

Review article

How Do Strategic Issues Shape the Direction of Development in Blitar Regency?

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze strategic issues and formulate regional development strategies in Blitar Regency by reviewing the 2021–2026 Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD). Using a literature review approach, the analysis was conducted in global, national, provincial, and local contexts. The study results indicate that Blitar Regency faces various development challenges, including the prolonged impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, the need for accelerated infrastructure development, and strengthening human resource quality. Technical issues identified include limited data integration, weak coordination between regional agencies, and development disparities between the northern and southern regions. Although several development indicators show positive trends, such as economic recovery and poverty reduction, open unemployment, income inequality, and disparities in access to education and health services remain major concerns. This study recommends strengthening sustainable development strategies through the digitalization of public services, empowering women, and expanding the reach of social protection as priorities for the future regional development agenda.

Keywords: Strategic Issues, Regional Development, Blitar Regency

INTRODUCTION

In carrying out development, each region always pays attention to its potential and existing resources. Planning is a continuous process, including decisions or choices to utilize existing resources to achieve certain future goals. According to Lawton and Rose (1994) in Nainggolan et al., (2023) planning can be seen as a process that pays attention to the objectives of factual evidence and assumptions which are translated into a logical argument process which then becomes a policy intended to achieve the set goals. In the process, it is necessary to prepare a quality development plan that is based on accurate and accountable data and information.

Based on the provisions of Law Number 25 of 2004 concerning the National Development Planning System, development planning is the process of making decisions about appropriate future actions through a sequence of choices by taking into account available resources. In addition, regional development planning can also be interpreted as a development planning process whose purpose is to make changes towards better development for a community of people, government, and the environment in a certain area through the utilization and utilization of various existing resources and must have an

orientation that is comprehensive and complete but still adheres to the principle of priority (Ekana Lora Nainggolan et al., 2023).

Regional development plans are contained in an official document called the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD). In Law No. 25 of 2004, the elaboration of the vision, mission, and program of the regional head which contains strategies, general policies, policy directions, and development programs. There are many obstacles encountered in the process of formulating development planning, such as coordination constraints between regional apparatus and minimal data availability (Ajizah et al., 2021), limited human resource capabilities (Zaki Wafa & Trimurni, 2025), and lack of accurate information. This is in line with research conducted by (Rita Arini, 2018) in Kutai Kartanegara, where in carrying out its duties and functions, BAPPEDA experiences several obstacles, one of which is the lack of accurate development data and information for planning, control and evaluation.

The covid-19 pandemic is one of the factors that influence changes in development planning. In addition, issues such as climate change, food and energy security, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic have created a new paradigm in development planning (Panggayuh Karahayon et al., 2022). In 2023, many countries around the world are still struggling to recover post-pandemic economies, while the pressures of the climate crisis have further exacerbated inequalities between regions. These challenges are complicated by diverse geographical characteristics, disparities in the quality of human capital (World Bank, 2023), and reliance on informal sectors that are vulnerable to external shocks. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic became a catalyst that accelerated the transformation while exposing systemic vulnerabilities as the Indonesian population fell into extreme poverty during the pandemic, with MSMEs as the most affected sector.

Likewise, Blitar Regency, which is part of the East Java region, is also not immune to the implications of this complexity. With its dominant agricultural and tourism potential, Blitar Regency faces a dilemma between maintaining its traditional economic base and adopting technological innovations. This impact is felt especially in the southern region, which relies on subsistence agriculture and nature tourism. Budget refocusing during the pandemic led to delays in critical infrastructure projects such as connecting roads between villages and modern irrigation systems, widening the gap between North and South Blitar. Blitar Regency internal challenges are even more complex when linked to the issue of equitable development. Data from the Statistics Indonesia (2023) recorded the poverty depth index in Blitar at 1.210, lower than the national average of 1.53. The hilly geography and lack of transportation access make the distribution of health and education services a structural problem. Meanwhile, the urbanization of the younger generation to big cities in East Java has resulted in the stagnation of innovation in the agricultural sector, which is the backbone of the economy.

