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LEARNING INNOVATION MANAGEMENT FOR EXCELLENT CLASSES IN INDONESIAN ISLAMIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A MULTI-CASE STUDY

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ABSTRAK

Pendidikan menengah berorientasi Islam dituntut menghasilkan prestasi akademik tinggi sekaligus karakter dan kedalaman spiritual, namun program kelas unggulan dapat menimbulkan eksklusivitas, ketimpangan layanan, dan ketergantungan pada seleksi input. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana manajemen inovasi pembelajaran digunakan untuk mewujudkan kelas unggulan di SMA Qur'an Darul Fattah Bandar Lampung, SMA Al Azhar 3 Bandar Lampung, dan SMA Al Huda Jati Agung, dengan fokus pada konsep kelas unggulan, konseptualisasi inovasi, fungsi manajemen, dan implikasinya. Penelitian menggunakan paradigma fenomenologis dengan pendekatan kualitatif, desain studi multi-kasus, dan latar alamiah. Data diperoleh melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam dan kelompok terfokus, serta dokumen; informan dipilih secara purposif dan berkembang melalui snowball sampling. Analisis dilakukan pada setiap kasus dan lintas kasus melalui pengumpulan, reduksi, penyajian, verifikasi, dan perbandingan konstan. Temuan menunjukkan pola 'input menengah-proses unggul-output unggul' yang ditopang kurikulum diperkaya, pembelajaran berpusat pada siswa, media digital, moving class, full-day school, pengayaan, remedial, pembinaan, dan evaluasi berlapis. Disimpulkan bahwa keunggulan lebih ditentukan oleh kualitas proses yang dikelola secara terpadu daripada selektivitas input semata. Sekolah disarankan memperkuat kompetensi guru, pemerataan layanan bagi kelas reguler, integrasi pembelajaran spiritual dan digital, serta evaluasi program yang berkesinambungan; penelitian lanjut perlu menelaah dampak sosial-psikologis pengelompokan siswa dan keberlanjutan model pada konteks sekolah yang berbeda.

Keywords:
Learning Innovation Management; Excellent Class; Islamic Education; Student-Centered Learning; Enriched Curriculum

ABSTRACTS
Islamic-oriented secondary education is expected to produce academic achievement while sustaining character and spiritual development, yet excellent-class programs may create exclusivity, unequal services, and dependence on selection. This study examines how learning innovation management supports excellent classes at SMA Qur'an Darul Fattah Bandar Lampung, SMA Al Azhar 3 Bandar Lampung, and SMA Al Huda Jati Agung, focusing on excellent-class concept, innovation, management functions, and implications. Using a phenomenological paradigm, the study used a qualitative multi-case design. Data came from participant observation, in-depth and focus-group interviews, and document analysis, with informants selected purposively and expanded through snowball sampling. Within-case and cross-case analysis combined data collection, reduction, display, verification, and constant comparison. Findings reveal a shared middle-input, excellent-process, excellent-output pattern supported by enriched curricula, student-centered learning, digital media, moving classes, full-day schooling, enrichment, remediation, coaching, and layered evaluation. The study concludes that excellence is shaped more by the quality and integration of learning processes than by input selectivity alone. Schools should strengthen teacher competence, extend excellent learning services to regular classes, integrate spiritual and digital learning, and institutionalize continuous program evaluation. Further research should examine the socio-psychological consequences of ability grouping and the sustainability of this management model across different school contexts.

A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic-oriented secondary schools in Indonesia operate within a dual expectation: they are required to demonstrate measurable academic quality while cultivating religious commitment, ethical conduct, social responsibility, and readiness for a digitally mediated future. This combination makes the management of learning more complex than the delivery of curriculum content alone. Recent studies of Islamic education describe curriculum transformation as a process that must connect institutional identity, technological change, learner needs, and new pedagogical forms rather than treating innovation as the simple adoption of devices or fashionable methods (Lubis et al. 2022; Marjuni 2022; Assegaf, Zainiyah, and Fahmi 2022). In this sense, innovation is meaningful only when it reorganizes how schools plan learning, allocate people and resources, structure student experiences, and evaluate whether intended academic and moral outcomes are actually achieved.

