

# Regional Autonomy Management from the Perspective of Human Resource Management

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## ABSTRACT

Regional autonomy is a constitutional mandate that grants broad authority to regions to regulate and manage their own government affairs and local interests in accordance with laws and regulations. This policy not only serves as the foundation for good governance, but also as a strategy for empowering regions in facing the demands of globalisation. This study aims to analyse regional autonomy management from a human resource management (HRM) perspective, focusing on the role of regional leaders and the competence of civil servants (ASN) in supporting the effectiveness of regional governance. The research design is descriptive qualitative with a case study approach. The research population includes all government officials in the New Autonomous Regions (DOB) that are the research locations, while the sample was selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of regional policies. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document reviews, then analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and relationships between variables. The results of the study indicate that the success of regional autonomy management is greatly influenced by visionary leadership, professional civil servant competence, and an organisational culture oriented towards public service. Effective human resource management implementation can strengthen institutional capacity, improve service quality, and promote regional autonomy. These findings imply the need for strengthening capacity building of civil servants, implementing a merit-based system in recruitment and promotion, and conducting consistent performance evaluations to ensure the sustainability of regional autonomy.

## INTRODUCTION

Regional autonomy policies emerged amid the turmoil of demands from various regions for various authorities that had been exercised by the centralised government during the 32 years of the New Order. Law No. 5/1974 on regional government, which was followed by Law No. 5/1979 on village government, became the main pillars of the New Order's centralisation of power. All mechanisms for participation and initiative that had previously flourished before the New Order came to power were gradually dismantled under the control of the regime. Political stability to ensure the continuity of economic investment (growth) became the primary reason for the New Order regime to suppress any democratic activities emerging from the people.

At least two factors played a strong role in driving the enactment of regional autonomy policies in the form of Law No. 22/1999. *First*, internal factors driven by various protests against past centralist policies and the underdevelopment of rural communities. *Second*, external factors influenced by international pressure for investment, particularly to improve the efficiency of high investment costs resulting from corruption, collusion, nepotism, and lengthy bureaucratic processes.

During the five years of implementation of Law No. 22/1999, regional autonomy has become an important political necessity for advancing democracy. Not only is Indonesian society highly heterogeneous in terms of political development, but autonomy has also become the basis for the growth

of political dynamics that are expected to encourage initiatives and justice. Although there are critical views that regional autonomy is still understood as a direct path to exploitation and investment, as an effort to build initiatives amid the decline of the good will of those in power, regional autonomy can become an 'alternative path' for the growth of new hope for the advancement of regional economic development.

In the process of implementing the administration of New Autonomous Regions (DOB) to carry out mandatory and optional duties in accordance with the (UU) Number 23 of 2014 on Regional Government, the role of Human Resources (HR) in the civil service has become one of the most important and fundamental aspects, especially in planning, implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and ensuring that tasks, functions, and authorities are carried out efficiently and effectively. The position of human resources is dominant, and the achievement of DOB objectives and the quality of governance in DOB administration are in the hands of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN).

The role of ASN in carrying out every process and activity is crucial. According to Law No. 5 of 2014 on the Civil Service, the primary roles of ASN are: 1) implementing public policies; 2) providing public services; and 3) serving as a unifying force for the nation. To fulfil these roles, ASN human resources must possess a productive work ethic, skills, creativity, responsibility, and professionalism. ASN plays a role in realising the objectives of the establishment of DOB through professional public services, free from political interference, and clean from corruption, collusion, and nepotism.

To carry out the above roles, the human resources (HR) of the Civil Service (ASN) must possess competencies. With competitive human resources (HR), civil servants can work optimally. The core competencies that must be possessed by civil servants are: 1) Civil servants possess knowledge; 2) Civil Service Human Resources (ASN) possess skills; and 3) Civil Service Human Resources (ASN) possess appropriate behaviour or attitude. Human Resources (HR) of the Civil Service (ASN) who possess the above competencies will produce performance that is assumed to be work achievements, work results that are good in terms of both quantity and quality, which will accompany the success of the implementation of the DOB. Additionally, organisations need to establish a culture, as organisational culture and performance significantly impact the improvement of civil servants' performance in achieving work targets (Darmi, T, et al., 2013).

Following the end of the New Order era and the onset of the Reform era, many regions expressed a desire to separate from their parent regions. To accommodate this desire, the Central Government implemented a wise policy by establishing new autonomous regions throughout Indonesia based on proposals from the local community, represented by the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) (Darmi, 2016). In general, the establishment of DOBs did not meet expectations or fell into the category of failure. The failure of DOB implementation was caused by a shift in the objectives of DOB formation. The philosophy behind the formation of DOB, which was intended to improve services to the community, was tainted by the dominance of political interests in the formation process. The lack of independence, both in terms of human resources and finances, resulted in many DOBs with unsatisfactory performance. The central government's policy to tighten the formation of DOBs is a step that should be supported so that in the future the formation of DOBs does not burden the State Budget (APBN) because the funding for the administration of DOBs is highly dependent on or solely reliant on transfer funds from the central government (*Kompas*, 11 July 2015).