The fundamental problem in development planning lies in the process of formulating strategic issues that are still normative. Research by Sofianto et al. (2023) in Central Java revealed that 70% of district/municipality RPJMD documents still adopted generic issues such as bureaucratic reform and poverty alleviation without in-depth analysis of specific regional needs. Limited accurate data (Sofianto et al., 2023) and analytical capacity are structural barriers.

A report by the Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas (2023) states that only 30% of districts in Indonesia have an integrated database system for development planning. The absence of real-time data on agricultural productivity, labor migration and climate change impacts on agricultural land makes it difficult to develop responsive policies. Inter-OPD (Regional Apparatus Organization) coordination also remains fragmented (Ajizah et al., 2021). Local political dynamics also affect planning consistency. Changes in local leadership are often followed by changes in program priorities, resulting in discontinuity in the implementation of RPJMD.

Based on this context, this analysis identifies three main problems in Blitar Regency's development planning. First, the development disparity between North and South Blitar is not only caused by geographical factors, but also disproportionate budget allocation policies. Second, a weak monitoring and evaluation system that causes misalignment between technical planning at the village level and the kabupaten's macro policies. This problem is exacerbated by limited disaggregated data and institutional capacity. As it happens, there is a gap between policy planning institutions and technical institutions implementing policies due to dependence on other parties. Third, the availability of information data issued by institutions outside the local government in terms of time often does not coincide with the data needed. So that in the process of planning programs/activities that require this data, it is often not available (Iwan Sutardi Santoso, 2016). In terms of data completeness, the need for data for the analysis process is very dependent on other parties.

This research aims to comprehensively analyze strategic development issues in Blitar Regency using a multidimensional approach. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to assess the level of integration and synchronization between the planning documents of Blitar Regency and the RPJPD, RPJMD of East Java Province, RPJMN, and other sectoral planning documents. The results of the analysis are expected to serve as policy recommendations for the preparation of a more inclusive and sustainable RPJMD 2024-2029. By considering the complexity of global challenges and the diversity of local potential, this study seeks to bridge the gap between modern development planning theory and empirical reality in Blitar Regency. This research is expected to provide a holistic perspective for equitable development transformation.

Decentralization and Regional Development Planning Theory

Decentralization of development planning is one of the important pillars in the implementation of regional autonomy in Indonesia. The main objective of decentralizing authority is to create more targeted development through decision making based on local needs and characteristics. Kumar (2001) in Ginting et al. (2016) asserts that decentralized planning enables a better understanding of the needs of local communities, improves the quality of policy formulation through greater access to information, and allows for community participation in the decision-making process and implementation of development programs. Thus, coordination and integration between development programs can run more optimally.

However, in reality, the implementation of decentralization in regional development planning often has not fully achieved these objectives. Common problems that arise include weak coordination between regional apparatus organizations (OPD),

lack of data quality in policy formulation, and limited community participation in the planning process. This indicates a gap between *policy* design and *policy* outcomes.

