



Negotiated Autonomy in Madrasah Governance: Regulatory Constraints, Institutional Accountability, and Local Adaptation

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ABSTRACT

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Madrasah governance operates within a complex regulatory environment in which national education standards intersect with ministerial regulations governing religious education. Although madrasahs have some institutional discretion, their autonomy remains constrained by administrative requirements, limited supervisory support, and overlapping accountability structures. This study aims to examine how regulatory arrangements, institutional constraints, and local governance practices shape madrasah autonomy and to develop a conceptual understanding of how institutional actors respond to competing policy demands. This study employed a systematic literature review guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework. The review examined 24 journal articles published between 2022 and 2026, comprising 18 Scopus-indexed articles and six articles published in SINTA 2 journals. Five interconnected themes emerged: dual regulatory architecture, bounded institutional autonomy, limited developmental supervision, dual accountability in foundation-managed madrasahs, and local adaptive strategies. The findings inform the concept of negotiated autonomy, whereby institutional actors respond through formal compliance, selective adaptation, and protective decoupling. Improving madrasah governance requires streamlined administrative reporting, stronger developmental supervision, targeted financial and managerial support, and clearer arrangements for regional government assistance. These measures may help transform procedural compliance into substantive institutional autonomy.

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INTRODUCTION

Across education systems, school autonomy has become a major governance issue because it shapes educational quality, institutional responsiveness, and public accountability. Governments have spent the past two decades expanding schools' decision-making responsibilities while tightening performance requirements. Principals are expected to plan, allocate resources, and innovate locally while meeting centrally established targets, submitting digital reports, and competing for funding (Caldwell, 2024; Montecinos & Lira, 2025). This arrangement matters because schools cannot respond effectively to diverse community needs when their decisions remain constrained by administrative demands. International studies indicate that competing responsibilities increase principals' workloads and divert their attention from educational leadership (Rowe & Langman, 2025; Wang et al., 2022). Therefore, autonomy should be understood not merely as a formal policy entitlement but as a practical capacity that depends on institutional conditions and governance arrangements.

The wider societal significance of school autonomy lies in its relationship with educational equity, institutional accountability, and the distribution of decision-making authority. Schools serving different communities require sufficient flexibility to address local circumstances, yet public authorities must ensure consistent educational standards and responsible resource management. When accountability mechanisms become excessively administrative, schools may prioritize documentation over teaching improvement; conversely, unrestricted discretion can weaken transparency and consistency. The central challenge is therefore to establish arrangements that reconcile local responsiveness with public responsibility. This challenge becomes particularly complex in religious education, where educational institutions must negotiate the expectations of governments, religious authorities, and communities simultaneously. Understanding how these competing demands shape institutional decisions is essential for explaining why formally similar autonomy policies may produce different practices and outcomes across educational systems.

Indonesia's madrasah governance illustrates the general problem of autonomy constrained by overlapping regulatory responsibilities. Although madrasahs are recognized as equivalent to general schools under the National Education System Law, religious affairs remain an absolute competence of the central government under the Regional Government Law. Consequently, madrasahs operate within a vertical ministerial structure while general schools have experienced decentralization (Kosim et al., 2023). Nevertheless, reforms require madrasahs to evaluate institutional performance, formulate

improvement plans and budgets, and develop contextually appropriate operational curricula (Ainissyifa et al., 2024; Haddade et al., 2024). This creates a practical tension between institutional responsibility and decision-making authority. Persistent quality differences between public and private madrasahs, alongside administrative burdens affecting principals and teachers, demonstrate why this governance problem requires closer investigation (Kultsum et al., 2022).