The dissertation from which this article is developed begins from a practical concern that schools may become preoccupied with short-term indicators such as promotion, examination results, and competitive achievements while paying less attention to students' long-term learning character, responsibility, and social development. This problem becomes especially important in an excellent-class program. Such a class is designed to provide more intensive learning to students with strong academic potential, but the same arrangement can create an unintended hierarchy between excellent and regular classes. The original field observations recorded teacher comparisons between the two groups, different expectations toward students, and the possibility that an excellent class becomes an exclusive rather than inclusive learning community. Contemporary research on high-achieving and gifted learners similarly warns that differentiated provision is beneficial only when

instructional adaptation is educationally justified and socio-emotional needs remain visible (Ziernwald, Hillmayr, and Holzberger 2022; Raoof et al. 2024).

This tension suggests that the central question is not whether excellent classes should exist, but how they should be governed as part of an equitable school system. A recent study on excellent-class management in madrasah settings found that student-centered management can improve learning achievement when curriculum enrichment, teacher roles, and learning services are deliberately coordinated (Mawardi 2023). At the same time, evidence from professional development research indicates that teachers need sustained, context-specific support to translate differentiation principles into classroom practice; improved teacher knowledge does not automatically generate improved student outcomes without coherent implementation (Kahmann, Droop, and Lazonder 2022). The management layer therefore matters because it connects institutional intentions with the repeated classroom decisions through which students experience innovation.

Digital transformation adds another layer to this management problem. Islamic education research increasingly reports the use of e-learning platforms, digital modules, social media, multimedia, and other technology-supported resources to expand access and engagement (Firdaus et al. 2023; Marganingrum and Shahib 2023; Susanti et al. 2024). Yet technology integration depends on teachers' digital competence, pedagogical judgment, infrastructure, and institutional support. Studies of Islamic Religious Education teachers show that competence and implementation vary across settings, particularly where infrastructure and professional learning are uneven (Mintasih, Sukiman, and Purnama 2024; Reksiana et al. 2024). Broader reviews of secondary education reach a similar conclusion: successful information and communication technology integration requires curriculum alignment, training, maintenance, policy support, and a collaborative school environment rather than hardware alone (Msafiri, Kangwa, and Cai 2023; Yang, García-Holgado, and Martínez-Abad 2023).

The instructional dimension of innovation is equally important. Project-based learning, collaborative learning, varied assignments, discussion, performance tasks, and technology-supported activities can shift classroom authority from teacher transmission toward student participation. A meta-analysis found that project-based learning has a positive overall effect on learning outcomes and higher-order thinking, although effects vary by subject, group size, and implementation conditions (Zhang and Ma 2023). A systematic review of student-centered technology-supported learning likewise emphasizes learner agency, interaction, flexible access, and the purposeful use of modern technologies (Kerimbayev et al. 2023). In Islamic education, recent work has explored quantum learning, multiple-intelligences approaches, digital modules, and smart-classroom designs as ways of making learning more active and responsive (Zulkarnain et al. 2023; Khoeriah, Shohib, and Nubail 2023; Qurrotu'ain, Shohib, and Nubail 2024; Hafiduddin and Abdullah 2024). These studies support a view of innovation as a coordinated change in curriculum, pedagogy, media, learning time, and assessment.

However, innovation in Islamic education cannot be reduced to efficiency and academic acceleration. The three schools studied in the dissertation explicitly connect excellence with moral and spiritual formation. Current scholarship on Islamic character education reinforces the need to integrate religious values into the learning environment, routines, curriculum, and teacher-student relationships rather than

isolating character formation as an additional subject (Mua'lim 2022; Miftahuddin, Aman, and Yuliantri 2024). Curriculum innovation literature also argues that digital adaptation should preserve the normative orientation of Islamic education while making content and methods relevant to contemporary life (Kusno 2024; Fathurrohman et al. 2024; Judijanto, Akib, and Risnawati 2024). This creates a distinctive managerial challenge: the process must be academically rigorous, technologically adaptive, and spiritually grounded at the same time.