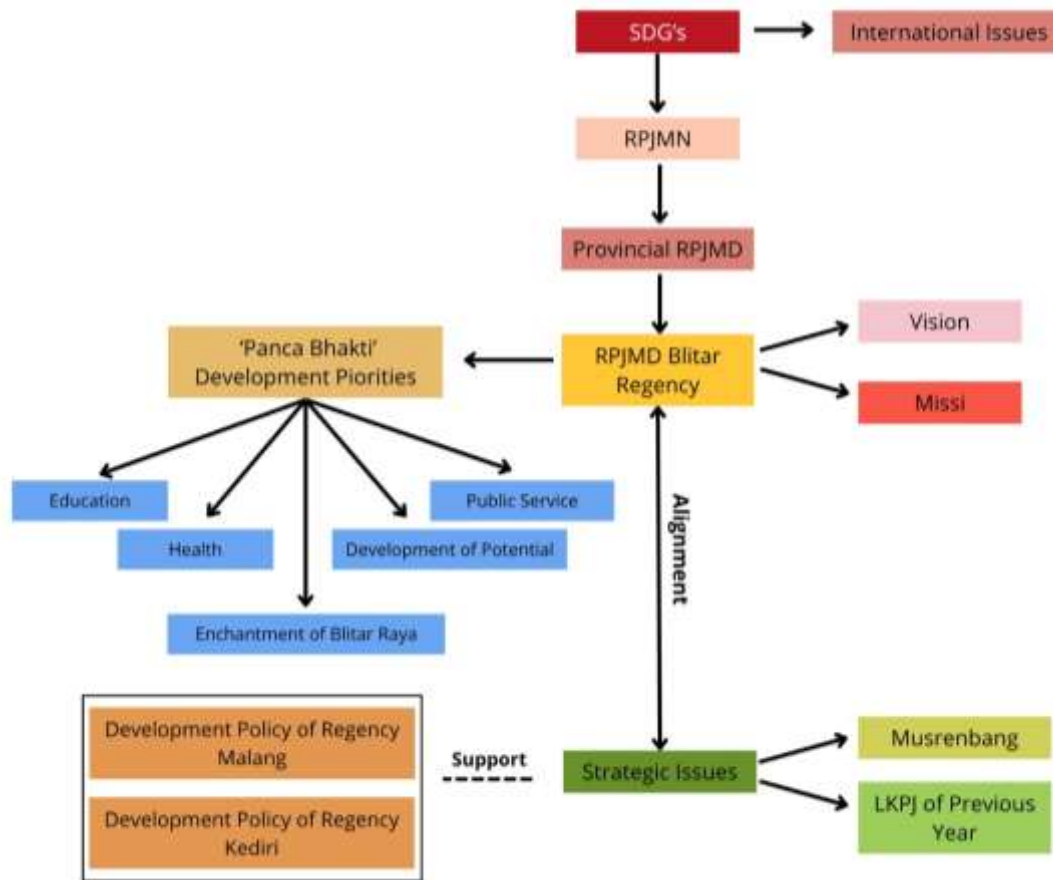
Ginting et al. (2016)) explain that in the study of planning theory, there are two main approaches that are relevant to explain these dynamics, namely rational planning theory and participatory or communicative planning theory. Rational planning theory states that effective planning must be based on accurate data, valid observations, and empirical experience from previous policy evaluations. Meanwhile, participatory planning theory emphasizes the importance of active community involvement in the plan-making process, either through deliberation forums, aspiration surveys, or other forms of public consultation.

Faludi (1973) also explains two other conceptual approaches, namely substantive theory and procedural theory. Substantive *theory* or *theory in planning* highlights the importance of a deep understanding of the root causes of problems faced by the community as the basis for effective *planning*. The inability of planners to identify real problems can result in development plans that are irrelevant to local needs. Meanwhile, the procedural *theory of planning* views planning as a series of processes involving institutional capacity, technocratic procedures, and complex inter-actor coordination. In this context, constraints arise from the length of the bureaucratic process and the number of parties involved, which in turn risks causing inefficiencies in the implementation of development plans.

Thus, an understanding of the various planning theories above is an important foundation for analyzing the effectiveness of the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) document, especially in identifying strategic issues and formulating development strategies that are adaptive to local and national challenges. In the context of Blitar Regency, it is important to examine the extent to which the development planning process has reflected the principles of participatory, data-based, and responsive to inter-regional inequality.