The scale and institutional diversity of Indonesian madrasahs make this tension especially consequential. In the 2025/2026 academic year, Indonesia recorded 87,454 madrasahs from early childhood through senior secondary education under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) (Statistics Indonesia [BPS], 2026). Most are privately managed by community foundations, while the senior secondary sector has continued expanding in institutional and teacher numbers (Wahyudin et al., 2024). These arrangements create multiple layers of responsibility: central authorities establish regulatory requirements, foundations influence institutional priorities, and school leaders interpret policies within their available resources. Related studies have examined policy changes in Islamic education (Kosim et al., 2023), curriculum compliance and religious-subject preservation (Ihsan et al., 2024), and the formal incorporation of traditional institutions into national governance through the *Pesantren* Law (Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022). Together, these findings establish the institutional complexity underlying madrasah autonomy.

Previous research has investigated several instruments through which autonomy and accountability are implemented in Islamic education. Studies have examined the Madrasah Reform programme (Haddade et al., 2024), performance-based and affirmation grants (Kurniawan, 2025), madrasah-based management (Susanto, 2022; Tauhid, 2025), and curriculum autonomy under the Merdeka curriculum (Ainissyifa et al., 2024). Other investigations address supervisory practices (Sanuri, 2026), discretionary local government support for madrasah teachers (Kurniawati et al., 2026), and selective adoption of the national curriculum in *Pesantren*-based madrasahs (Ahdi et al., 2025). International scholarship provides complementary explanations through street-level bureaucracy and frontline discretion (Witenstein & Abdallah, 2022; Alsharefeen, 2025; Bulut-Sahin, 2023), alongside research on policy responses and organizational decoupling (Waslander et al., 2023). However, these studies generally examine particular instruments or institutional settings rather than explaining how multiple regulatory demands interact across governance domains.

The theoretical limitation becomes clearer when existing implementation perspectives are considered together. Street-level bureaucracy, policy sensemaking, loose coupling, and decoupling explain how frontline actors

interpret, adapt, and selectively implement formal requirements rather than simply executing prescribed policies. Research on affiliated colleges demonstrates curricular discretion, while studies of autonomy reforms in other national contexts identify constraints imposed by central targets, competitive funding, and reporting obligations. Nevertheless, these perspectives have rarely been integrated to explain religious school systems characterized by centralized ministerial authority, private foundation ownership, and simultaneous accountability to state and institutional stakeholders. This gap limits understanding of how autonomy is negotiated across curriculum, planning and budgeting, and staffing and supervision within Indonesia's madrasah governance arrangements.

This article advances a model of negotiated autonomy by integrating policy interpretation, frontline discretion, and organizational decoupling to explain how madrasah actors reconcile regulatory compliance with local institutional priorities. Its central argument is that autonomy in madrasahs is neither wholly granted nor entirely absent; instead, it emerges through ongoing negotiation among ministerial requirements, institutional capacities, and foundation expectations. The study addresses three questions: how do principals and teachers interpret and enact national regulations; what bureaucratic constraints do they encounter; and what strategies enable them to balance compliance with local autonomy? Through a systematic synthesis of recent peer-reviewed studies published in Scopus-indexed and SINTA 1–2 accredited journals, the article examines curriculum, planning and budgeting, and staffing and supervision. It contributes a context-sensitive explanation of negotiated autonomy and identifies governance conditions that may support more meaningful institutional decision-making.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a systematic literature review (SLR) design guided by the PRISMA 2020 reporting guideline (Page et al., 2021). This design was selected because the study aimed to identify recurring patterns in policy implementation and explain how institutional autonomy is negotiated across different governance arrangements. Systematic reviews enable researchers to synthesize fragmented evidence and develop explanatory frameworks for complex educational issues (Sosa-Díaz et al., 2022). Unlike a single-case study, this approach facilitates comparisons across institutions, policy domains, and national contexts through explicit search strategies, eligibility criteria, and transparent study selection procedures. The review focused on understanding how madrasah principals and teachers interpret national regulations, experience bureaucratic constraints, and develop strategies to

balance regulatory compliance with local decision-making authority within centralized educational governance.

