

THE PRINCIPAL'S STRATEGY IN DEVELOPING EXCELLENCE CLASSES AT MUHAMMADIYAH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL 7 SURAKARTA

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Abstract

Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 Surakarta is a private school based on the Islamic Center with an accredited A grade as an Adiwiyata Comfort and Cultural School. The school also offers distinguished programs aimed at achieving excellence, producing Islamic graduates with global perspectives and environmental awareness. Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 manages 2 exclusive programs: the global class program and the regular program. These distinguished classes have been running for approximately 10 years. Researchers conducted a study on the principal's strategies in developing these excellence classes at Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 Surakarta. This study aims to identify and describe the principal's strategies in developing these classes. The research utilized a qualitative approach through field research, with the principal as the primary informant. Data collection methods included interviews, observations, and documentation, analyzed descriptively. The findings indicate that the principal employs strategies such as student management focusing on both input and output, daily teacher evaluations to assess teaching activities, mentorship, and motivation, and implementing additional programs including memorization (tahfidz), English language, educational trips, robotics, and coding classes.

Keywords: Principal; Strategy; Excellence classes.

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as the cornerstone in shaping the character and potential of learners, providing the foundation necessary to achieve the desired educational outcomes. In the context of rapid globalization, transforming the educational system is essential to maintaining relevance and competitiveness in this dynamic era (Sekar Pertiwi, 2023). Principal leadership plays a pivotal role in steering schools towards higher standards through the development and implementation of programs that are not only excellent but also attuned to contemporary demands (Jaliah, Fitria, & Martha, 2020).

Modern educational institutions aim to extend their offerings beyond the standard curriculum to foster a learning environment rich in exploration and innovation (putridiyanti, 2022). This is embodied in various flagship programs designed to expand students' knowledge and enhance their skills across diverse fields. Therefore, principals hold a strategic responsibility in crafting, executing, and evaluating these programs' effectiveness.

Education is recognized as a deliberate endeavor by educators to facilitate self-development, guiding learners to become fully realized individuals according to predefined goals. Historically, the purpose of education has been to instruct students and guide them towards achieving specific objectives and improving behavior (Astuti, 2019). It is also a process aimed at broadening, enriching, and transforming knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors, ultimately fostering wisdom through teaching and training activities (Muhammad Basarrudin, 2023). In this era of globalization, significant changes in the education system are imperative for a country to remain competitive across all sectors. Therefore, principals must remain vigilant regarding external

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educational advancements, especially in terms of performance and quality (Jonni Mardizal & Nizwardi Jalinus, 2023).

To achieve educational goals, schools have developed various unique features and advantages in their learning systems. These include international schools, special program schools, national schools, and distinguished schools. The evolution of these schools aims to enhance the quality of education and achieve superior educational outcomes (Rizqi, 2022). Principals, in particular, play a crucial role in devising strategies to improve their schools by considering factors such as teacher quality, facilities, student achievements, and community engagement. The success of schools in implementing distinguished programs hinges on the strategic efforts of principals to elevate school quality through superior programs (Saputra, Adha, Jakarta, & Ariyanti, 2020).

Principals must also be perceptive and proactive in observing societal trends to identify the types of schools favored by parents and students, ensuring that planned distinguished programs are both targeted and executed effectively (Trisandi & Salam, 2020). School leadership is instrumental in driving schools to realize their vision, mission, and goals through systematically planned programs. As Arthur G. Jago, cited by Mukhtar, notes about leadership: "Leadership is both a process and a property. As a process, leadership involves influencing group members without coercion to direct and coordinate their activities to achieve goals. As a property, leadership encompasses the traits a leader must possess to successfully influence group members" (Trisandi & Salam, 2020).

A quality school is characterized by the high caliber of its graduates. The effectiveness of a school is significantly influenced by the principal's leadership style. It is the principal's duty to enhance the quality of their school to produce graduates who not only possess strong academic abilities but also exhibit the moral and intellectual qualities expected from those who have received an education. Consequently, principals implement strategies to achieve school excellence. The careful formulation and strategic execution of these programs are essential for success (Saifulloh, Muhibbin, & Hermanto, 2012). Furthermore, principals must observe community preferences to determine which schools are most appealing, ensuring that distinguished programs are well-targeted (Navy, 2013).

Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7, a private school with an A accreditation and recognized as an Adiwiyata Comfort and Culture School, exemplifies the implementation of distinguished programs aimed at excellence. This institution is committed to producing graduates who are both Islamic and globally aware. It offers several exclusive class programs, including the Global Class Program and the Regular Special Program. The Global Class, in particular, is highly sought after due to its distinctive focus on Islamic studies, English proficiency, and memorization, setting it apart from the regular curriculum. This program, which has been in operation for a decade, reflects an innovative approach to achieving educational excellence. Achieving this level of excellence requires a comprehensive educational process, supported by qualified teachers, educational staff, sufficient educational services, and facilities.

Distinguished programs, backed by the principal's leadership skills, aim to develop high-quality schools and drive reforms across various domains, with the ultimate goal of creating better educational institutions in terms of both quality and quantity. These programs enhance the quality of learning by offering specialized services that foster the talents and creativity of learners, meeting the needs of those with exceptional potential and abilities. To deliver superior educational processes, schools must have adequate facilities, competent management, and a commitment to global perspectives (Rohani, 2022).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted at Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7, located at Jl. Tentara Pelajar No. 1, Jebres, Kec. Jebres, City of Surakarta, Central Java Province. The researcher used a qualitative descriptive approach with field research as the research type. Qualitative research is a research method that uses descriptive data such as writings, words, and observed behaviors to

describe specific phenomena. Field research involves studying events occurring within a community and directly investigating research subjects. The primary data source for this study was the school principal, who was the main subject to understand the strategies implemented at the school in developing excellence classes.

The primary data source for this research was the school principal of Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7. As the key informant, the principal provided crucial insights into the strategies implemented for developing excellence classes. The choice of the principal as the primary data source was driven by their central role in designing and executing the school's distinguished programs.

In addition to the principal, the study also included interviews with several other stakeholders:

1. Teachers: Their perspectives on the implementation and effectiveness of the excellence classes were gathered to understand how these programs impact teaching practices and student engagement.
2. Students: Selected students from the excellence classes shared their experiences and feedback on the program, providing a firsthand account of its impact on their learning and development.
3. Parents: Parents of students in the excellence classes were interviewed to gauge their satisfaction and perceptions regarding the program's influence on their children's education.
4. Administrative Staff: Insights from the administrative staff were collected to understand the operational support and challenges associated with managing the excellence programs.

Data collection methods in this study comprised observation, interview, and documentation. *First*, observation. The researcher spent significant time at the school to observe the daily activities and interactions within the excellence classes. Observations focused on classroom dynamics, teaching methods, student engagement, and the use of facilities and resources. This method provided a direct view of how the excellence classes were conducted and their impact on the learning environment. *Second*, interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, students, parents, and administrative staff. These interviews were designed to be flexible, allowing the respondents to express their views in depth. The principal was interviewed multiple times to capture a detailed understanding of the strategic planning and implementation processes. Teachers were interviewed in small groups or individually, while students and parents were approached for one-on-one interviews to ensure a comfortable environment for sharing their experiences. *Third*, Documentation: The researcher collected and reviewed various documents related to the excellence programs, including school reports, curriculum outlines, program evaluations, and administrative records. These documents provided additional context and validated the data obtained through observations and interviews.

Supporting data sources for this study included books, journals, and previous research. The collected data were then analyzed through stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 Surakarta

The flagship program is a series of steps carried out with applied methods by following specific stages with the aim that students have advantages. Among the advantages are for students who have participated in English language and science and technology capabilities. (Ahmad Zarkasyi, 2016) The implementation of the flagship class is an implementation of the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System states that: "citizens who have intelligence potential and special talents have the right to receive special education".

(Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003, 2003) Therefore, with the existence of this flagship class, the aim is to develop and improve the quality of education, produce human resources, enhance the skills and knowledge of educators so that they can compete globally and create competitive advantages.

Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 implements management starting from student planning, where the current number of students at SMP Muhammadiyah is 306 people. Consisting of 104 students in grade VII, 104 students in grade VIII, and 98 students in grade IX. The admission of students at Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 has been adjusted to the class capacity and available seating facilities. Teachers and educational staff at Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 total 21 people, consisting of 0 Non-Permanent Teachers (GTT), 11 Permanent Teachers (GTY), and 12 honorary teachers.

Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 has 2 exclusive class programs, namely the global class program and the special class program. However, among these 2 programs, the global class is highly favored at Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7. This can be seen from the programs offered in the global class. This program is specially designed by the school to enhance the potential within students. Meanwhile, the main objective of this program is to enable students from the global class to understand English and Islamic insights well, and it is expected that graduates will be able to continue to the next level equipped with English language skills trained during this program. In addition, students are expected to pursue further studies not only domestically but also internationally.

