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The Principal's Strategy in Improving the Quality of Education Through the Flagship Program at Madrasah Aliyah Bilingual Batu

Sayyidatul Qory'ah*[,1], Ahmad Barizi[1], Fatia Ainur Rosyida[1], Kholis Aniyati[2]
[1]Faculty of Islamic Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia
[2]Islamic Education Department, Institut Agama Islam Insan Prima Misbahul Ulum Gumawang, Indonesia

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***Correspondence:**
Address:
Jalan Pronoyudo, Dadaprejo, Junrejo, Kota Batu, Jawa Timur, Indonesia
Email:
qoriahsayyidatul@gmail.com

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Abstract:
The centralization of education policy in Indonesia has made educational materials and objectives lose their locality. The role and strategic steps of the principal are needed in implementing government regulations and the needs of a plural society. The purpose of this study was to analyze the strategy of the principal of Madrasah Aliyah (MA) Bilingual Batu in improving the quality of education through flagship programs. This qualitative study purposively selected the principal as the main informant, and teachers and students as supporting informants. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis technique used descriptive analysis techniques with data validity tests using triangulation techniques. The results of the study showed that in order to make graduates able to compete in the international arena, bilingual programs (mastery of English and Arabic) were determined as flagship programs. To make the program a success, the principal took seven strategic steps: Establish a forum for channeling students' interests and talents, form work teams, establish and maintain communication, improve teacher quality, provide infrastructure facilities, adjust the curriculum, and evaluate.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of national education is explained in Law Number 20 of 2003, Chapter II, Article 3, that national education functions to develop abilities and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation to educate the life of the nation to develop the potential of students to become human beings who believe in and are devoted to God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, and independent, and become democratic citizens. To achieve these lofty educational goals, education must be carried out by families, communities, and the government through guidance, teaching, and training activities that take place at school and outside school (Rosyadi, Supriadi, and Rabbanie 2021). The educational process is carried out throughout life to prepare students to be able to play roles in various living environments appropriately in the future (Ramayulis 2013).

Along with the rapid challenges throughout the world, the world of education is facing increasingly greater challenges. It encourages students to perform to the best of their abilities. As globalization becomes an important part of modern life, its effects on the formation of markets and open free competition are increasingly visible. All businesses, especially

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education, must be able to take advantage of opportunities to survive and compete by prioritizing quality, customer satisfaction, and efficiency. Competition is an aspect that cannot be avoided (Noprika and Yusro 2020).

Talking about the quality of Indonesian education today, Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, Anies Baswedan, said that the condition of Indonesian education is currently in an emergency condition. From several data held by the Ministry of Education and Culture, in recent years, the world of Indonesian education has shown poor results. These facts are an emergency that must be changed immediately (Yulmawati 2016). In line with the results of the results of the learning ability survey released by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in December 2019 in Paris, it was stated that Indonesia was ranked 72nd out of 77 countries. Being in the bottom 6th place is still behind neighboring countries such as Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam. Meanwhile, UNESCO data in the 2016 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report places the quality of teachers in Indonesia in 14th place out of 14 developing countries. Furthermore, based on data from the Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report issued by UNESCO in 2011, Indonesia's education development index was 0.934, placing Indonesia 69th out of 127 countries in the world (Lin and Spaulding 2022).

One of the factors that influences the quality of education is the school principal, because the school principal is a central figure who is the captain in the development journey of an educational institution (Riani and Ain 2022). So, school principals need to increase their roles and functions and must have the right strategy to improve the quality of their institution's education (Printy 2010). Improving the function and role of the principal is a breakthrough in achieving educational goals. This is done to make schools an educational environment that can produce graduates who have various levels of knowledge, abilities, values, and attitudes that enable them to become citizens and communities who are competent, devout, faithful, and have noble character (Mustajab, Lee, and Jansee 2021; Winingsih and Sulistiono 2020).

To improve quality, a leader must have a strategy. To change the quality of education, school principals must use the right strategies to maximize their potential and that of their institutions to implement school programs (Ismaya et al. 2023; Palah et al. 2022). This is what the head of Madrasah Aliyah (MA) Bilingual Batu did by establishing the bilingual program as the madrasa's flagship program. This bilingual program emphasizes English and Arabic language proficiency for students. The usefulness of this program is that students are able to compete in the international arena with the provision of tool knowledge (foreign language proficiency) that they have.