METHOD

This research is a descriptive study through a qualitative approach and applied with practical purposes. This type of research is a literature study, which is research with the main subject in the form of documents and the research process is carried out using the main method of *library research*. This research examines the Blitar Regency Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) document. The data in this study is in the form of primary data collected from the initial and final draft documents of the RPJMD in Blitar Regency as the simultaneous regional elections throughout Indonesia have been held in 2025. Secondary data is in the form of evaluation reports from the provincial government and other related sources. Processing was carried out using classification techniques, and data analysis was carried out using *content* analysis techniques on RPJMD documents in Blitar Regency. This research was conducted in 2021. The analysis was devoted to the RPJMD document in Chapter 4, especially in the section on regional strategic issues, because this section is one of the bases for formulating the vision, mission, programs, and activities. This section shows the basis for the focus of regional development, matters of primary concern, and then outlined in policy. The research framework is as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.*Mind Mapping Overviews of Regional Development Initiatives for 2025: Blitar Regency*

Source: Authors (2025)

The research subject is Blitar Regency as it is one of the regions in East Java that held regional head elections in 2024 for a term of office in 2025-2029. This research is also based on the change of the new head of state and the direction of the Ministry of Home Affairs (Kemendagri) Rules related to changes in the RPJMD (Regional Medium-Term Development Plan) 2025-2029, especially those related to socialization and preparation guidelines, contained in the Instruction of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 2 of 2025 concerning Guidelines for the Preparation of Regional Medium-Term Development Plans and Regional Apparatus Strategic Plans for 2025-2029. This instruction regulates the guidelines for the preparation of RPJMD and Regional Apparatus Strategic Plans (Renstra PD) for the period 2025-2029.

RESULTS

Strategic Issues in Blitar Regency

Each regency/city has its own unique way of presenting strategic issues. The strategic issues of each region always refer to global, national, provincial, and regional issues. In addition to being used as guidelines, regions also need to harmonise development. The formulation of strategic issues is based on an analysis of current and strategic problems,

which generates themes of problems that serve as one of the considerations for formulating regional strategic issues. Regions need to present problem analyses as material for analysing strategic issues, where the relationship between problems and strategic issues is explained. However, there are also many regions that present a systematic formulation of strategic issues based on previously studied problem formulations. Explanations of the interconnection between problems and strategic issues are not provided in most other regions. This is necessary to explain the direct interconnection between problems and strategic issues that arise.

In most regions, the discussion of strategic issues begins with an explanation of the global, national, and regional strategic environment, as well as other planning documents (RPJMN, RPJMD Province, RPJPD, RTRW), which are then formulated into regional issues. The following is an identification of global, national, and local issues in the RPJMD document of Blitar Regency.

Table 1.

Global, National, Provincial, and Local Issues in the Blitar Regency RPJMD

Global Issues	National Issues	Provincial Issues	Local Issues
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024	East Java Provincial Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) 2019-2024	Education and Public Awareness
Covid-19 Pandemic	National Economic Recovery Post-Covid-19	Agriculture, Fisheries and Plantation Development	Health Services and Stunting Control
Industrial Revolution 4.0	Bureaucratic Reform	Improvement of Education Quality	Development of MSMEs and Creative Economy
Climate Change and Disasters	Acceleration of Infrastructure Development	Regional Infrastructure Development	Improvement of Road & Transportation Infrastructure
Green Economy & Energy	Human Resource Development	Improvement of Public Health	Development of Tourism and Culture
Free Market	Poverty Reduction	Poverty Reduction	Poverty Eradication and Social Protection
Demographic Bonus	National Security	Disaster Mitigation and Management	Environmental and Waste Management

Source: Blitar Regency Medium-Term Development Plan 2021-2026

Based on Table 1 regarding the strategic issues of Blitar Regency derived from the 2021-2026 RPJMD document, it is evident that the strategic issues of Blitar Regency reflect a strong interconnection between global, national, provincial, and local conditions.

In the global context, Blitar Regency aligns itself with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the primary framework, including challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the 4th Industrial Revolution, climate change, and the green economy, which underpin the direction of regional development. These issues form the foundation for policy formulation that aligns with national and provincial development agendas.

