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Principal's Innovation at MTS Negeri 1 Boyolali: Improving School Quality Though Superior Programs

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ABSTRACT

The quality of Indonesia's education is still low, as reflected in the PISA score. MTs Negeri 1 Boyolali innovates with excellent programs under the leadership of the principal. This study aims to describe the innovations implemented by the principal of MTs Negeri 1 Boyolali in improving the quality of schools through excellent programs and identify the challenges faced in its implementation. This research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman models. The results of the study show that the principal's innovations include improving teacher competence, optimizing facilities and infrastructure, and strengthening community involvement. Excellent programs such as Tahfidz, Science, and Sports contribute to the improvement of students' academic and non-academic achievement. However, its implementation faces challenges, such as limited funding and resistance to change. In conclusion, the innovations implemented have a positive impact on the quality of schools, but still require a more optimal management strategy to overcome existing obstacles.

1. Introduction

Education is an important element in the formation of character and competence of the nation's next generation. In this context, schools have a central role as a place of formal education that imparts knowledge, abilities, and moral principles to students. Schools must always innovate and adapt to the times to ensure that education is always relevant and of high quality. In a Hearing Meeting with Commission X of the House of Representatives which took place on Wednesday, October 30, 2024, Professor of the Indonesian University of Education (UPI), Prof. Ace Suryadi, revealed that the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) scores of Indonesian students are still low since they first participated in 2001 until now. "The PISA scores of Indonesian children have been low since 2001 until now. Never high," he said. If considered in comparison with other countries, the quality of education in Indonesia is still at an alarming level.

Based on the worldtop20.org report in the first quarter of 2023, as many as 203 countries were included in the ranking of global education levels. Denmark occupies the first position, followed by South Korea in second place, and the Netherlands in third place. Meanwhile, Indonesia is ranked 67th, close to Albania in 66th position and Serbia in 68th position. The rankings are based on five levels of education (Hasbi, 2023).

Talking about the quality of education, the quality of education includes input, process, and output aspects. Input in education includes everything that must be available to support the continuity of the process. The educational process itself is a stage in which something undergoes a change into another form. Meanwhile, educational output refers to school performance, namely the results achieved by the school or madrasah as a consequence of the ongoing educational process (Suranto, 2019). Meanwhile, education quality indicators are reflected in school achievement in a certain period of time.

These achievements include academic results, such as general exams, as well as achievements in non-academic fields, such as sports and the arts. (Shobri, 2017). To achieve quality indicators, schools must continue to innovate to enable educational institutions to continue to grow and improve quantity and quality. Innovation can be developed through excellent programs that are able to answer the needs of students and the community. The flagship program is an initiative designed to provide added value in the learning process, both through improving academic competence, developing non-academic skills, and strengthening students' character (Rohmah & Abidin, 2021).

As innovators, principals must be able to find opportunities and changes by selecting and creating new ideas to meet the needs of the school (Abzul et al., 2022). To make changes and create quality schools, principals must continue to develop innovative ideas to create an effective climate and education system. The government, teachers, the community, parents, and students must work together to achieve a superior school (Zaka & Mustofa, 2023). The strategy implemented by the principal in developing superior programs is the main factor in improving the quality of the school and ensuring success in its implementation.(Hayudiyani et al., 2020).

However, the implementation of this flagship program is not without challenges. Based on the results of interviews at Mts Negeri 1 Boyolali, the obstacles faced include limited funds, resistance to change from some teachers and students, and lack of support from external parties such as parents and the community. School principals must have an effective strategy to overcome these obstacles. Mts Negeri 1 Boyolali adopts a flagship program as a strategic step to improve the quality of education. This initiative aims to improve students' academic and non-academic achievements. Therefore, this study aims to describe the innovations carried out by the principal of Mts Negeri 1 Boyolali through flagship programs to improve the quality of the school and describe the challenges and obstacles faced in its implementation.

2. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research paradigm with a type of field study research, which is research that involves a direct visit to the location to observe the research object and collect data accurately (Niam et al., 2024). The research was conducted at MTs Negeri 1 Boyolali to obtain data based on observations of phenomena that occur in the field. The approach used is phenomenology, which is a method that analyzes phenomena by utilizing theory as a basis for discussion, then the results are analyzed based on the phenomenological theory approach (Yusanto, 2020). The data sources in this study consist of primary data and secondary data. The credibility of the data is tested through triangulation of sources and time. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was carried out based on the Miles and Huberman method which involved three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Winarni, 2021).

3. Result and Discussion

The principal is the main figure responsible for the management and operational supervision of a school. They play a significant role in creating a supportive learning environment, motivating educators, and designing effective educational programs (Zulkarmain, 2021). Based on interviews with the principal and a number of MTsN 1 Boyolali students, it was identified that various excellent programs have been implemented to improve the quality of learning and student achievement which will have an impact on improving the quality of the school. This analysis uses an Input-Process-Output approach to evaluate the effectiveness of the innovation and its impact on the quality of the school.

Input in education refers to all aspects that support the sustainability of the learning process (Lestari & Nuryanti, 2022) including human resources, facilities and infrastructure, as well as external support from various parties. At MTsN 1 Boyolali, various efforts have been made to ensure that all of these components are available and function optimally to improve the quality of education.

Human resources are an important component in supporting the effectiveness of learning. The principal of MTsN 1 Boyolali, emphasized the importance of improving teacher competence through various programs, such as Subject Teacher Deliberation (MGMP), information technology-based workshops, and intensive training in the application of modern teaching methods. In addition to the principal, teachers also have a crucial role in improving the quality of education, because as the front line in the classroom, teachers interact directly with students in the learning process (Fatikah, 2019). These programs encourage the application of the concept of *collaborative learning*, where teachers can share information, experiences, and teaching strategies to enhance mutual understanding (Agnestia, 2024). Through MGMP, teachers from various backgrounds can discuss challenges in learning and find solutions collectively. In addition, technology-based workshops and training on modern teaching methods not only improve the

individual skills of educators, but also strengthen collaboration in the use of technology and pedagogical innovations in the classroom. With this flagship program, a learning ecosystem is created that supports the improvement of the overall quality of the school.

In addition to the human resource factor, facilities and infrastructure are also important to support the effectiveness of learning because limited infrastructure facilities can hinder learning itself (Noprika et al., 2020). The results of the interview with the principal at MTsN 1 Boyolali show that the procurement of digital facilities such as LCD, computers, and touchscreen digital TVs is one of the innovative steps in supporting technology-based learning. In recent years, the school has increased the number of computers and is committed to continuously improving digital facilities to meet the challenges of the technological age.

The implementation of technology in education can be analyzed through the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which highlights two main factors in technology acceptance, namely the perception of benefits and ease of use (Sugiyono & Sulaiman, 2024). With the improvement of these digital facilities, teachers and students gain wider access to learning resources and more dynamic interaction in the learning process. In addition, the selection of user-friendly technology ensures that educators and learners can easily adapt to the technological changes implemented in schools.

Public participation is considered important because it reflects the principles of a just democracy. Therefore, an institution was formed as a means for the community to play a role in improving the quality of schools, known as school committees (Rozi et al., 2020). External support from the school committee also plays an important role in the success of various flagship programs at MTsN 1 Boyolali. The principal actively builds communication with parents and external parties to support various educational programs, such as Camp Sains and Camp Tahfidz. Community participation is one of the key factors in increasing the effectiveness and sustainability of the programs that have been designed.