The research setting comprised two bibliographic sources: Scopus and the Indonesian Science and Technology Index (SINTA), accessed through the Garuda portal and individual journal websites. Scopus was selected because it indexes international publications in education, public administration, and Islamic studies, including theoretical research on policy implementation. SINTA was included because Indonesian journals provide important empirical evidence concerning madrasah governance, particularly those accredited in ranks one and two. These sources enabled the review to integrate international theoretical perspectives with research addressing Indonesia's institutional context. Official statistics, including BPS (2026), World Bank (2025) publications, and relevant national legislation, were consulted exclusively to establish contextual information and were not counted among the included studies. Because this research synthesized published literature rather than collecting primary data, no physical field location was involved.

Data were collected through a structured literature search and screening process conducted between [month–month 2026]. The search strategy combined the terms (“*Madrasah*” OR “Islamic School” OR “*Pesantren*” OR “School”) AND (“Governance” OR “Policy Implementation” OR “Autonomy” OR “School-Based Management” OR “Supervision” OR “Street-level Bureaucracy” OR “Decoupling” OR “Accountability”). Eligible publications were peer-reviewed journal articles published between January 2021 and 2026, indexed in Scopus or published in SINTA 1–2 accredited journals, and relevant to Islamic educational governance or policy implementation theory. Studies were required to have verifiable bibliographic records. Conference papers, theses, book chapters, news reports, articles in SINTA 3–6 journals, and irrelevant publications were excluded. Following screening and eligibility assessment under PRISMA 2020, 24 studies were included: 18 from Scopus and six from SINTA 1–2 journals.

Data analysis employed thematic synthesis through data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification. First, information from each included study was extracted into a standardized matrix containing authorship, publication year, journal indexing, research setting, methodology, policy domain, and principal findings. Second, data were condensed through deductive coding based on implementation and institutional theories, including interpretation, constraint, compliance, adaptation, and decoupling, alongside inductive coding to identify emerging patterns, particularly the influence of private foundations. Third, coded findings were displayed in comparative matrices to identify similarities and differences across curriculum, planning and budgeting, staffing and supervision, institutional ownership, and national

contexts. Finally, conclusions were verified by comparing evidence across studies, examining convergent and divergent findings, and refining the emerging explanatory model of negotiated autonomy. The first author conducted the coding, discussed interpretations with co-authors until consensus was achieved, and maintained an audit trail documenting analytical decisions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Characteristics of the Included Studies

The synthesis included 24 studies published between 2022 and 2026. Six studies were published in 2022, three in 2023, five in 2024, six in 2025, and four in 2026. Regarding indexing, 18 studies appeared in Scopus-indexed journals, while six were published in SINTA 2 journals. Geographically, 15 studies examined madrasahs, *Pesantren*, or Islamic higher education in Indonesia, whereas nine investigated policy implementation and school autonomy in Australia, Canada, Chile, India, the Netherlands, Poland, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. Most studies employed qualitative case-study designs, while others used surveys, document analysis, or conceptual analysis.

Table 2. Summary of the Included Studies (n = 24)

Author (year)	Journal	Index	Focus and main contribution
Ahdi et al. (2025)	JUMPA: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan	SINTA 2	<i>Pesantren</i> -based madrasahs adopt national curriculum selectively while keeping the <i>Pesantren</i> curriculum dominant
Ainissyifa et al. (2024)	Jurnal Pendidikan Islam	Scopus	Curriculum autonomy under the Merdeka curriculum depends on local capacity
Alsharefeen (2025)	Frontiers in Education	Scopus	Faculty as street-level bureaucrats use discretion when rules and evidence are unclear
Argaman (2026)	Systems	Scopus	Teachers' policy modification; compares ecosystem, street-level bureaucracy, and loose-coupling theories
Bulut-Sahin (2023)	Education Sciences	Scopus	Frontline staff with heavy, unclear workloads exercise discretion that can advance or undermine policy
Caldwell (2024)	Education Sciences	Scopus	School leaders' workload is driven more by accountability and paperwork than by autonomy
El Widdah (2022)	Int. Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research	Scopus	Madrasah management strategy requires regulation, staffing, data management, and quality assurance policies
Haddade et al. (2024)	International Journal of Educational Management	Scopus	Management strategies developed through the Madrasah Reform programme
Ihsan et al. (2024)	Educational Studies	Scopus	Contestation between national and