At the national level, Blitar Regency responds to the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) with a focus on supporting accelerated development and economic recovery post-COVID-19 pandemic, as well as bureaucratic reform to improve the quality of public services. National priority programmes are aligned with local potential and needs, such as agricultural development, infrastructure, and community empowerment. At the provincial level, strategic issues in East Java, such as equitable development, improved social welfare, and strengthened governance, are also integrated into Blitar Regency's RPJMD. Focusing on improving human resource quality, developing the agribusiness, fisheries, and tourism sectors are key components of the provincial strategy adopted by Blitar Regency to support inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Local issues in Blitar Regency highlight specific challenges such as equitable access and standardisation of education services, improving the quality and coverage of health services, particularly in addressing stunting, and developing SMEs and the creative economy as efforts to increase regional income and create job opportunities. Additionally, prioritising farmers, strengthening agricultural production facilities, and developing agricultural processing industries are key focuses to support food security and drive local economic growth.

Strategic infrastructure development, such as road improvements and expansion, as well as the construction of the Southern Cross Route (JLS) and supporting accessibility facilities, is a critical sector being accelerated to connect production and tourism areas. Meanwhile, aspects of disaster preparedness, environmental mitigation, and changes in community behaviour regarding waste and waste management also receive attention to create a healthy and sustainable living environment. Social issues such as integrated poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, child protection, and social welfare issues are also integral parts of Blitar Regency's development agenda. Bureaucratic reform and the acceleration of public services based on information technology are key challenges in creating a responsive, transparent, and effective government.

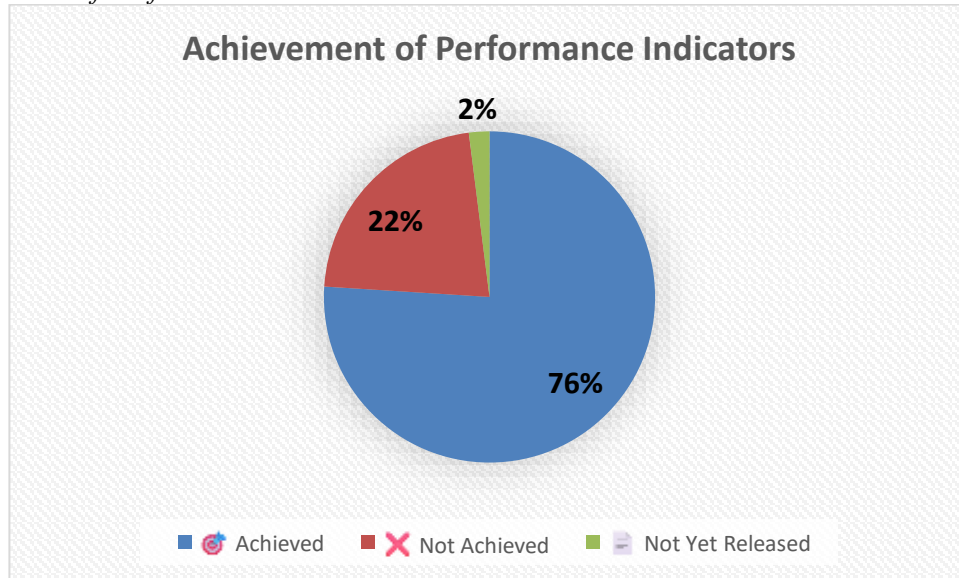
Performance of the Blitar Regency Government in 2024: Between Achievements and Challenges

The performance measurement of the Blitar Regency Government during the 2024 period shows an increase from the previous year. There are 184 performance indicators, with 140 indicators (76%) achieving the set targets, 41 indicators (22%) failing to meet the targets, and 3 indicators (2%) not yet released due to inter-agency constraints (see Figure 2). Figure 3 shows several achievements, such as economic growth in 2020 and 2021, which experienced a contraction, particularly in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and has now successfully increased to 5.11% in 2024. This figure is significantly higher than the national and provincial averages. The poverty rate, which was 9.33% in 2020, has decreased to 8.16% in 2024, indicating the effectiveness of the social programmes implemented. However, among these achievements, there are several issues that need to be addressed immediately, such as the open unemployment rate, which remains significantly higher than the provincial average. The human development index

is below the average for East Java and the national average. Additionally, the Gini ratio of 0.03 indicates that income inequality remains an issue requiring attention from the government in Blitar Regency.