Based on Slamet's view, community participation in the world of education can include various aspects, ranging from decision-making, resource allocation, to direct involvement in the implementation of programs (Narang & Oktavian, 2022). In Science Camp, for example, parents and the community participate in providing facilities and providing moral support for students. Meanwhile, in Camp Tahfidz, they play a role in character development and strengthening Islamic values. This form of involvement shows that the synergy between schools and the community has a positive impact on the quality of education at MTsN 1 Boyolali, while ensuring the sustainability of various excellent programs that have been launched.

With human resources, facilities, and adequate infrastructure, as well as active community involvement, MTsN 1 Boyolali has succeeded in building a modern, adaptive, and collaboration-based education system. The combination of these

various factors reflects how innovation in education management has the ability to create a better and quality learning environment.

Process (Implementation of Flagship Program at MTsN 1 Boyolali)

The process here can be interpreted as a series of steps or procedures in processing inputs to produce quality outputs (Devi, 2021). The implementation of the flagship program at MTsN 1 Boyolali is the result of various innovations implemented by the principal in order to improve the quality of education. Various strategies are implemented systematically, ranging from improving teacher competence, implementing excellent programs in various fields, to a structured evaluation system to ensure the effectiveness of the programs being run.

In improving teacher competence, one of the main steps implemented by the principal at MTsN 1 Boyolali is to hold weekly meetings every Friday. This meeting involved various elements of the school, such as the vice principal, administrative staff, treasurer, and all educators. In this forum, various aspects related to school management, learning effectiveness, and obstacles faced in the implementation of flagship programs were discussed and evaluated on an ongoing basis.

This approach reflects the principle of *Total Quality Management (TQM)*, which is a quality improvement strategy that involves all members of the organization in the continuous improvement process. In the context of education, TQM focuses on the satisfaction of students, parents, and the community with school services. With weekly meetings held regularly, all parties involved can actively participate in identifying problems, providing input, and finding solutions based on data and real experience in the field. In addition, a collaborative and transparent work culture is created through this mechanism, allowing schools to flexibly adapt educational strategies to the needs of students as well as the times. MTsN 1 Boyolali develops several excellent programs as part of innovations in the learning system. These programs include the Tahfidz Program, Science Program, and Sports Program, which are designed to accommodate students' academic and non-academic potential.

A. Tahfidz Program

The tahfidz program at MTsN 1 Boyolali aims to ensure that every student is able to memorize at least 3 juz of the Qur'an before they graduate. In its implementation, this program applies the *tasmi'* method, which is an activity in which students read their memorization in front of their parents to strengthen their memory and foster a sense of responsibility. In addition, there is a tahfidz camp, which is an intensive coaching activity carried out at Islamic boarding schools during the semester holidays to deepen students' memorization.

The methods applied in this program are in line with *the metacognitive* strategy, which focuses on students' awareness in organizing, organizing, and evaluating

their thought processes during learning. By applying this strategy, students not only memorize the Qur'an mechanically, but also have control over their cognitive processes. Tasmii' provides an opportunity for students to evaluate the extent to which their memorization has been mastered, while tahfidz camps create an environment conducive to improving memory and discipline. Through this strategy, the tahfidz program at MTsN 1 Boyolali not only aims to achieve academic achievements, but also to form the character of students who are more disciplined, independent, and have a deeper understanding of Islamic values.

B. Science Program

The science program is designed to improve students' understanding of science, mathematics, and English subjects through the addition of learning hours and more interactive learning methods. Students are given the opportunity to participate in laboratory experiments and intensive discussion sessions, which allow them to be more active in the learning process and understand concepts more deeply through hands-on practice.

The approach applied in the program is in line with the theory of constructivism, which emphasizes that students not only passively receive information, but also play an active role in building their own understanding through interaction and real experience (Suparlan, 2019). Through laboratory experiments, students can test scientific concepts learned in theory, so that their understanding becomes more concrete and applicative. Meanwhile, intensive discussion sessions provide a space for students to share ideas, think logically, as well as develop their critical thinking skills. With the application of this constructivism-based learning model, the science program at MTsN 1 Boyolali not only aims to improve academic achievement, but also develop a critical, innovative, and analytical scientific mindset.

