STRATEGIES OF EXCELLENT MADRASAH PRINCIPALS IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE: AN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The school principal's leadership matters for students' learning and teachers' intrinsic motivation. Many previous studies have revealed that principals' instructional leadership plays a significant role in the success of schools; therefore, many school leaders apply instructional leadership in managing their schools. However, research on the use of instructional leadership in madrasah in Aceh Province is scarce. This study attempted to explore the strategies employed by two excellent madrasah principals in Banda Aceh in improving students' performance. Drawing upon the instructional leadership model, this study interviewed two principals of madrasah and 20 school teachers. Analyzed the data using Braun and Clark's method, this study showed that the two madrasah principals have to some extent, employed an instructional leadership model in the schools and proved to result in high student performance. However, they also collaborated with external support teachers from private learning centers to improve their students' performance outside school hours. They believed that relying solely on their teachers' ability was not convincing enough to maintain their excellent performance. Therefore, it can be concluded that the two principals of excellent madrasahs practiced instructional leadership in managing their schools.

Keywords: instructional leadership, madrasah, students' performance, school principals

1. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the term "excellent school", or in the context of this study "excellent madrasah", was first initiated by the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, Wardiman Djojonegoro, in 1994. The idea of "excellent school" was sparked because of a strong desire to create a school as an educational institution with a far-sighted vision and an insight into excellence (Buchari & Saleh, 2017). The Minister of Education and Culture hopes that there will be excellent schools in every province in Indonesia, so that there will be a distribution of knowledge, which will eventually create an accelerated increase in human resources (HR). Therefore, excellent schools do not aim to discriminate, but to prepare qualified human resources with an insight into excellence (Djojonegoro, 1998).

The term of "excellent madrasah" emerged because of the desire to create madrasas that have graduates who excel at the national and world levels in mastering science and technology and have good morals (Depag RI, 2004). In other words, the development of excellent madrasah is expected to be in line with the concept of developing superior schools to achieve superior educational output, which are not only smart but also have noble character. For this reason, inputs, educational processes, teachers and education staff, management, educational services, and adequate supporting facilities and infrastructure are needed (Buchari & Saleh, 2017).

In Indonesian history, madrasah was superior in practice and then manifested in three types of superior Islamic madrasah. As mentioned by Moedjiarto (2002), the three types of excellent madrasah are based on smart children, based on facilities, and based on learning climate.

First, the type of madrasah based on smart children only accepts and strictly selects prospective students who have criteria for having high academic achievement. The hope is that if the input is excellent, the output will be superior even though the teaching and learning process in that environment is not too special or even mediocre.

Second, the type of madrasah or Islamic school is based on facilities, which has a tendency to provide complete facilities to support teaching and learning activities. Typically, this type of madrasah tends to charge higher rates than the rates for madrasah in general.

Third, the type of madrasah based on a learning climate tends to prioritize a positive learning climate. Madrasah with this type is willing to accept and are able to process prospective students who become inputs even though they have low achievements, who are then educated so that they become high quality graduates. However, according to Moedjiarto (2002), this third type of madrasah is rather rare because it requires extra hard work to produce good quality graduates.

In the world of education, madrasah development strategy can be interpreted as an effort to plan and manage madrasah that function to direct and develop madrasah in achieving their educational goals. In order to carry out its ideal function, madrasah must have a future orientation in order to survive and be able to appear meaningful, in the midst of demands for mastery of science and technology and appreciation of religious values. Therefore, madrasah must be more serious about reforming the development of madrasah in a comprehensive and continuous and future-oriented manner (Sanjaya, 2006).

Furthermore, the provision of quality Islamic educational institutions is a community need and is one of the main objectives of the long-term strategy of education in Indonesia. There are several things that need to be done in order to realize madrasah quality improvement activities, namely: a) equalization of the commitment to achieving quality by all madrasah parties, b) the

existence of a special program to improve the quality of madrasah, c) an increase in madrasah administration services, d) effective school leadership, e) the existence of clear graduate competency standards, f) a good and broad network of cooperation, g) effective institutional governance, and h) creating a conducive climate and institutional culture (Syafaruddin, 2005).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 instructional leadership

The concept of instructional leadership has been widely discussed in a number of literatures, since the concept was developed by Phillip Hallinger and Joseph Murphy (1987). The concept of instructional leadership is interpreted as a personal characteristic of leadership practice which consists of behavior, actions and also involves practices that emphasize the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Instructional leadership refers to all efforts to encourage and support the parties involved in the teaching and learning process to achieve school goals and establish an effective school social system. Hence, excellent schools need to carry out instructional leadership because excellent schools emphasize quality or excellence in learning (Ahmad & Hussain, 2015).

Instructional leadership style consists of specific and general concepts (Ng et al., 2015). In a special concept, instructional leadership is defined as actions that are directly related to teaching and learning processes. For example, the principal makes direct observations in the classroom. While general instructional leadership is defined as teaching leadership as an act of leadership that does not directly influence student learning. For example, the principal creates an effective culture and timing in the school (Gaol, 2017).