Data from the Directorate General of Regional Autonomy of the Ministry of Home Affairs between 1999 and 2014 shows that 223 new provinces, cities, and regencies have been formed, bringing the total number of autonomous regions to 542, consisting of 34 provinces, 415 regencies, and 93 cities (Ministry

of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2014). Unfortunately, the enthusiasm for establishing DOBs has not been matched by the performance of the institutions responsible for their implementation. The institutional performance of DOBs is far below public expectations and the original objectives of their establishment. An evaluation by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2012 stated that 78 percent of the regions resulting from the division were deemed to have failed to achieve their objectives (Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2012).

The failure of DOB implementation is attributed to a shift in the objectives of DOB formation. The noble philosophy behind DOB formation, aimed at improving public service delivery, has been tainted by the dominance of political interests in the formation process. The lack of autonomy, both in terms of human resources and finances, has resulted in many DOBs with unsatisfactory performance. The central government's policy to tighten the formation of DOBs is a step that should be supported so that in the future, the formation of DOBs does not burden the State Budget (APBN) because the funding for the administration of DOBs is highly dependent on or solely reliant on transfer funds from the central government (*Kompas*, 11 July 2015).

However, in the short term, the policy of establishing DOBs has not had a significant impact, but in the long term, it tends to create a significant gap. This gap is caused by the unfair distribution of natural resources (SDA) and human resources (SDM) between the parent region and the DOB. DOBs experience a reduction in resources, including human resources (HR), natural resources (NR), infrastructure, networks, and so on (Yuliadi, 2012). On the other hand, public services will be achieved if the DOB authorities focus their budget expenditure on public services (infrastructure, health, education) rather than routine expenditure (Firman, 2013). This statement is consistent with empirical data showing that only 50% of the regional budget is absorbed by programmes that directly benefit the community. On average, DOBs that are deemed unsuccessful and have low performance are new autonomous regions with inadequate infrastructure and human resources, and the financing of new autonomous regional governments still heavily depends on central government subsidies (Darmi, T, 2016).

To address the issues in the implementation of DOB, strategies need to be formulated to accelerate the achievement of DOB objectives. One appropriate approach is through 'Capacity Building,' which involves enhancing the capacity of civil servants to ensure that the quality of civil servants has the ability to perform their mandated tasks in accordance with regulations. One way to assess the quality of civil servants is by measuring the performance of new autonomous regions (DOB) as a public sector. However, it is important to note that the public sector is not the same as the private sector in terms of performance evaluation. In the private sector, performance evaluation focuses on the success in achieving profits, while in the public sector, performance is emphasised on the extent to which services have been received by the public (Mardiasmo, 2004).

The performance of DOB organisations is measured through an assessment process in the form of work results. The performance of DOB organisations can be measured within a certain period of time, and the results of the assessment are used as input for future organisational performance improvement (Keban, T, 1995). In government organisations, indicators have not yet reached the level of effectiveness or outcome, and the indicators used are still very limited.

The performance indicators used are the percentage of the budget that has been absorbed/implemented. The performance assessment of DOB organisations has been carried out in the form of Local Government Performance Reports (LPPD).

The LPPD is mandated by Law No. 23 of 2014, as stated in Article 74, which stipulates that the procedures for evaluating regional government administration are regulated by Government Regulations,

in this case Government Regulation No. 3 of 2007 on Regional Government Administration Reports to the Government, the Head of the Regional Government's Accountability Report to the Regional People's Representative Council, and Information on the Implementation of Regional Government Administration to the Public. Meanwhile, the preparation of the Accountability and Performance Report of Government Agencies (LAKIP) is mandated by Presidential Instruction No. 7 of 1999.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Regional Autonomy***

Regional autonomy is the right, authority, and obligation of autonomous regions to regulate and manage their own government affairs and local interests in accordance with the laws and regulations (Law No. 23 of 2014). This policy was born as a response to the centralisation of power during the New Order era, which limited public participation and hampered regional initiatives. The enactment of Law No. 22 of 1999 marked the beginning of decentralisation in Indonesia, which was later revised through Law No. 32 of 2004 and Law No. 23 of 2014, with an emphasis on a clearer division of government affairs between the central and regional governments (Mutiarin & Damayanti, 2019).

Previous studies have shown that regional autonomy can promote public service innovation and local economic growth, but its success is highly dependent on institutional capacity and human resources (Hidayat & Yuningsih, 2020). In the context of New Autonomous Regions (DOB), the implementation of autonomy often faces obstacles in the form of limited infrastructure, fiscal dependence on the central government, and weak bureaucratic capacity (Komalasari & Abdullah, 2022).