C. Sports Program

The sports program at MTsN 1 Boyolali is one of the flagship programs that aims to develop students' non-academic talents. The principal realized that students' interest in sports was increasing, both in regional and national competitions, so this program was developed to provide a forum for talented students.

The approach applied in this sports program refers to the theory of plural intelligence put forward by Howard Gardner. This theory states that human intelligence consists of various aspects, one of which is kinesthetic intelligence, which is related to motor abilities and body coordination (Jamaris, 2017). By developing sports programs, schools not only help students improve achievement in athletics, but also build character such as discipline, teamwork, and sportsmanship. Through this sports program, MTsN 1 Boyolali has succeeded in building a more interactive and open educational environment, which not only emphasizes the academic aspect but also supports the development of students holistically.

In order to ensure the continuity and success of the flagship program implemented, the principal of MTsN 1 Boyolali in terms of evaluation and supervision implements a quarterly evaluation system through regular meetings with the Special Program (PK) team. This evaluation intends to identify the advantages and challenges faced in the implementation of the program, as well as provide appropriate solutions to improve the quality of education.

This evaluation system is based on the concept that evaluation is an ongoing process that aims to gather information to support decision-making. In addition, the evaluation approach at MTsN 1 Boyolali can also be studied through the Responsive Evaluation Model developed by Stake. This model focuses on the benefits and tangible results that the program provides to learners' behavior (Arikunto et al., 2010). In addition to internal evaluation, parental involvement in monitoring student development is also an important part of this evaluation system. Through periodic reports submitted to parents, the school ensures transparent communication and cooperation between the school and families in supporting academic development and student character. With a participatory and data-based evaluation system, schools can make more informed decisions in developing superior programs. Regular evaluations allow schools to be more responsive to changes and developments in the learning process.

The implementation of the flagship program at MTsN 1 Boyolali reflects the principal's innovation in managing quality education and oriented towards quality improvement. Through improving teacher competence, developing excellent programs that meet student needs, and implementing a systematic evaluation system, schools have succeeded in creating an adaptive and dynamic learning environment. With the support of all elements of the school and the community, the excellent programs implemented at MTsN 1 Boyolali not only improve students' academic achievements, but also form a more independent, disciplined, and creative character.

Education Output as an Indicator of School Innovation Success

The results of the school performance process can be seen through various achievement indicators that reflect the quality of the school that has been achieved. According to Syaefudin in *the Quality Analysis of Islamic Education*, educational output reflects the success of madrasas in creating quality graduates (Syaefudin, 2020). The innovations implemented at MTsN 1 Boyolali have produced various positive impacts, both in academic, non-academic aspects, and improving the image of the school in the community.

In terms of academic achievement, the implementation of flagship programs has shown significant results. The number of students accepted into leading schools, such as MAN Insan Cendekia (MAN IC) and MAN Religious Program (MAN PK), has increased quite drastically. In addition, students who take Special Program (PK) classes have higher academic achievement compared to regular classes, which shows the effectiveness of the program in improving the quality of learning.

In the non-academic field, the success of school innovation is reflected in the various achievements achieved by students in extracurricular activities. Various awards and trophies were successfully brought home from the national level competition, showing that the flagship program not only focuses on academic achievement, but also encourages the development of students' talents and potential in various aspects.

In addition, innovations made by school principals in school branding strategies also have a positive impact on the school's reputation. School branding itself is a concept where schools try to build a strong identity and have a competitive advantage so that they are widely known and get a special place in the hearts of prospective students and parents. The use of social media as a means of socializing superior programs has become an effective strategy in building a positive image of the school in the eyes of the public. Through various digital channels, MTsN 1 Boyolali is able to introduce academic excellence, facilities, and student achievements more widely. This strategy has proven to be successful in attracting the interest of prospective students, not only from the Boyolali area, but also from outside the city, which has an impact on increasing the number of applicants every year.