Several previous researchers have actually paid attention to the study of principal strategies and school flagship programs. A study on principal strategies in improving the quality of education was conducted by Noprika, Yusro, and Sagiman (2020); a study on principal strategies in improving teacher performance was conducted by Ajepri, Vienti, and Rusmiyati (2022); a study on principal strategies in making learning policies a success in the Covid 19 Pandemic era was conducted by Saputro and Darim (2022); a study on principal strategies in improving the quality of education through flagship programs based on Christian spirituality, learning, and life skills was conducted by Hayudiyani et al. (2020); a study on flagship

programs of religious-based schools was conducted by Kurniati (2021); a study on flagship programs of *tahfiz* (memorizing the Qur'an) in junior high schools was conducted by Ismael, Muazza, and Sulistiyo (2023); a study on flagship programs of Islamic religious education in vocational high schools based on Islamic boarding schools was conducted by (Masduqi 2021). There has been no research that specifically examines the principal's strategy in making the bilingual flagship program a success. This study is very important because it does not only examine the principal's strategic steps but also looks at how the madrasa community builds a unique language environment. Mastery of two languages (English and Arabic) is very important for students to be able to compete in the era of globalization.

This study aims to analyze the principal's strategy in improving the quality of education through the flagship program at Madrasah Aliyah Bilingual Batu. The objectives are divided into three study focuses: (1) the flagship bilingual program, namely English and Arabic; (2) the strategic steps of the principal in making the flagship bilingual program a success; and (3) achievements and challenges of the principal in improving education quality through flagship programs.

METHOD

This type of research is qualitative with a case study approach. The researcher tried to examine the strategic steps of the principal in improving the quality of education through the bilingual flagship program. The location of this research is MA Bilingual Batu. The object of the study is the principal. To obtain accurate data, the researcher added teacher and student informants. Data were collected using observation, interview, and documentation techniques. The data analysis technique used descriptive analysis techniques with three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Sudaryono 2016).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Flagship Bilingual Program

The bilingual program at MA Bilingual Batu is a superior educational program that uses two languages as the language of instruction in the learning process. The languages used are English and Arabic. As can be seen from the name of the school, MA Bilingual, this program has become a characteristic, attraction, and excellence of the school since it was founded in 2010 (Sulistyowati 2023).

The bilingual flagship program is strengthened with additional activities, such as "English and Arabic Camp" and "English and Arabic Area". English and Arabic Camp is held every Thursday afternoon while training students' public communication skills in two languages. This activity is led by a language instructor recruited by the Al-Ikhlas Education Foundation through the recommendation of the principal. The language instructor is specifically tasked with providing language coaching for students in activities outside the classroom (formal learning) (Sulistyowati 2023). Meanwhile, the English and Arabic Area is a place and time for students to be required to speak English or Arabic. This is a program of the Intra-School Student Organization (OSIS) management. Students who violate are fined to pay

a predetermined amount of money. The fine money will go into the OSIS treasury (Marlina 2023).

The main objective of the bilingual program is to develop students' English and Arabic language skills (Sulistyowati 2023). However, other objectives to be achieved through this program are (1) improving communication skills, (2) improving critical thinking skills, (3) improving linguistic intelligence, (4) improving global insight, and (5) developing 21st-century competencies (Marlina 2023). Through this superior bilingual program, students gain several benefits, such as (1) improving cognitive skills, (2) improving career opportunities, (3) improving cultural understanding, and (4) improving academic achievement (Marlina 2023).

Principal's Strategy in Succeeding Flagship Programs

In improving the quality of education through flagship bilingual programs, the principal of the MA Bilingual Batu has strategic steps: (1) Establish a forum for channeling students' interests and talents, (2) form work teams, (3) establish and maintain communication, (4) improve teacher quality, (5) provide infrastructure facilities, (6) adjust the curriculum, and (7) evaluate (Sulistyowati 2023).

Establish a Forum for Channeling Students' Interests and Talents

A person's talents and interests are developed to achieve educational goals. This is because talent is potential that still requires serious and systematic development and training efforts to be realized. In other words, talent is the potential possessed by someone who is talented and does their work faster than someone less talented. Meanwhile, interest is a development process in combining all existing abilities to direct individuals to an activity that interests them (Elvida and Subaidi 2022). The importance of knowing talents and asking students to be provided with platforms and facilities, the first step taken by MA Bilingual Batu was to distribute a questionnaire about students' talents and interests. This activity is carried out to discover the potential that students have so that the madrasah will try to provide a platform for students to develop their interests and talents.

