

The Principal's Strategy for Improving the Quality of Graduates at MIN 3 Nagan Raya

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ABSTRACT

The quality of graduates of Islamic elementary schools (madrasah ibtidaiyah) is an important indicator in measuring the success of Islamic-based elementary education institutions. The role of the madrasah principal is crucial in managing and developing appropriate strategies to improve the quality of graduates who are not only academically superior but also possess good morals and life skills. This study aims to analyze the strategy of the principal of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) 3 Nagan Raya in improving the quality of graduates through the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Informants consisted of the madrasah principal, teachers, and education staff. The results show that the madrasah principal planned programs based on the madrasah's vision and mission, involved a solid work team, implemented structured quality improvement programs, and conducted continuous evaluations using the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) model approach. This strategy successfully increased public trust, student skills, and graduate acceptance in further education institutions. This study recommends that madrasah principals continue to strengthen their transformational leadership capacity and conduct innovations based on regular quality evaluations.

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1. Introduction

Basic education is the primary foundation for developing students' character and competencies. In the context of madrasahs, besides being formal educational institutions, they also instill Islamic values, morals, and local culture from an early age. Therefore, the quality of madrasah ibtidaiyah graduates is a crucial indicator in measuring the success of the Islamic education system at the elementary level. Improving graduate quality encompasses not only academic aspects but also spiritual, social, and life skills dimensions that align with current demands.

According to Tilaar (2002), quality education is education that can meet future challenges and equip students with the skills to live independently, think critically, and act ethically. In a madrasah environment, the quality of education is largely determined by the leadership quality of the madrasah principal. The madrasah principal plays a strategic role as a manager, innovator, supervisor, and motivator in all aspects of educational delivery at the madrasah. Therefore, the madrasah principal's leadership strategy is a key factor in efforts to improve the quality of graduates.

An effective madrasah principal is a leader who can formulate a clear vision, mobilize all the school's resources, and build a work culture conducive to learning (Mulyasa, 2004). He or she must also be able to build good relationships with the school community and the wider community to foster productive collaboration. Furthermore, the madrasah principal needs to implement a transformational leadership approach that emphasizes teacher empowerment, innovative learning, and continuous evaluation.

One of the challenges faced by many madrasahs in Indonesia, including in Aceh, is the disparity in educational quality and the lack of innovation in institutional management. Many madrasahs still operate with limited resources, undertrained teaching staff, and inadequate facilities. In this context, the ability of madrasah principals to design and implement appropriate strategies is crucial. As explained by Bush and Glover (2003), quality educational leadership is based on professional, collaborative, and data-driven values.

MIN 3 Nagan Raya is one of the Islamic schools that has shown significant improvement in the quality of its graduates in recent years. This is evident in the large number of students accepted into top-tier secondary schools, both Islamic boarding schools and leading public junior high schools (SMP/MTs). Furthermore, public trust in the school has also increased, as evidenced by the annual increase in enrollment. This phenomenon merits further study, particularly in the context of the principal's leadership strategies in driving change and continuous quality improvement.

This research is crucial to uncover the strategy of the principal of MIN 3 Nagan Raya in improving graduate quality by exploring the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of the program. Using a qualitative case study approach, the results are expected to provide practical contributions to other madrasah principals in designing similar strategies and to add to the academic literature on Islamic education management.

Thus, this study aims not only to describe the strategies implemented by madrasah principals but also to evaluate their effectiveness in producing quality graduates. The CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) evaluation model serves as an analytical tool to understand the successes and challenges faced in this quality improvement process.

2. Literature Review

Educational quality is a complex and multidimensional concept. In the context of madrasas, graduate quality is seen not only from a cognitive perspective, but also from the perspective of character development, Islamic values, and life skills. According to Sallis (2002), quality in education is a continuous effort to meet or exceed the expectations of students, parents, the community, and other stakeholders. Therefore, quality management in madrasas requires a comprehensive and systematic approach, starting with effective leadership.