### ***Human Resource Management (HRM)***

Human resource management is a strategic process of acquiring, developing, motivating, and retaining quality employees to achieve organisational goals (Dessler, 2020). In the public sector, HRM has a dual role, namely improving organisational performance while ensuring the quality of public services (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

According to Armstrong (2021), effective HRM in the public sector must consider aspects of workforce planning, transparent recruitment, competency-based training, career development, and objective performance appraisal systems. In the context of DOB, HRM is directed at forming an apparatus capable of carrying out government functions effectively, with integrity, and adaptability to changes in national policy.

### ***Civil Servants (ASN) and Their Competencies***

Law No. 5 of 2014 on ASN emphasises that ASN functions as implementers of public policy, public servants, and unifiers of the nation. ASN competencies encompass three main dimensions, namely knowledge, skills, and attitude (BKN, 2021).

Recent studies emphasise that ASN competencies are a determining factor in the quality of public services. ASN with high competencies are able to increase public trust and the effectiveness of regional policies (Purnamasari & Nurhadi, 2021). In DOBs, the biggest challenge is the low level of professionalism due to recruitment that is not merit-based and the lack of capacity development programmes (Sari & Pratama, 2022).

### ***Performance of New Autonomous Regions (DOB)***

The performance of DOB organisations in the context of regional government is measured through the region's ability to provide quality, transparent, and accountable public services (Mardiasmo, 2018).

Performance indicators include budget efficiency, public satisfaction with services, achievement of regional development targets, and fiscal independence (Keban, 2020).

An evaluation by the Ministry of Home Affairs (2022) shows that most DOBs face difficulties in achieving performance targets due to weak strategic planning, low-quality human resources, and high dependence on central government transfers. Research by Ismail & Fathurrahman (2023) adds that the success of DOB performance is greatly influenced by the consistency of policy implementation, effective supervision, and an organisational culture that supports innovation.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of regional autonomy management from a human resource management perspective. This method was chosen based on the research objective, which is to explore the phenomenon comprehensively through systematic, factual, and accurate descriptions of the conditions in the field. The qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it allows researchers to uncover policy dynamics, leadership roles, and the competencies of officials based on the perspectives of actors and stakeholders in a contextual manner (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2022).

The research location was determined in one of the New Autonomous Regions (DOB) selected purposively, considering that the region represents common challenges in the implementation of autonomy in Indonesia, particularly related to the management of human resources of the apparatus. The research was conducted within a period covering the preparation, data collection, analysis, and report writing stages. The research population includes all civil servants (ASN) working in the DOB government, both at the leadership and staff levels.

The research sample was determined using the purposive sampling technique, which involves selecting informants based on specific considerations relevant to the research objectives, such as knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of regional policies (Sugiyono, 2022). Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews and participatory observation of the governance process. Secondary data was collected through a review of official documents such as the Local Government Performance Report (LPPD), the Government Agency Performance Accountability Report (LAKIP), and relevant laws and regulations.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Data reduction involves the selection, focusing, and simplification of raw data obtained from the field. Data presentation is carried out in the form of structured narratives to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions were drawn inductively by referring to the research objectives and combining empirical findings with the theoretical framework used. To maintain data validity, this study applied source and method triangulation, thereby ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the research results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Decentralisation and Changes in Central-Regional Relations***

The decentralisation policy that began in 1999 through Law No. 22 of 1999 had a dual strategic objective. On the one hand, decentralisation was intended to free the central government from domestic affairs that could be handled directly by regional governments. With the delegation of authority, the central government is expected to be able to focus more on formulating strategic macro policies, responding to global dynamics, and taking advantage of opportunities arising from international developments. On the other hand, decentralisation is an instrument for empowering local governments to have the capacity to solve domestic problems independently, encourage initiative, and develop the creativity of their government and society (Ryaas Rasyid et al., 2009).

This fundamental change has implications for the pattern of central-regional relations, which previously had a centralised character. Prior to 1999, the central government controlled most administrative, political, and financial authority over local governments. With the implementation of decentralisation, most government affairs were transferred to local governments, except for strategic areas such as foreign policy, defence and security, the judiciary, monetary and fiscal affairs, and religion, which remained under central authority (Rozali Abdullah, 2010). This change not only affected governance but also required human resources (HR) in the regions to be prepared to manage these powers effectively.

### ***Regional Autonomy as an Instrument for Human Resource Empowerment***

Decentralisation is not merely an administrative process, but a symbol of trust from the central government to the regions. This trust must be balanced with competent human resources so that the regions are able to respond to the challenges of more independent governance. These capacities include technical, managerial and social competencies, which enable regions to find creative solutions to the problems they face.