Form Work Teams

In the process of improving the quality of education through the flagship program, the principal of the MA Bilingual Batu school formed a work team that was given the task and responsibility of implementing the school's flagship program (English-Arabic). The formation of the work team is adjusted to the skills and competencies of the teaching staff according to their respective fields and of course, the teaching staff has the commitment and motivation to continue to improve and strive to develop flagship programs towards a better madrasah.

According to Siagian (Akilah 2018), staffing is one of the management functions that carries out the selection, selection, development, and use of human resources to achieve organizational goals effectively and efficiently (Ansah Ofei et al. 2021). Staffing is also known as a position-filling function which aims to obtain effective employees who will fill vacant positions in the company organization. The staffing principle directs the right employees to contribute to achieving goals in the management system. Every worker in the organization is expected to have full commitment to the organization, not just compliance with various employment regulations that apply in the organization concerned (Choi et al. 2021). In this

activity, the head of the madrasah determines the criteria for selecting work team members to carry out flagship programs that will be implemented. This determination of human resources is carried out by considering the teacher's area of expertise and motivation in developing madrasa's flagship program (Sulistyowati 2023).

Establish and Maintain Communication

The principal of the MA Bilingual Batu continues to strive to establish open communication with teaching and education staff and provide mutual motivation to maintain communication and commitment to continue to do the best for the madrasa (Sulistyowati 2023). The data is in accordance with the theory of the principal's communication skills play an important role in social interactions in the workplace because the principal has the task of guiding and assessing teachers, utilizing all the potential of the school, and implementing the school's relationship with its environment, and the principal has a role as a leader, namely developing, directing and motivating teachers (Wakini et al. 2021; Noorsanti, Zamroni, and Salehudin 2023).

Improve Teacher Quality

Improving the quality of teaching staff can be interpreted as activities that are being carried out by teaching staff in applying knowledge, knowledge, and skills to improve the quality of the ongoing process of teaching and learning activities and the professionalism of educational staff or to obtain something that has benefits for culture and education. So, teachers are obliged to do this according to the times. To obtain students who can compete on the international stage to make Indonesia a country with high competitiveness (Kawuryan 2021).

Educators have a crucial role in achieving success in improving the quality of education because they are at the forefront of transferring knowledge and skills to students. The Merdeka Belajar policy will change the mindset regarding the role of teachers in the teaching and learning process. Teachers no longer only act as transmitters of information, but also as facilitators in learning activities. In the role of facilitator, teachers have the responsibility to assist students in the learning experience, adapt the learning environment to facilitate an effective learning process, and help create a learning process that suits students' individual needs and preferences (Nurzannah 2022).

To face these new challenges, teachers need to be equipped with a holistic and sustainable quality improvement program for teaching staff. So the principal of the MA Bilingual Batu school continues to instruct all teaching and education staff, especially the work teams in the flagship program, to take part in various trainings and facilitate learning needs to increase their knowledge and competence (Sulistyowati 2023). Apart from that, the principal of MA Bilingual Batu also occasionally gives rewards to teaching staff who have a high work ethic and are loyal to the madrasa. In this way, the teaching and educational staff at MA Bilingual Batu can be motivated and continue to exist to face all new challenges in an increasingly advanced educational era (Feriandika 2023).

Provide Infrastructure Facilities

Processes in the education system are as important as instrumental input and environmental input. Everything will be a determinant in achieving output and learning

outcomes. Related to the above, management of facilities and infrastructure absolutely must be carried out in the education process. Management of educational facilities and infrastructure is tasked with organizing and maintaining educational facilities and infrastructure so that they can contribute optimally and meaningfully to the learning process (Isnaini et al. 2021). Facilities are equipment that is directly used. This means that facilities have an important role in supporting student learning activities because facilities are facilities and infrastructure that can support student learning activities both at home and school (Mulyasa 2011). Bearing in mind the importance of fulfilling the facilities, MA Bilingual Batu provides the infrastructure to students to improve the quality of education, namely with flagship programs offered such as adequate language laboratories, allowing students to hone their language skills by holding various competitions and courses and adequate and appropriate teaching staff with their fields and competencies (Feriandika 2023; Marlina 2023).