			religious curricula; madrasahs struggle to comply with both
Kosim et al. (2023)	Cogent Education	Scopus	State policy on Islamic education moved from domestication to accommodation
Kultsum et al. (2022)	Int. Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education	Scopus	Regional autonomy produced quality tiers and difficulties in funding and staffing madrasahs
Kurniawan (2025)	Khazanah Pendidikan Islam	SINTA 2	Management of performance-based and affirmation grants in the Madrasah Reform programme
Kurniawati et al. (2026)	International Journal of Nusantara Islam	SINTA 2	Local government support for madrasah teachers depends on regional political will
Montecinos & Lira (2025)	Education Sciences	Scopus	School autonomy constrained by national targets and performance contracts
Musgamy et al. (2026)	Int. Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research	Scopus	Islamic universities reinterpret audit-based quality requirements through a values lens
Nurtawab & Wahyudi (2022)	Studia Islamika	Scopus	<i>Pesantren</i> Law formalises traditional institutions and may alter their values
Rowe & Langman (2025)	Australian Educational Researcher	Scopus	Autonomy accompanied by competitive grants, rigid oversight, and paperwork
Sanuri (2026)	International Journal of Nusantara Islam	SINTA 2	Supervision policy and its implementation in improving educational quality
Susanto (2022)	Al-Tanzim: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam	SINTA 2	Madrasah-based management as a quality improvement strategy
Tauhid (2025)	International Journal of Nusantara Islam	SINTA 2	Role of madrasah-based management in improving quality: multiple cases
Wahyudin et al. (2024)	Jurnal Pendidikan Islam	Scopus	Growth of Madrasah Aliyah, teachers, and students over time
Wang et al. (2022)	Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability	Scopus	Principals balance competing accountabilities amid work intensification
Waslander et al. (2023)	Journal of Educational Change	Scopus	Schools choose the least disruptive response to multiple central policies, including symbolic change
Witenstein & Abdallah (2022)	Prospects	Scopus	Street-level bureaucracy framework for curriculum and examination policy discernment

Table 2 presents the distribution and substantive focus of the 24 included studies. The evidence covers three interconnected dimensions: institutional arrangements, policy implementation mechanisms, and organizational responses. The Indonesian studies provide the primary empirical basis for understanding madrasah governance, while international studies contribute

evidence on discretion, accountability, autonomy, and policy adaptation. The range of research designs also allows the synthesis to incorporate institutional experiences alongside broader conceptual explanations. Five recurring themes emerged from the thematic synthesis: dual regulatory architecture, bounded autonomy, thin supervision, dual accountability in foundation-run madrasahs, and local adaptive strategies. These themes identify the regulatory conditions, institutional constraints, and practical responses that characterize the implementation of autonomy.

A Dual Regulatory Architecture

The first finding concerns the dual regulatory architecture within which madrasah principals and teachers interpret educational policy. Madrasahs operate under national education standards while also being subject to ministerial regulations governing religious education. These overlapping requirements create a situation in which policy implementation involves reconciling different regulatory expectations rather than applying a single, unified framework. The distinction becomes particularly visible in curriculum management, where institutions must accommodate nationally prescribed educational content while maintaining religious subjects and institutional traditions.

The findings further indicate that formal recognition and institutional standardization coexist with continued community and religious authority. National regulatory requirements establish common expectations, but their implementation varies according to institutional priorities and existing educational practices. In *Pesantren*-based madrasahs, the national curriculum may be incorporated selectively while the *Pesantren* curriculum remains dominant. The practical meaning of a regulation therefore depends not only on its formal requirements but also on how institutional actors understand its relevance, compatibility, and implications for their educational responsibilities.

The dual regulatory architecture demonstrates that policy interpretation is an active institutional process. Principals and teachers must determine how different requirements can be accommodated within existing organizational arrangements. This process creates variation in implementation even when institutions operate under the same national policy framework. The resulting differences are particularly apparent where religious commitments, institutional traditions, and national standards require simultaneous consideration. The central finding is that regulatory complexity shapes how autonomy is understood and exercised before institutions make specific decisions about curriculum, planning, budgeting, or other management responsibilities.