As the leader of an educational institution, the madrasah principal plays a central role in determining the direction, strategy, and success of an institution. According to Mulyasa (2011), successful madrasah principals are those who are able to fulfill the dual roles of learning leader, institutional manager, academic supervisor, and driver of change. In this regard, madrasah principals must possess a strong educational vision and the ability to mobilize all components of the madrasah toward continuous quality improvement.

A madrasah principal's strategy for improving graduate quality can be analyzed through a strategic management approach in education. Robbins and Coulter (2012) define strategy as a comprehensive action plan used to achieve long-term goals. In the educational context, a good strategy is one that integrates the institution's goals, human resource potential, infrastructure, and the needs and expectations of the community. Madrasah principals are required to be able to design relevant and flexible strategies and involve all elements of the school in the implementation process.

In implementing their strategies, madrasah principals need to consider three important aspects: planning, implementation, and evaluation. Strategic planning must be based on the madrasah's vision and mission, which are contextual and adaptive to current developments. Strategy implementation requires the active involvement of all madrasah members, from teachers and education staff to students and parents. Evaluation aims to assess the effectiveness of the program and serve as a basis for future decision-making.

One of the educational evaluation models that can be used to assess the quality of graduates is the CIPP model developed by Stufflebeam (2003). This model consists of four main components, namely:

- a. Context : analyzing the needs, background, and objectives of the program,
- b. Input : assess the resources, strategies and plans used,
- c. Process : monitoring program implementation,
- d. Product : evaluate the results achieved, both output and outcome.

The CIPP model is considered suitable for use in the context of madrasah education because it is able to provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of a program, including in terms of improving the quality of graduates.

On the other hand, leadership theory also serves as an important foundation for formulating quality improvement strategies. Madrasah principals need to develop transformational leadership styles, namely leadership oriented toward change and empowerment. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leaders are those who are able to inspire,

motivate, and optimally develop the potential of their subordinates. In the madrasah context, principals who implement transformational leadership will be able to create a strong academic culture and a conducive learning environment.

Transformational leadership in madrasahs also needs to be supported by a school-based management system. School-Based Management (SBM) emphasizes the importance of autonomy, community participation, and accountability in the management of educational institutions (Depdiknas, 2003). Through SBM, madrasah principals have the flexibility to develop quality improvement programs based on local needs and potential.

Based on various theories and previous research findings, it can be concluded that improving graduate quality in madrasahs is significantly influenced by the principal's strategy, which is based on a clear vision, strong leadership, sound program management, and systematic evaluation. Therefore, this literature review provides a strong theoretical basis for analyzing the graduate quality improvement strategies implemented by the principal of MIN 3 Nagan Raya.

3. Research Method

Research Approaches and Types

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the principal's strategies in depth within a real-life context, namely MIN 3 Nagan Raya. Yin (2011) states that case studies are suitable for examining complex phenomena that cannot be separated from real-life contexts, especially when researchers want to answer "how" and "why" questions.

Research Location and Subjects

This research was conducted at MIN 3 Nagan Raya, a public elementary madrasah located in Nagan Raya Regency, Aceh Province. The research subjects consisted of the madrasah principal, senior teachers, educational staff, and school committee members directly involved in the process of improving graduate quality. Informants were selected purposively, based on the consideration that they possessed knowledge and experience relevant to the research focus (Creswell, 2014).

Data Collection Techniques

Data in this study were collected through three main techniques:

- a. In-depth interviews were conducted with madrasah principals, teachers, and administrative staff to explore strategies and implementation of quality programs.
- b. Participatory observation is used to understand the real situation in the madrasah environment, including interactions between teachers and students, learning activities, and work culture.
- c. Documentation includes analysis of madrasah work program documents, quality evaluation reports, meeting minutes, and student achievement data.

The use of these three techniques is carried out for data triangulation purposes , in order to increase the validity of the information obtained (Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes three main stages:

- a. Data reduction – the process of sorting, simplifying, and organizing raw data into meaningful information,
- b. Data presentation – displaying data in descriptive narrative form,
- c. Drawing conclusions and verification – compiling research findings based on patterns that emerge from interviews, observations, and documentation.

Analysis is carried out simultaneously during the data collection process and afterward.