Figure 2.

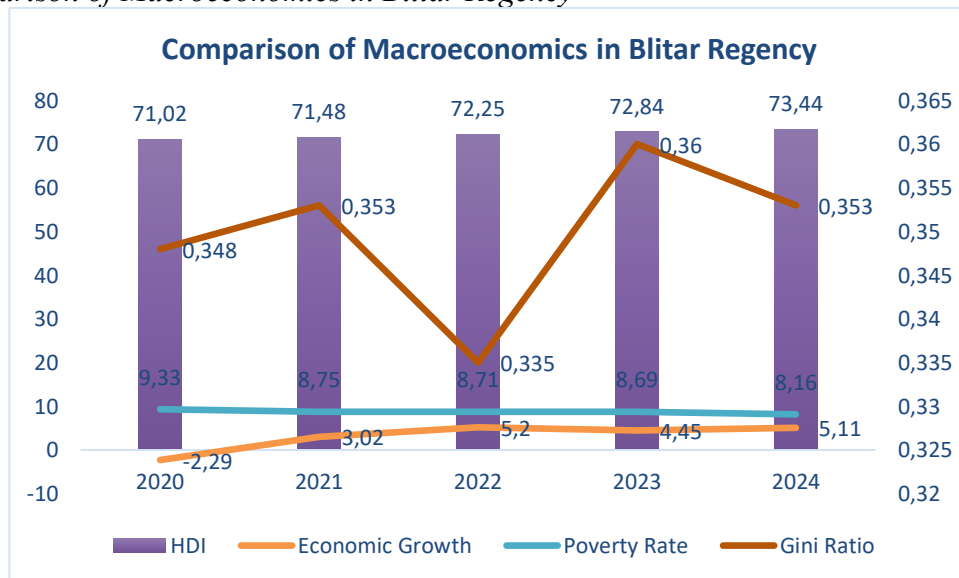
Achievement of Performance Indicators



Source: LKPJ DPRD Blitar Regency

Figure 3.

Comparison of Macroeconomics in Blitar Regency



Source: Central Statistics Agency data processed (2025)

Furthermore, there are various challenges (unmet) that are still faced in several sectors in Blitar Regency, namely:

1. In the field of education, although school participation rates have increased, there are still children who cannot access education optimally. Therefore, it is necessary

- to strengthen scholarship programmes, provide support for out-of-school children, and empower communities to support education.
2. In the health sector, although there has been an improvement in health services, there are still some shortcomings as indicated in the Annual Work Report (LKPJ), particularly regarding healthcare personnel in some community health centres (puskesmas). As a result, as council members, it is necessary to enhance medical personnel and strengthen health advocacy.
 3. Infrastructure development still faces challenges in irrigation, roads, and other public facilities. Therefore, digitising irrigation network data and training technical personnel are important steps to ensure infrastructure development is more effective and efficient.
 4. In the social and public safety sector, there are complaints about the shortage of Satpol PP and fire brigade personnel, as well as inadequate facilities and infrastructure. It is not only the number of personnel but also the improvement in quality and the procurement of modern firefighting equipment that must be prioritised to better maintain public order and safety.
 5. In the economic and labour sector, unemployment rates remain fluctuating. The implementation of Job Fairs and industry-based training must be enhanced to ensure that the workforce in Blitar Regency has high competitiveness and access to broader employment opportunities.
 6. Empowerment of women and child protection remain a serious concern due to the high incidence of violence against women and children. Although these cases are committed by the general public in Blitar District, legal education should strengthen victim support institutions and collaborate with the private sector to build a more comprehensive protection system.
 7. Environmental issues, the extent of critical land and the limited capacity of the Final Disposal Site (FDS). The solution is to revitalise green areas and use technology in waste management, so that Blitar District can become a more environmentally friendly area.
 8. Other important issues related to the 20-year vision are the agriculture and fisheries sectors, with training in the operation of modern equipment, subsidies for fish feed prices, fertilisers, and seeds.