By utilizing digital technology to strengthen school branding, school principals play a role in creating attractiveness and increasing the competitiveness of educational institutions. These innovations not only have an impact on increasing the number of students enrolling, but also shape a positive perception of the school, which ultimately contributes to the overall improvement of the school's quality. Public satisfaction can be reflected in the output and outcomes produced in each period. If the service to the community goes well, they will be aware of this and automatically support the school's various needs. Thus, the school will not have difficulties in improving the quality of the school (Sarifudin & Maya, 2019).

Challenges and Obstacles to the Implementation of the School Principal Program

In the face of innovation to improve the quality of schools, school principals face several challenges and obstacles related to aspects of funding and program management. One of the main obstacles faced is the limited funds to support various innovations that have been designed. The principal stated that if the budget is sufficient, development programs can run faster and optimally. However, in reality, the participation of committee funds from parents of guardians in this madrasah is still relatively low compared to other madrasahs. For example, at MTs Negeri 5 Boyolali, the community's contribution to madrasahs has reached Rp40,000 per month, while in this madrasah it is still lower.

To overcome these challenges, the principal continues to strive to optimize communication with the school committee and parents. Regular committee meetings are held to discuss strategies to increase community participation in supporting madrasah programs. The principal also designed a new strategy that

will begin to be implemented in July, where all programs that have been prepared will be presented to the parents in an official meeting. With this information disclosure, it is hoped that parents can understand the importance of their contribution in supporting the sustainability of madrasah innovation. In addition, the government's budget saving policy is also a challenge. With the lack of operational funds from the government, school principals must be careful in developing programs so that they can continue to run with limited resources. One of the strategies implemented is to adjust the program to the financial condition of the madrasah and look for other possible funding alternatives.

In terms of decision-making, another challenge faced is internal coordination among the school management team. Before a policy or innovation is implemented, the principal always discusses various possibilities with the team of vice principals. After reaching an agreement, decisions will be executed according to the results of deliberations, both challenging and easier to implement. Overall, the principal continues to strive to find the best solution in dealing with existing obstacles and challenges. With good communication, careful planning, and support from various parties, it is hoped that the innovations designed can be implemented well to improve the quality of education in schools.

4. Conclusion

Referring to the results of the analysis and discussion that has been carried out, it can be concluded that the principal of MTsN 1 Boyolali has succeeded in implementing various significant innovations to improve the quality of education in schools. Through the Input-Process-Output approach, the various factors that support the success of this flagship program, such as human resources, infrastructure, and external support, have been well managed and play a role in building a more efficient and flexible educational environment. The excellent programs developed, such as the Tahfidz Program, Science Program, and Sports Program, have succeeded in providing space for students to develop both in academic and non-academic aspects. Improving teacher competence through various trainings and workshops, the application of technology in learning, and the active involvement of the community and parents, have strengthened the foundation of education at MTsN 1 Boyolali. A transparent and continuous evaluation system also ensures that every program that is run can be evaluated and improved continuously.

The output of these programs can be seen in the improvement of students' academic achievement, both in the selection of superior schools and in the extracurricular field, as well as the positive image of the school that has been successfully built through school branding strategies. Principals' leadership innovations that utilize digital technology to introduce school excellence also support the growth in the number of applicants from various regions. However, challenges and obstacles in terms of funding and internal coordination remain a concern. Principals must continue to optimize communication with school committees and parents to increase their participation in supporting the

sustainability of these innovative programs. Nonetheless, the principal has shown tremendous effort in overcoming these constraints with a careful planning strategy and the search for alternative resources. Overall, the innovations implemented at MTsN 1 Boyolali reflect quality education management, with an emphasis on improving the quality of schools comprehensively, inclusively, and sustainably. With the support of all related parties, these excellent programs are expected to continue to advance and bring a beneficial influence to improve the quality of education in the future.

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