Institutional leadership provides the architecture for this integration. A systematic review of school leadership and teaching practice shows that leadership commonly influences instruction indirectly through teacher collaboration, professional learning, and teacher self-efficacy (Ninković 2024). Islamic education management research similarly highlights the importance of adaptive management, organizational learning, and innovation capacity when institutions face technological and social change (Shofiyyah, Komarudin, and Hasan 2023). Curriculum transformation studies in integrated Islamic schools further demonstrate that innovation becomes sustainable when it is embedded in program structure, learning methods, teacher capacity, and institutional routines rather than implemented as a temporary project (Nur Intan, Sirozi, and Karoma 2025).

Against this background, the study examines learning innovation management in three Islamic-oriented secondary schools in Lampung: SMA Qur'an Darul Fattah Bandar Lampung, SMA Al Azhar 3 Bandar Lampung, and SMA Al Huda Jati Agung. The research asks four interconnected questions: how excellent classes are conceptualized; how learning innovation is conceptualized within those classes; how the functions of planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation are enacted; and what implications the resulting management system has for learning, teachers, students, and school reputation. The article's central argument is that excellent-class performance in the three cases is explained less by highly selective intake than by an integrated process that converts middle-level input into stronger outcomes through enriched curriculum, student-centered learning, digital resources, extended learning time, differentiated support, and iterative evaluation.

B. METHOD

The study used a qualitative approach grounded in a phenomenological paradigm and a multi-case study design. The intention was to understand learning innovation management as it was experienced and enacted in natural school settings rather than to test a causal relationship among predefined variables. The three cases were SMA Qur'an Darul Fattah Bandar Lampung, SMA Al Azhar 3 Bandar Lampung, and SMA Al Huda Jati Agung. The sites were selected because they shared important characteristics: each operated an excellent-class program, combined the national curriculum with additional academic or religious enrichment, involved teachers in both regular and excellent classes, selected students on the basis of academic achievement and testing, and used extended-day learning arrangements. The design nevertheless allowed differences in group size, boarding arrangements, parental contribution, curriculum packaging, and school location to become analytically meaningful.

The researcher functioned as the key instrument and remained engaged with the sites for approximately one year to obtain a holistic and contextual understanding of the programs. Primary data were generated from words and actions, while documentary

materials functioned as supporting data. Informants were chosen purposively based on their knowledge of the excellent-class program and then expanded through snowball sampling. They included principals, vice principals, program coordinators, teachers involved in excellent classes, students, and school-committee representatives. No numerical sample size is imposed in this article because the source study organized participation around information-rich roles and case saturation rather than statistical representativeness.

Data collection combined participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus-group interviews, and document analysis. Observation covered classroom and out-of-class learning, teacher guidance, extracurricular activities, school environments, and visible institutional messages. Interviews were conducted face to face and, when necessary, by telephone; small-group interviews were also organized with teachers involved in excellent-class implementation. Documentary evidence included school profiles, visions and missions, regulations, organizational structures, excellent-class curricula, learning schedules, facilities, and records of school and student achievement. Combining these sources made it possible to compare what participants said with what the researcher observed and what institutional documents recorded.

Analysis was conducted in two stages. First, each case was analyzed individually through an interactive cycle of data collection, reduction, display, and conclusion or verification. Data were sharpened, categorized, condensed, and organized according to the research focus before being presented in an integrated form. Second, cross-case analysis compared and combined the provisional findings from the three schools. The study used a constant-comparative logic: emerging categories were examined across sites, similarities and differences were identified, provisional propositions were checked against case evidence, and the process was repeated until the cross-site pattern became stable. This approach enabled the article to distinguish shared management mechanisms from school-specific variations.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through prolonged engagement and triangulation. Source triangulation compared information from school leaders, program managers, teachers, students, and committee representatives, while method triangulation compared interview statements with observation and documentary evidence. The source study also emphasized detailed, systematic reporting so that readers could judge the transferability of findings to other settings. The present journal conversion preserves the substantive findings of the dissertation while condensing its extensive case description into an analytical narrative suitable for the journal format; contemporary literature published during the last five years is used to position and discuss the findings, not to replace the original field evidence.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings

1. The Excellent-Class Concept

Across the three sites, the excellent class was understood as an intensive learning environment for students with stronger academic potential and a pronounced interest in self-development. The common aim was not merely to accelerate coverage of conventional material, but to maximize student potential through deeper learning, character formation, structured competition, and access to additional support. Cross-

site evidence shows that the concept combines five recurring components: an explicit orientation toward academic achievement and character, an enriched curriculum, varied and technology-supported pedagogy, more complete learning facilities, and comprehensive assessment. SMA Qur'an Darul Fattah gave a particularly visible place to Qur'anic, Hadith, and religious learning; SMA Al Azhar 3 emphasized intensive academic learning and character; and SMA Al Huda combined academic and religious enrichment within its own institutional configuration. The differences were meaningful, but they did not alter the common architecture of the excellent-class idea.