Constructing Regional Development Strategies in Blitar Regency

Based on the problems encountered during regional development in 2024, there are several efforts that can be made by local governments, as follows:

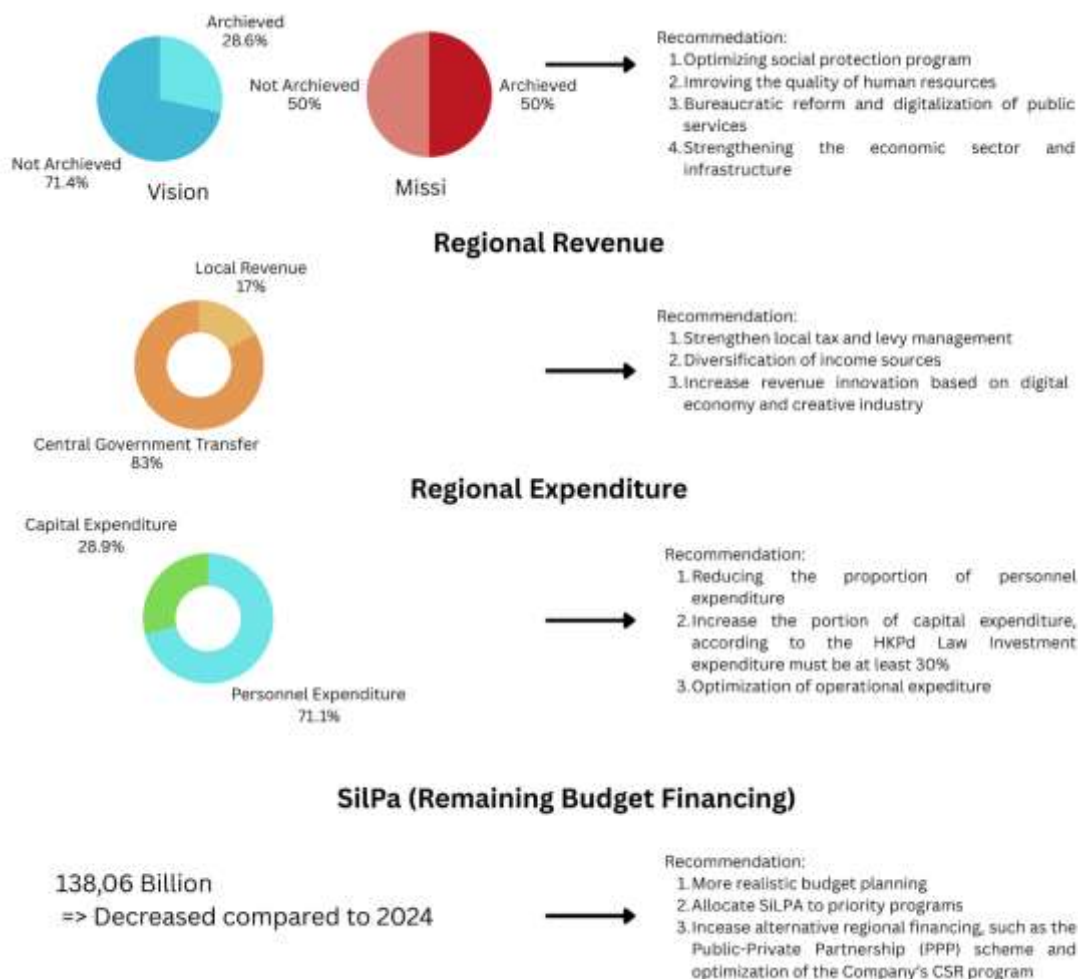
1. Equal access to education and health care
Ensuring that all citizens can enjoy equal and quality education and health care services, especially in remote areas.
2. Strengthening regional infrastructure and connectivity
Supporting economic growth and community mobility through the improvement and development of physical facilities and connectivity networks.
3. Digitalisation of government services
Implementing information technology to accelerate public services, transparency, and bureaucratic efficiency.
4. Empowering the community economically

Developing local economic potential through training, support for MSMEs, and strengthening the productive sector so that the community becomes more independent.