Bounded Autonomy

The second finding establishes that madrasah autonomy exists but is unevenly distributed across policy domains. Curriculum management provides comparatively greater room for institutional discretion. Madrasahs can develop operational curricula that reflect local circumstances, and some *Pesantren*-based institutions use this flexibility to preserve their established curriculum while incorporating selected national requirements. However, the practical extent of this autonomy depends on the capacity of principals and teachers to translate formal flexibility into workable educational arrangements.

Planning and budgeting are more tightly constrained. Institutional self-evaluation and electronic planning systems provide mechanisms for identifying priorities and organizing improvement activities, but budget categories, eligible expenditures, reporting formats, and grant criteria limit the range of available decisions. The widespread adoption of electronic planning systems demonstrates that procedural implementation can reach a very high level, while the existence of standardized financial requirements indicates that procedural participation does not necessarily confer equivalent financial discretion. Institutions can be responsible for identifying their needs without having unrestricted authority over how resources are allocated.

The findings also reveal that institutional capacity conditions the practical value of autonomy. Madrasah-based management provides an organizational framework for quality improvement, but its implementation depends on leadership capacity, community participation, staffing, and available resources. Institutions with stronger organizational support can use their discretion more effectively, whereas those with limited capacity face greater difficulties translating formal authority into substantive improvement. Autonomy is therefore not a uniform institutional condition. Its practical scope varies according to the policy domain, the nature of central controls, and the resources available to each institution.

Thin Supervision

The third finding concerns the limited developmental capacity of supervision. Although supervision encompasses both academic and managerial responsibilities, its implementation is characterized by a substantial emphasis on administrative inspection and document verification. Supervisory activities do not consistently provide the sustained guidance required to strengthen instructional practices and institutional management. Consequently, the presence of formal supervision arrangements does not necessarily translate into continuous professional support for principals and teachers.

Limited supervisory personnel relative to the number of institutions further restrict the frequency and depth of supervisory engagement. Under these conditions, supervisory visits tend to prioritize the verification of required documents rather than sustained examination of educational practice. Local government assistance could provide an additional source of support, but its availability varies across regions. This variation produces differences in the assistance that institutions can access beyond the central ministry's supervisory arrangements.

The findings also identify an imbalance between administrative responsibilities and instructional leadership. Principals must allocate time to reporting, documentation, and grant applications, reducing the time available for educational planning and direct support for teaching and learning. Where formal guidance is insufficient and responsibilities are unclear, institutional actors must rely more heavily on their own judgment to address operational problems. Thin supervision therefore represents not simply a shortage of monitoring but a limitation in the institutional support needed to translate autonomy into improved educational practice.

Dual Accountability in Foundation-Run Madrasahs

The fourth finding identifies dual accountability as a distinctive feature of foundation-run madrasahs. Principals are accountable to the Ministry of Religious Affairs for regulatory compliance and, in relevant arrangements, funding requirements. At the same time, they must respond to the foundations that own institutional assets, appoint staff, and frequently contribute to operational financing. These overlapping responsibilities create an organizational environment in which decisions must accommodate both external regulatory obligations and internal institutional priorities.

The influence of foundations extends beyond administrative and financial matters. Foundation leaders and *Pesantren* communities may maintain religious expectations and educational traditions that shape how national requirements are interpreted. As a result, principals must consider whether regulatory demands can be implemented without undermining established institutional priorities. The extent of their room for maneuver varies according to the resources, organizational arrangements, and decision-making authority available within each foundation.

Dual accountability consequently produces different conditions for negotiating autonomy. Better-resourced foundations may have greater capacity to accommodate regulatory requirements while maintaining local priorities, whereas smaller or resource-constrained foundations may face narrower options. The findings also indicate that competing accountability demands can intensify

the pressure experienced by school leaders, particularly when expectations are difficult to reconcile. Institutional ownership is therefore a consequential factor in understanding why autonomy is exercised differently across madrasahs operating within the same national regulatory framework.