According to Mrs. Tri Winarni., as the principal of Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7, the new student admission system certainly goes through several processes including the formation of a new student admission committee or commonly known as the New Student Admission (PPDB) which can be accessed online and offline. Furthermore, after the formation of the new student admission committee, it is followed by the creation and posting of PPDB announcements through online and print media posted around the school environment or along the roadside. This is done with the aim that the community can be well informed about the PPDB announcement at Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7. The student admission process at schools is basically steps to search, select, and invite individuals with the ability to become students at the respective schools. In the admission of new prospective students, the flagship class will pass through several selections online with various tests such as written academic tests with general knowledge and Quran reading tests. However, after using the Merdeka Curriculum, there are no longer general knowledge tests, but only diagnostic tests. In learning activities in the flagship class, students are required to be more active and teachers only act as facilitators. The curriculum used in learning uses both the global class and regular class Free Curriculum.

Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 also provides facilities to support students in acquiring knowledge and mastering technology by providing infrastructure at the school, such as providing projectors in each class to help teachers in delivering material by displaying videos, animations, or audios so that students can have an idea or shadow on each learning material. So that not only seeing writing in books or on blackboards but also added with learning videos. In addition, it is also necessary to have a comfortable and conducive learning environment at school, one of which is the school also provides AC in each classroom so that students feel comfortable in the classroom during the learning process. Therefore, the school strives to create comfortable, conducive learning supported by adequate facilities and infrastructure. Knowledge and technology today that are increasingly advanced and rapidly developing in the era of globalization become a challenge for educational institutions and we can see the progress of technology in the world of education has various changes in learning media that were previously using chalk, but now can easily access only with internet, audiovisual, learning applications such as google classroom, learning media such as LCD projectors, it will greatly facilitate educators and students to be more effective and efficient.

The world of education is influenced by advances in science and technology and the rapid tide of globalization. In recent years, many schools in Indonesia have begun implementing global

education into their internal systems. This is evident in bilingual schools where foreign languages such as English and Mandarin are compulsory. Furthermore, various levels of education from secondary schools to both public and private universities offer programs that meet international standards (Salim, 2014).

Advantages of the Global Class

The advantage of the global class compared to regular classes lies in the programs implemented in the global class. The principal of Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 has implemented three programs for students in the flagship class, namely Tahfidz, English, and edu trip (Malaysia-Singapore). This flagship program at Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 has been running since 2014 with the aim of equipping students with proficient English language skills, focusing on reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English. Essentially, by honing these four fundamental skills, there is a high likelihood that someone's English proficiency will improve and become better (Kutlu, 2009). This flagship class program certainly involves many activities, thus requiring support and parental involvement in education. According to (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000), there are three aspects to parental involvement in children's education: school-based involvement, home-based involvement, and home-school relationships in education.

1. School-based involvement refers to activities and actions that parents and their children participate in at school and interact with other parents both inside and outside the school.
2. Home-based involvement is an active role contributing to the child's learning environment by providing study spaces and participating in the child's learning activities.
3. Home-school relationships involve personal communication and understanding between parents and the school about their child's learning and academic progress. Teacher feedback on the child's learning difficulties, learning behaviors, or homework tasks can be used to determine parental involvement in this aspect.

In essence, teachers and parents have the same goals in educating their students. This includes educating, guiding, and nurturing children to be knowledgeable, morally upright, and capable of achieving not only in this world but also in the hereafter. To achieve these goals, schools and parents maintain good communication on various topics, requiring good cooperation between teachers and parents. Besides educators, parents are also responsible for teaching and supervising activities at home. Conversely, without cooperation between teachers and parents, the results achieved will not be optimal because true success depends on the role of both the school and parents. Therefore, Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 conducts comprehensive evaluations every two months to assess the progress of this flagship class program, known as the Global Family Gathering Forum (FOSGABA), between the school and parents to discuss the activities offered by the school and share challenges or issues faced by parents or students at home or school. The school principal also provides student progress reports, although not formally, to facilitate strong communication between the school and parents through this forum. Parents can also provide feedback to the school, and the school informs parents about activities that need preparation and improvement.