Other issues faced by the Blitar Regency government in managing regional finances are explained as follows:

Figure 4.

Fiscal Performance Dashboard and Development Strategy Overview



Source: Authors' configuration based on the LKPJ of Blitar Regency DPRD

In macroeconomic terms, financial management and administration, including revenue, expenditure and financing. In 2024, local revenue (PAD) will remain low at below 20%, while revenue transfers from the central government will still dominate at 82.97%. This indicates a very high level of dependence on the central government. Some efforts that can be made by the government to increase PAD include:

1. Optimising PAD by strengthening the management of local taxes and levies through the digitalisation of the collection system.
2. Diversifying revenue sources by promoting the creative economy sector, optimising local assets, and strengthening the role of local government-owned enterprises (BUMD).
3. Increasing innovation in revenue based on the digital economy and creative industries to ensure sustainable growth in PAD.

Personnel expenditure remains very high at 36.85% of total expenditure. Meanwhile, capital expenditure remains relatively low at only 15.01%, a decrease compared to the previous year, indicating insufficient investment in infrastructure and productive sectors. The following recommendations are based on expenditure:

1. Reduce the proportion of employee expenditure.
2. Increase the proportion of capital expenditure; according to the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Law (UU HKPD), investment expenditure must be at least 30%.
3. Optimise operational expenditure, particularly the component of goods and services expenditure, to benefit the community.

Regarding the SiLPA of 138.06 billion, which is lower than the previous year, the following recommendations can be implemented:

1. Ensure more realistic budget planning, reduce SiLPA, and absorb the budget more effectively.
2. Allocate SiLPA to priority programmes, such as poverty alleviation, improving public services, and regional economic development.
3. Enhancing alternative regional financing options, such as Public-Private Partnership (PPP) schemes and optimising corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes.

Based on various efforts that can be undertaken to address challenges and constraints during regional development, a more straightforward approach is needed, along with a thorough evaluation of policies that have not been optimally implemented. This should form the basis for the formulation of the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) for 2025-2029. There are four focuses of the 2025-2029 RPJMD:

- More inclusive economic equality, in line with the mission
- Improving the quality of competitive human resources
- Accountable and innovative governance
- Sustainable infrastructure development for regional progress

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that regional development in Blitar Regency is shaped by a complex interplay of strategic issues spanning global, national, provincial, and local levels. Challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, and the demands of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 have underscored the need for adaptive, inclusive, and forward-looking planning. While Blitar Regency has shown signs of economic recovery—evident in improved growth rates and a declining poverty trend—it continues to grapple with persistent issues such as high unemployment, income inequality, and unequal access to quality health and education services, particularly between the northern and southern parts of the region.

These findings imply that local governments must strengthen their institutional capacity for cross-sectoral coordination, optimize the use of available resources, and design more targeted and context-sensitive policies. Emphasis should be placed on digital governance transformation, equitable infrastructure investment, and empowering sectors such as agriculture, SMEs, and the creative economy to build a more resilient local economic base. Furthermore, women's empowerment, child protection, and robust social safety mechanisms must be recognized as critical components of inclusive and sustainable development.

This research primarily utilizes secondary data derived from official regional planning documents and performance reports, which may lack real-time validation and

could reflect institutional bias. The absence of primary data—such as inputs from affected communities or policy implementers—limits the depth of contextual understanding. Additionally, the scope of the study is confined to Blitar Regency, which restricts its applicability to broader regional contexts with differing developmental characteristics.

Future research should adopt mixed-method approaches, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative primary data collection, including interviews, surveys, or participatory methods. This would enable deeper insights into the lived experiences of stakeholders and the on-the-ground impact of development initiatives. Comparative analyses between different regions or regencies could also uncover replicable models of success or failure. Further exploration of the implementation outcomes of digitalisation initiatives, social inclusion strategies, and cross-regional collaborations would enrich the policy discourse on effective regional development in Indonesia and beyond.

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