customized curriculum approach, tailored to the potential of each region. Regional education must be designed based on the advantages of natural resources, economic characteristics, and local development needs. In this way, educational institutions—both schools and universities—can function as driving forces for regional development, while producing graduates with specific and relevant competencies. Furthermore, Irman Gusman highlighted the reality of global competition faced by Indonesian university graduates. According to him, Indonesian graduates not only compete with fellow domestic graduates but also with university graduates from around the world. Globalization, open labor markets, and technological developments have erased geographical boundaries in the world of work. Therefore, national and regional education policies must be designed with a global perspective, not just a domestic orientation. In this context, Irman Gusman emphasized that regional education must be able to follow and explore developments in science and technology in various developed countries. Regional universities must not be left behind by the flow of global scientific developments. The curriculum, learning methods, and research must be aligned with international standards so that graduates from regional universities have the same quality as graduates from other countries.

To achieve this, Irman Gusman believes that education cannot be solely conducted domestically. He emphasized the importance of a policy of sending Indonesian students to study abroad, particularly in fields of study where other countries have greater advantages. By studying directly in these countries, Indonesian students can absorb the science, technology, work culture, and professional ethos that are developing globally. This international experience will improve the quality of Indonesian graduates, enabling them to compete equally in the international labor market. However, Irman Gusman also emphasized balance. He emphasized that not all fields of study should be directed abroad. For fields where Indonesia has a competitive advantage—such as natural resources, tropical agriculture, marine affairs, forestry, energy, and biodiversity—in-depth study should be conducted domestically. Indonesia possesses wealth and potential that many other countries do not possess, so education in these fields must be seriously developed domestically to produce superior and globally competitive experts. According to Irman Gusman, this approach will create a balance between global orientation and strengthening national potential. Indonesian education is not only a consumer of foreign knowledge, but also a producer of internationally recognized expertise. Indonesian graduates are expected not only to be able to work domestically, but also to have opportunities to work and contribute in various other countries. Furthermore, Irman Gusman emphasized that globalization demands a change in mindset in the world of education. Indonesian students are not only being formed as Indonesian citizens, but also as global citizens. Education must instill global insight, cross-cultural skills, and adaptability to rapid change. In this way, Indonesian graduates will have the flexibility and resilience to face

increasingly fierce global competition in the future.

CONCLUSION

The success of educational decentralization is largely determined by a collective awareness that all stakeholders in the regions have an obligation to provide education, not just in the sense of academic instruction, but also in a holistic sense. Holistic education encompasses the development of character, moral values, social ethics, and the strengthening of students' cultural and spiritual identities. These values cannot be fully taught through a formal curriculum but rather develop through social interactions and the example set by the surrounding environment. The role of parents, for example, extends beyond ensuring their children attend school, to guiding, assisting, and modeling good behavior in their daily lives. Parents are their children's first and foremost educators, and their involvement is crucial for their educational success. In the context of decentralization, schools and local governments need to open up broad spaces for parental participation so they can actively participate in the educational process. Community leaders, religious leaders, and cultural figures also play an equally important role. They serve as role models capable of instilling noble values in the younger generation. The exemplary behavior shown by these figures is a very effective educational tool, because students learn not only from what is taught, but also from what they see and feel in everyday social life.

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