Local Adaptive Strategies

The fifth finding identifies three recurring strategies through which madrasah actors respond to regulatory constraints: formal compliance, selective adaptation, and decoupling. These strategies represent different ways of managing the relationship between formal requirements and institutional practice. They are distinguished by how closely actual organizational decisions correspond to prescribed procedures and how much discretion institutional actors exercise when responding to local conditions.

Formal compliance involves fulfilling reporting requirements, using prescribed platforms, and meeting administrative conditions associated with funding, allowances, and institutional legitimacy. This strategy prioritizes adherence to established procedures and ensures that required documentation is available. Selective adaptation involves adjusting the implementation of policies to accommodate institutional needs. Examples include incorporating national curriculum requirements selectively into *Pesantren*-based education and interpreting quality assurance requirements through established Islamic values. This strategy maintains engagement with formal policies while allowing some variation in their practical application.

Decoupling occurs when documentation prepared to demonstrate compliance becomes separated from everyday organizational decisions. Under this arrangement, formal records may indicate that prescribed procedures have been followed without necessarily reflecting the full complexity of institutional practice. The three strategies differ in their relationship between formal policy and operational activity: compliance emphasizes adherence, selective adaptation emphasizes contextual adjustment, and decoupling involves separation between documented procedures and actual practice. Their occurrence demonstrates that institutional responses are not uniform. Madrasah actors employ different approaches according to regulatory demands, organizational capacities, and the compatibility of formal requirements with local priorities.

Discussion

The discussion reveals that madrasah governance involves a tension between administrative compliance and meaningful institutional autonomy. The widespread adoption of electronic planning and budgeting demonstrates the capacity of centralized reform to achieve procedural implementation across

numerous institutions (World Bank, 2025). However, this achievement does not necessarily indicate improved educational decision-making. This finding corresponds with research showing that accountability requirements and administrative paperwork can intensify school leaders' workloads and restrict their attention to instructional leadership (Caldwell, 2024; Rowe & Langman, 2025). The present study extends this understanding by identifying the consequences of these pressures within a centralized religious education system. Theoretically, it distinguishes policy adoption from substantive implementation. Practically, it suggests that evaluating educational reforms requires indicators of decision quality, instructional improvement, and institutional responsiveness rather than relying exclusively on platform utilization and reporting compliance.

Autonomy also varies according to the policy domain in which institutional decisions occur. The findings indicate that planning and budgeting are constrained by centrally established categories, templates, and reporting deadlines, whereas curriculum management allows greater interpretation according to institutional circumstances. This pattern is consistent with research showing that curriculum autonomy depends on local capacity and that *Pesantren*-based madrasahs selectively incorporate national requirements while preserving established educational priorities (Ahdi et al., 2025; Ainissyifa et al., 2024). However, the present synthesis clarifies that autonomy is not distributed uniformly across institutional responsibilities. Its practical scope depends on regulatory ambiguity, available resources, and the capacity to translate discretion into decisions. Theoretically, this finding conceptualizes autonomy as conditional rather than fixed. Practically, differentiated regulations and support mechanisms could provide flexibility where local adaptation is educationally necessary while retaining standardized accountability for public responsibilities.

The proposed concept of negotiated autonomy explains how institutional actors reconcile central requirements with local priorities through formal compliance, selective adaptation, and protective decoupling. This interpretation aligns with research showing that frontline professionals exercise discretion when policies are unclear and that schools sometimes respond to multiple requirements through symbolic or minimally disruptive changes (Alsharefeen, 2025; Waslander et al., 2023). It also corresponds with research on teachers' policy modification and the relationship between street-level bureaucracy and organizational coupling (Argaman, 2026; Witenstein & Abdallah, 2022). Nevertheless, the present study extends these perspectives by situating negotiation within madrasahs' distinctive governance arrangements. Negotiation involves not only individual professional judgment but also institutional priorities and foundation-level authority. The theoretical contribution is an integrated explanatory framework connecting regulatory

ambiguity, organizational conditions, and adaptive responses. This framework clarifies why identical regulations can produce different implementation practices across institutions.