Furthermore, there are adaptation programs and self-reliance programs that are considered to help students have strong principles in organized life. The adaptation programs organized include morning literacy, Dhuha prayer, kultum, and congregational Dhuhr-Asr prayers which are carried out daily in an orderly manner. Furthermore, in the English village training program and edu trip, there is a similarity in that students can learn to recognize social environments directly through learning outside of school. This can provide a basis for students to encourage social interaction in new environments and interact with new people. In addition, the Tahfidz and English performance programs, which are flagship programs at Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7, also have great potential to equip students upon graduation. Based on this, it can be assessed and seen from the Tahfidz program which creates Qur'an memorizers who receive much appreciation in the

community and in the education world. As we know, there are already many schools and even universities that offer scholarships for prospective students or students who have memorized 10 juz, 5 juz, or even 30 juz.

Additional Class Programs

In implementing strategies to develop flagship classes, the principal of Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 has implemented three programs in the flagship classes: Tahfidz, English, and Edu Trip (Malaysia-Singapore). This accredited A school innovates with a new program, namely robotics extracurriculars and coding class programs.

In the robotics extracurricular, the school collaborates with Telkom, while the coding class program is still in the planning stage and will be held monthly to increase knowledge and awareness in facing this increasingly sophisticated and developing global world. Therefore, student management contributes to the development of students at higher levels. The ability to conduct learning activities efficiently and effectively also facilitates achieving good results. One of the principal's strategies in developing superior classroom spaces is using teacher development programs as input to boost the morale of teachers and administrators moving towards improvement and creating classrooms that can foster excellence.

In the Tahfidz program for grades 7, 8, and 9, each has different memorization targets: grade 7 targets memorizing Juz 30, grade 8 targets Juz 29, and grade 9 targets Juz 28. Although in practice, some students may still face challenges in memorizing effectively. Graduation ceremonies for Tahfidz are held annually. Furthermore, in the English program, Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7 collaborates with Pare English Village. Annually, the school sends students from the flagship classes to attend a two-week training session at Pare English Village to enhance their English language skills. The school hopes that the preparation and training provided will build confidence in students, sharpen their interests and talents, and prepare them for the future by considering their individual interests and talents.

The flagship class program has certainly produced many quality outputs, including alumni who have become ambassadors to Japan. Not only that, but many alumni excel in language fields, and currently, students consistently participate in various competitions, many of which are won by students from the flagship program. This program also has positive impacts on students, parents, the school environment, and the community. The positive impact on parents includes their confidence in their children's abilities in foreign languages and Quranic memorization, which is a mandatory program at Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7. This program not only impacts students, schools, and parents but also positively impacts the local community. Students are sent to various areas to assist residents in teaching Quranic reading and writing or teaching elementary school children. Non-formal education such as Quranic education parks (TPA) is one way communities pay attention to Islamic education. This type of education not only meets the requirements of Islamic education in formal schools but also aims to enhance religious knowledge and Quranic reading and writing skills (Fatma, 2016).

The homestay activities cultivate independence in students as they stay for approximately 5 days in a community environment. This is beneficial because it develops various aspects in students, which vary according to their conditions and stages of learning (Purnawanto, 2023).

In implementing the development of flagship programs, there are always challenges that need to be addressed and resolved to achieve the desired goals. Failures can arise from both the school's internal and external environments. Students and educators, who are key elements in implementing demanding programs, are crucial and their strengths need to be carefully considered. A series of evaluation activities help the entire program development team evaluate whether the procedures and methods followed are effective (Rohani, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted at Muhammadiyah Junior High School 7, it can be concluded that the principal's strategies in developing flagship classes encompass several key aspects. Firstly, student management includes the intake and outcomes of students in the global class program. Secondly, teacher management involves daily evaluations during morning briefings for 10 minutes, followed by afternoon sessions starting with group recitations like reading Surah Al-Baqarah, and then evaluating the day's issues. This allows teachers to conduct regular and thorough evaluations. Thirdly, additional programs are implemented for students in the flagship classes. Meanwhile, the principal also organizes the Global Family Gathering Forum (FOSGABA) between the school and parents/guardians to discuss school-offered activities and share challenges faced by parents or students at home or school. Additionally, the principal compiles student progress reports, albeit informally, to foster strong communication between the school and parents through this bi-monthly forum. The additional programs include robotics extracurriculars, coding classes, Tahfidz, English, and Edu Trips. Consequently, students benefit from these supplementary programs, influencing spiritual aspects and specific competencies. These additional programs reflect the principal's innovative efforts to maintain the quality of flagship classes, fostering continuous innovation and striving not only to satisfy current achievements but also to compete effectively and meet the increasingly stringent educational demands of society. Therefore, the educational landscape requires continuous progress to remain an attractive school choice.

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