The excellent-class concept also included student development beyond examination performance. Schools expected high achievement, but field findings described leadership, social skills, spiritual development, and disciplined learning as part of the intended profile. This broader conception is important because studies of gifted and high-achieving students warn that academic identification alone does not guarantee sustained achievement; motivation, emotional-social factors, family context, peer relationships, and school climate also shape whether potential becomes performance (Raoof et al. 2024). Likewise, differentiated instruction is most defensible when it expands opportunity and matches learning needs rather than simply labeling students as superior or inferior (Ziernwald, Hillmayr, and Holzberger 2022).

2. Conceptualization of Learning Innovation

The strongest cross-site conceptual finding is the formula described in the dissertation as middle input, excellent process, and excellent output. The schools did use selection procedures, but the theoretical contribution of the study is that superior outcomes were not understood as the mechanical result of already superior entrants. Instead, the management system aimed to transform students through process quality. This process consisted of innovation in learning approaches, curriculum, methods, media, and learning time. The proposition challenges a purely input-based model of excellence and redirects attention toward what schools actually organize after students are admitted.

In the area of pedagogy, the three schools reported a movement from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. The shift was expressed through more discussion, assignments, presentations, project work, collaborative activity, and opportunities for learners to engage with problems rather than only receive explanations. This direction is consistent with the positive learning effects associated with project-based learning (Zhang and Ma 2023) and with systematic evidence that student-centered technology-supported learning works best when learners are active participants rather than passive recipients (Kerimbayev et al. 2023). Islamic education research likewise shows that innovative models can reorganize classroom interaction and learning experience, as seen in quantum learning and multiple-intelligences approaches (Zulkarnain et al. 2023; Khoeriah, Shohib, and Nubail 2023).

Curriculum innovation was implemented through enrichment rather than wholesale replacement. National curriculum requirements remained the foundation, while olympiad science, language, religious studies, extracurricular programs, remedial activity, enrichment, and coaching provided differentiated pathways. This form of layered curriculum is compatible with recent Islamic curriculum scholarship that emphasizes contextual adaptation without abandoning the ethical and religious orientation of education (Kusno 2024; Judijanto, Akib, and Risnawati 2024). The field

data also show that curriculum enrichment was inseparable from allocation of time: all three cases used full-day schooling, and one site combined full-day and boarding arrangements. Extended time was intended to create space for deeper instruction, competition preparation, religious learning, and closer teacher-student interaction.

At the same time, the field study identified uneven teacher understanding of learning innovation. Some teachers continued to rely on conventional assumptions even when the school formally promoted student-centered and digital learning. This gap is significant because digital competence is not merely technical ability; it includes the capacity to select, adapt, and evaluate technology in relation to pedagogy and content (Mintasih, Sukiman, and Purnama 2024; Reksiana et al. 2024). Reviews of teacher digital competence and ICT integration make the same point: infrastructure has limited value if schools do not build pedagogical knowledge, continuous professional development, technical support, and curriculum alignment (Msafiri, Kangwa, and Cai 2023; Yang, García-Holgado, and Martínez-Abad 2023).

3. Implementation of Learning Innovation Management Functions

Planning began with the design of input, process, and output standards. Input design included student selection, although the exact criteria varied across schools. The source study records, for example, different report-card thresholds and the use or non-use of psychological testing in particular sites. Process standards included enriched curricula, information-technology-based media, moving-class arrangements, teacher qualifications, extended learning time, and differentiated academic support. Output standards were expressed through high learning achievement, olympiad performance, language and debate competitions, arts and sports achievements, and progression to favored further-study destinations. Planning therefore connected admission, learning architecture, and expected outcomes rather than treating them as separate administrative tasks.