Data Validity Test

To ensure data validity and reliability, researchers conducted source and technique triangulation , member checking, and ongoing observation. Triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results with observational data and documentation . Member checking was conducted by requesting reconfirmation from informants regarding their interview results. This strategy aims to increase trustworthiness in the research results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. Result and Discussion

This study aims to analyze the principal's strategy for improving graduate quality at State Islamic Elementary School (MIN) 3 Nagan Raya. The research findings are structured around three main focuses : strategic planning, quality program implementation, and success evaluation. Findings are analyzed by linking empirical data with theoretical concepts from the literature review.

Strategic Planning of Madrasah Principals

The madrasah principal's planning is based on the institution's vision and mission, namely to produce graduates who excel academically and possess Islamic character. Planning is not conducted unilaterally, but involves working meetings with teachers and staff, and considers input from the madrasah committee and parents.

The programs designed include improving teacher competency, strengthening religious activities, developing learning resources, and developing a character-building system. This aligns with Robbins and Coulter's (2012) opinion that strategic planning must be participatory and adaptive to changes in the external environment.

This strategy is also in line with the principles of school-based management (Ministry of National Education, 2003) which gives authority to educational units to develop work programs according to local needs.

Implementation of Quality Improvement Program

The program's implementation focuses on two dimensions: academic strengthening and character development. From an academic perspective, teachers are encouraged to develop active and enjoyable learning methods. The Madrasah also provides additional tutoring for students facing learning difficulties and forms study groups.

In terms of character, the madrasa implements daily religious programs such as congregational Dhuha prayers, Quranic recitation, and the practice of Islamic etiquette. Extracurricular activities such as scouting, Hadrah arts, and Quranic literacy are also routinely implemented. This strategy is based on transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance of building a positive organizational culture (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Observations show that the learning environment has become more lively, teacher-student relationships are more harmonious, and student attendance has increased. This indicates a positive change in the school climate.

Program Evaluation with the CIPP Model

Program evaluation is carried out periodically by the madrasah head together with the quality team. Evaluation is carried out using the CIPP approach :

- a. Context : The principal analyzes the need for quality improvement through reflection on the previous year's results and the results of meetings with the teachers' council.
- b. Input : Assess resource readiness, including teacher competency and availability of facilities.
- c. Process : Monitoring of implementation is carried out through class supervision, surprise visits, and weekly reflective discussions.
- d. Product : The evaluation results show an increase in the average academic grades of students, an increase in participation in religious activities, and an increase in the number of graduates accepted into their favorite further education institutions.

This evaluation is formative and used for continuous improvement. According to Stufflebeam (2003), the CIPP model is used not only to assess final results but also to improve processes and managerial decisions during program implementation.

Impact of Strategy on Graduate Quality

The impact of the strategies implemented by the madrasah principal can be seen from the following indicators:

- a. The average student exam scores have increased from year to year.
- b. Graduates of MIN 3 Nagan Raya are accepted at leading Islamic boarding schools and MTs in Nagan Raya and the surrounding area.
- c. Students' characters are more orderly, civilized, and have a high enthusiasm for learning.
- d. The image of madrasahs in the eyes of the public is increasingly positive, as evidenced by the increasing number of applicants every year.

These results demonstrate that the implemented strategy is effective and can be replicated by other madrasahs, adapting it to their local context. This success demonstrates the importance of visionary leadership, structured programs, and ongoing evaluation in improving graduate quality.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research findings on the principal's strategy of MIN 3 Nagan Raya in improving graduate quality, it can be concluded that the madrasah's success in producing quality graduates is inseparable from the principal's strategic role in leading and managing the educational institution. The strategies implemented include vision-mission-based planning, involvement of all madrasah components, structured implementation of quality improvement programs, and program evaluation using the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) model approach.

Strategic planning is conducted in a participatory manner and based on needs data. Program implementation focuses on strengthening active learning and developing Islamic character through religious and extracurricular activities. Regular evaluations are conducted to ensure program effectiveness and continuous improvement. The impact is evident in improved student learning outcomes, community participation, and a positive public image of the madrasah.

This study shows that madrasah principals who apply a transformational leadership style, think strategically, and are open to innovation are able to bring about significant changes to the quality of education.

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