Adjust the Curriculum

The curriculum has an important role in advancing education in the country, of Indonesia. Rebuilding education by redesigning is the right step to take (Herlina 2018). MA Bilingual Batu continues to strive to develop and facilitate learning needs in implementing the curriculum. By continuing to make improvements from the implementation of previous curriculum results for further madrasa development and remaining guided by the madrasah's vision and mission. The role of the curriculum is very important in education. There are three important roles of the curriculum, namely conservative, critical or evaluative, and creative. These three roles need to be implemented in a balanced manner. Apart from having a role, the curriculum also has several functions, namely adjustment, integration, differentiation, preparation, selection, and diagnostics. Some of these functions are fully implemented by the curriculum. This function influences the growth and development of students, in line with the educational goals set by the relevant educational institutions (Aprilia 2020).

Evaluate

Evaluation is a systematic and ongoing process for collecting, describing, interpreting, and presenting information to be used as a basis for making decisions, formulating policies, or developing programs in the future. The purpose of the evaluation is to obtain accurate and objective information about a program (Haryani 2021). In the evaluation activities, the principal of the MA Bilingual Batu school continues to uphold the commitment to the vision, mission, and goals of the madrasah together with the teachers and looks at the results of academic and non-academic achievements that have been achieved, whether they have achieved the target or not.

Achievements and Challenges

Through this flagship program, MA Bilingual Batu has achieved several achievements, namely winning several city, provincial, and national language competitions. Becoming one of the madrasas that are trusted for visits by foreign students, such as Malaysia, Japan, and the United States (Sulistyowati 2023).

Although various achievements have been achieved in both academic and non-academic fields, the principal still faces several challenges in making this flagship program a success,

including support from various parties, differences in students' language abilities, and lack of cooperation between schools and homes (Sulistyowati 2023).

First, schools lack support from various parties, both government and community, in making the bilingual program a success. International competitions held abroad are still difficult to participate in due to funding constraints. There has been no government financial support related to participation in this international competition (Sulistyowati 2023). Moreover, the local community has not been able to be used as a good language environment for students. The community generally still uses Javanese in communicating (Feriandika 2023). The solution to this problem is to submit a proposal for financial assistance to participate in international activities and optimize language-strengthening activities outside the classroom. Unfortunately, the proposal for assistance has not received attention, and the announcement of the English-Arabic area has not been heeded by the community visiting the school (Sulistyowati 2023).

Second, there are differences in the language abilities of each student. Therefore, the principal continues to ensure the improvement of the quality of teachers so that they have various methods of improving students' language abilities (Sulistyowati 2023). Fun learning activities will attract students' interest to focus and be active in improving their language abilities (Tulung and Christianty 2022).

Third, lack of cooperation between the school and parents. Therefore, the school provides students' language ability records to parents every weekend as a joint follow-up material. Unfortunately, some parents have low educational backgrounds, so they are less able to motivate and help with language development at home (Sulistyowati 2023).

CONCLUSION

The bilingual flagship program is an educational program that uses two languages (English and Arabic) as the language of instruction in the learning process. This program is a characteristic and advantage of the school which is strengthened by additional activities, namely "English and Arabic Camp" and "English and Arabic Area". Language strengthening activities outside the classroom are supervised by language instructors who are specifically recruited for this task.

Several strategies were carried out by the principal of the MA Bilingual Batu to improve the quality of education through flagship program: providing a forum for channeling students' interests and talents, forming a work team, establishing and maintaining communication, improving teacher quality regularly, provisioning infrastructure, adapting and developing a curriculum that is adapted to the situation and conditions of the madrasah, and evaluating the program.

Several strategies implemented by the principal have borne good achievements, including MA Bilingual Batu having won several language competitions at the city, provincial, and national levels. The madrasa became one of the madrasahs that are trusted for visits by foreign students, such as those from Malaysia, Japan, and the United States. However, there are still obstacles in the field, namely support from various parties, differences in students' language abilities, and a lack of cooperation between school and home.

This study suggests that the principal establish better cooperation with all parties, especially parents of students, in supporting the flagship bilingual program. This study has implications for principals who must be able to motivate teachers to carry out learning activities or other activities outside the classroom in the form of games to attract students' interest in getting involved directly in the school's flagship programs. This study is still lacking in examining the solutions taken by the principal in facing obstacles to the flagship program. Therefore, it is suggested that further researchers focus their studies on obstacles to the flagship program and their solutions.

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Authors' Contributions

The first author, as the corresponding author, determines the title of the research. Together, the first, third, and fourth authors prepare the proposal, collect data, and compile the research report. The second author, as the supervisor, ensures that the research is carried out according to the method and is written according to the principles of scientific writing.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declares that there is no conflict of interest in this research.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the results of this study are available from the corresponding author.

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