Regional leadership is a key variable in driving autonomy. Inu Kencana Syafie (2013) emphasises that leadership is classified as “man power” as part of human resources that determines the direction and quality of governance. Without moral and ethical leadership, regional autonomy is prone to abuse, leading to moral decadence and dysfunctional public services.

Ideal leadership is one that is able to enforce rules against lawbreakers while providing optimal services to those in need, such as the poor, disaster victims, and other vulnerable groups. From an HRM perspective, government leadership is a management function that not only manages physical resources but also empowers human potential. Regional heads must have proven competence through education, training, and merit-based selection mechanisms.

This is in line with the concept of moral leadership, which places integrity, professionalism, effectiveness, and efficiency as its main principles (Inu Kencana Syafie, 2013).

### ***Leadership and Moral Ethics in Regional Autonomy***

Leadership in the context of regional autonomy contains strong moral elements. According to Inu Kencana Syafie (2013), government leadership is a ‘night watchman’ who controls the community. This analogy reflects the dual function of a leader: preventing negative actions and encouraging positive actions. With the logic of ‘negative × negative = positive,’ firm action against negative behaviour will actually result in better social conditions. Conversely, inappropriate treatment, such as giving power to criminals or facilitating illegal activities, will reduce the legitimacy of the local government.

Moral ethics in leadership are important because in regional autonomy, regional heads are central actors in directing public policy and building a culture of government organisation. High ethics and

integrity ensure that public services are carried out for the benefit of the community, not for the interests of certain groups.

### ***Empowerment as a Strategy for Strengthening Regional Autonomy***

The concept of empowerment as described by Edi Suharto (2014) is relevant in the context of regional autonomy. Empowerment is closely related to power, which in the framework of regional autonomy must be understood as the power to serve, not to dominate.

Power managed according to the principles of public service is oriented towards achieving the national goals outlined in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, namely to educate the nation and advance the general welfare based on Pancasila.

This empowerment includes strengthening the capacity of civil servants as implementers of public policy. Civil servants must be trained and developed to have adequate competencies, including technical, managerial, and socio-cultural skills. Empowerment strategies can be implemented through planned capacity building, objective performance evaluations, and performance-based incentives. Without adequate human resource empowerment, regional autonomy has the potential to fail to achieve its initial objectives, as seen in many DOBs that have been unable to demonstrate satisfactory performance due to weak bureaucratic capacity.

### ***Synthesis: Regional Autonomy Management in the Perspective of HRM***

When synthesised from the various frameworks above, regional autonomy management in the perspective of HRM requires three main pillars. First, moral, visionary, and competency-based regional leadership. Second, professional human resources who are recruited and developed based on a merit system to support effective public service functions.

Third, sustainable empowerment through training, development, and the establishment of an accountable work culture. With these pillars, decentralisation can function as it should: strengthening regional capacity, improving public services, and building regional independence. Regional autonomy is not only a policy framework but also an instrument of institutional transformation that favours the community.

Without good human resource management, autonomy risks becoming merely a transfer of authority without a transfer of capacity, which will ultimately lead to stagnation or even regression in regional development.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results of this study indicate that regional autonomy management from a human resource management perspective essentially focuses on the leadership capacity of regional heads and the management of the civil service to achieve good governance based on the ideology of Pancasila and the mandate of the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution. The ultimate goal is to realise the aspirations of the Indonesian people, namely the improvement of the nation's intelligence and the advancement of general welfare that is equitable, just, civilised, and humane. The success of regional autonomy management is largely determined by the competence, integrity, and professionalism of regional heads and their apparatus, who synergistically carry out the functions of public service, community empowerment, and strengthening regional institutions in a sustainable manner.

Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on the relationship between regional autonomy, human resource management, and local government performance, particularly in New Autonomous

Regions (DOB). The findings reinforce the theory that the quality of leadership and the capacity of the apparatus are key variables in the success of decentralisation. Practically, the results of this study provide a basis for the central and regional governments to formulate policies to improve the competence of the apparatus, strengthen merit-based recruitment systems, and build an organisational culture oriented towards effective and accountable public services.

This study has limitations in its scope, which focuses on human resource management within the framework of regional autonomy, and therefore does not examine in depth other variables such as local politics, fiscal capacity, or community participation, which may also influence the success of autonomy implementation.

In addition, the findings are still based on the policy context and conditions of specific DOBs, so the results should be generalised with caution. Based on the results of the study, it is recommended that local governments strengthen sustainable capacity building programmes for civil servants, improve leadership integrity through merit-based selection and coaching mechanisms, and utilise performance evaluations for periodic policy improvements.

For future researchers, it is recommended to develop studies that integrate local political variables, fiscal capacity, and community participation, as well as conduct comparative research across regions to gain a broader understanding of the successes and challenges of regional autonomy management in Indonesia.

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