Instructional leadership, in a broad view, includes all leadership activities that indirectly influence student learning such as school culture and scheduling procedures (Ng, 2019). Instructional leaders are illustrated as strong leaders who have successfully transformed their schools (Hallinger & Wang, 2016). The leaders set clear directions for schools and motivate their teams to achieve them. School directions with instructional leadership focus primarily on improving student academic outcomes. It is considered an aspect of leadership that has an impact on the quality of the curriculum and instruction delivered to students. This conceptualization recognizes that the principal as instructional leaders have a positive impact on student learning.

The first two tasks, namely framing school goals and communicating school goals are included in the first broad dimension, defining the school's mission. These two leadership practices emphasize the role of the school principal in establishing and articulating a clear vision of the school with a focus on enhancing student learning. This dimension was developed to reflect the principal's responsibility to collaboratively construct appropriate context-based visions; ensure that it is widely known by other school stakeholders; and ensuring those teachings and learning processes are aligned with the vision (Ng, 2019).

The second dimension consists of three leadership tasks: supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating curriculum, and monitoring student progress. This dimension assumes the involvement of school principals in supervising, monitoring, and evaluating teaching and curriculum-based activities in schools. The

principal's role is treated as the primary leadership responsibility in this model (Ng, 2019).

The third dimension consists of five leadership tasks: protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, and providing incentives for learning. Compared to the previous two dimensions, this dimension is broader in scope and purpose. The leadership function included in this dimension is considered a highly influential primary practice. This dimension points to the importance of creating and maintaining a school climate that supports practical teaching and learning and promotes teacher professional development (Ng, 2019).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Research Design

This research is qualitative in nature to understand policies and phenomena that occur in the field. This qualitative research will use a phenomenological design to analyze how the strategies of school/madrasah principals excel in creating and maintaining the excellence of the madrasas they lead and how far they reflect the instructional leadership model. Phenomenology examines phenomena of which we are aware of but have no detailed understanding, and seeks to express the meaning of our everyday experiences with a deeper understanding.

3.2 The Research Participant

The research data was carried out in two superior madrasas in Aceh, namely MTsN 1 Banda Aceh and MTsN 4 Banda Aceh. The two madrasas were chosen because both had the status of being excellent schools in Aceh when the research was conducted. Graduates from these schools are widely accepted in superior high schools. In addition, many of their teachers have high achievements at the regional and national levels.

The data for this study came from documents and interviews with principals and teachers at two superior madrasas in Aceh, namely MTsN 1 Banda Aceh and MTsN 4 Banda Aceh. This study used two main data collection techniques, namely document analysis and interviews. In analyzing the data, this study used two approaches, namely document analysis relating to the achievements of the madrasa and Miles and Huberman's approach, to analyze data from interviews by reducing or reducing data, presenting data, and verifying (drawing conclusions). In reducing data, the data to be analyzed is selected in the form of words, sentences, and expressions that are relevant to the problem under study. Furthermore, at the data display stage, the data that has been selected and sorted is displayed and analyzes the type of research method. At the verification stage, the authors draw conclusions from the results of the analysis on the use of qualitative research methods.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The strategy carried out by superior madrasah principals in the perspective of instructional leadership to improve student achievement can be explained as follows:

1. Build various strengths in madrasah which include having teachers who have competence based on teacher competency

test results, high dedication and commitment, having outstanding students, namely students who are born from a creative and effective learning process, developing learning resources that are not only teacher-centered, has a strong madrasah culture, the madrasah head is a role model in the madrasah, has high motivation to be able to compete and create close togetherness from the various components that exist in the madrasah community.

2. Strengthen madrasah leadership and management. Leadership is to influence, encourage, mobilize, direct and empower all madrasah resources to achieve educational goals in madrasah. While the management function is to plan, organize, implement and control the development of madrasas in accordance with the vision, mission, goals and objectives, and future-oriented.

3. Build good image of madrasah. To build imagery, there is an adage that must be used as a guide by madrasah, namely do a good job; do a good job; do a good job; and tell people about it.

4. Develop superior programs. The head of the madrasah examines and maps the superior programs that are being and will be developed by their competitors. This mapping is needed so as not to get stuck in the same superior program development. This mapping is able to determine the choice of superior programs by being different, being the first, being the best.

5.   CONCLUSION

The strategy carried out by madrasah principals excels in the perspective of instructional leadership to improve student achievement. Developing education in madrasah by implementing four strategies. First, the substantive strategy, namely educational institutions, need to present comprehensive programs. Second, the bottom-up strategy, namely educational institutions, must grow and develop from the bottom. Third, deregulation strategy, namely educational institutions, as far as possible are not bound by standard provisions that are too centralized and binding, in the sense that it takes courage to develop educational institutions that are out of the box. Fourth, cooperative strategy, namely educational institutions, need to develop a network the same, both with fellow educational institutions of the same level or with others at the regional, national and international levels.

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