A distinctive finding concerns the influence of private foundations on the negotiation of institutional autonomy. Madrasah principals must accommodate ministerial requirements while responding to foundations that influence staffing, assets, financing, and institutional priorities. This arrangement complicates conventional explanations that concentrate primarily on relationships between government authorities and individual frontline professionals. Existing evidence identifies disparities in funding, staffing, and educational quality among madrasahs, while studies of local government support reveal dependence on regional political will (Kultsum et al., 2022; Kurniawati et al., 2026). The present study connects these conditions to differences in institutions' capacity to negotiate regulatory demands. Theoretically, foundation ownership becomes a conditioning factor in policy implementation rather than merely an administrative characteristic. Practically, targeted financial assistance, management mentoring, and more predictable regional support could help resource-constrained madrasahs exercise their responsibilities without compromising essential educational priorities.

Supervision emerges as another important condition shaping the relationship between autonomy and accountability. The findings indicate that supervisory arrangements frequently emphasize administrative verification, while limited personnel and inconsistent developmental support restrict opportunities for sustained institutional improvement. This pattern corresponds with evidence concerning supervisory implementation in madrasahs and research documenting the administrative pressures experienced by school leaders (Sanuri, 2026; Caldwell, 2024). Competitive funding arrangements and extensive paperwork can further divert attention from instructional leadership (Rowe & Langman, 2025). These findings suggest that granting decision-making responsibilities without adequate professional support may produce formal autonomy without corresponding institutional capacity. The theoretical implication is that supervision should be incorporated into explanations of negotiated autonomy as a condition shaping the strategies available to institutional actors. Practically, consolidating reporting requirements, strengthening developmental supervision, and expanding coaching through madrasah working groups could improve the relationship between accountability and educational leadership.

The principal contribution of this study is an integrated, context-sensitive explanation of how autonomy is negotiated across curriculum, planning and budgeting, and staffing and supervision within madrasah governance. By

combining evidence on centralized regulation, institutional discretion, supervisory limitations, and foundation-level accountability, the study extends existing implementation perspectives beyond governance arrangements in which decentralized public authorities constitute the primary institutional context. The proposed framework also explains why formal compliance, selective adaptation, and protective decoupling can coexist within the same education system. These mechanisms should not be interpreted as universally beneficial: their consequences depend on institutional capacity, regulatory clarity, and the relationship between documented procedures and actual practice. For policymakers, the findings support simpler reporting systems, developmental supervision, targeted assistance for smaller foundations, and clearer arrangements for regional support. For researchers, the framework provides a basis for future empirical testing of how governance conditions influence autonomy and educational improvement across diverse madrasah settings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that madrasah autonomy is not determined solely by formal regulations but by the interaction between national education standards, ministerial requirements, supervisory capacity, administrative demands, and foundation-level authority. The principal lesson is that meaningful autonomy requires more than granting institutional responsibilities; it requires enabling conditions that allow madrasah actors to translate regulatory flexibility into contextually appropriate educational decisions. The study's principal scholarly contribution is the proposed concept of negotiated autonomy, which integrates policy interpretation, institutional discretion, and protective decoupling while recognizing private foundations as influential actors in governance. However, the review is limited to Scopus-indexed and SINTA 1–2 journal articles, and the predominantly qualitative Indonesian evidence means that the proposed model remains an analytical proposition rather than an empirically validated theory. Future research should test the model through comparative, multi-site, and longitudinal studies involving state and private madrasahs with different levels of institutional and supervisory capacity. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of simplifying administrative reporting, strengthening developmental supervision, providing targeted financial and managerial support to resource-constrained foundations, and establishing clearer arrangements for regional government assistance. These measures could help transform procedural compliance into substantive autonomy and more responsive madrasah governance.

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