Organizing translated the design into roles, schedules, subject clusters, and resource arrangements. The schools organized enriched curriculum areas around science, language, and religion; allocated teachers according to subject expertise; managed learning time through full-day schedules; and organized learning resources through classrooms, laboratories, and digital media. The dissertation describes an aspiration to place the right person in the right role and place. Contemporary leadership research helps explain why this organizational function matters: school leaders influence teaching not only through direct supervision but through teacher collaboration, professional learning, and conditions that strengthen instructional self-efficacy (Ninković 2024). Innovation management in Islamic education also depends on the institution's ability to coordinate people, technology, and values as a coherent system (Shofiyyah, Komarudin, and Hasan 2023).

Implementation occurred through several mutually reinforcing programs. Curriculum enrichment served students who had met basic competency expectations or chose specialized olympiad pathways; remedial activity supported students who had not yet mastered material; sharpening and coaching extended preparation for specific academic goals. Moving-class arrangements were used to improve the utilization of spaces and specialized resources. Full-day schooling provided additional time for olympiad, language, religious, and mentoring activities. The schools also used digital media and laboratories, although facilities and patterns of use differed. These

arrangements illustrate why a smart or digitally enriched classroom should be interpreted as an ecosystem of curriculum flexibility, learning resources, assessment, and teacher practice rather than a room containing technology (Hafiduddin and Abdullah 2024).

Evaluation combined formal tests, non-test techniques, and competition-oriented try-outs. The assessment repertoire included quizzes, drills, assignments, performance tasks, homework, mid-semester and end-semester examinations, oral questioning, observation, and repeated try-outs for olympiad and examination preparation. The frequency of exercises and enrichment was greater in specialized programs. This layered evaluation served at least three functions: checking mastery, preparing students for high-stakes or competitive events, and providing information for subsequent support. The approach is consistent with the study's management logic because evaluation feeds back into enrichment, remediation, and coaching rather than functioning only as an endpoint.

The management cycle was not identical in all sites. Differences included the duration of excellent-class participation, the packaging of curriculum enrichment, the use of fixed or more differentiated program groupings, and the degree to which excellent-class rooms received distinctive facilities. These variations are analytically important: they show that the cross-site model is a set of management principles rather than a single standardized package. Innovation can therefore be locally configured while retaining a shared structure of planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation.

4. Implications of Learning Innovation Management

The first major implication was the formation of a more integrated learning system. The excellent-class program linked enriched curriculum, full-day scheduling, moving-class organization, digital media, laboratories, enrichment, remedial support, coaching, and subject clustering. The significance lies in the interaction among these components. Recent curriculum-transformation studies similarly argue that innovation becomes educationally meaningful when curriculum, method, technology, and institutional management are aligned (Lubis et al. 2022; Nur Intan, Sirozi, and Karoma 2025). In the cases studied, integrated management provided the mechanism through which middle-level input could be developed into stronger performance.

The second implication concerned teacher standards. Excellent-class implementation increased expectations for teacher qualification, discipline, responsibility, guidance, and the capacity to move from simple transfer of knowledge toward the cultivation of learning culture and values. The dissertation describes this as a form of spiritual learning in which professional service is connected to moral and religious responsibility. Recent work on Islamic character education supports the importance of linking curriculum with lived ethical practice and relational modeling (Mua'lim 2022; Miftahuddin, Aman, and Yuliantri 2024). At the same time, the finding that not all teachers understood innovation uniformly indicates that teacher standardization should be developmental, not merely credential-based. Professional learning must help teachers translate institutional expectations into observable instructional practice, a conclusion consistent with evidence on differentiated-instruction professional development (Kahmann, Droop, and Lazonder 2022).

A final implication is equity. The excellent class creates concentrated resources and expectations, yet the school has a responsibility to ensure that regular-class students are not positioned as permanently less capable. Research on differentiated instruction emphasizes that advanced learners can be challenged inside heterogeneous settings when teachers have adequate knowledge, resources, and adaptive strategies (Ziernwald, Hillmayr, and Holzberger 2022). This does not invalidate specialized programs, but it does mean that their innovations should generate organizational learning for the whole school. The long-term benchmark of an excellent-class program is therefore not the permanence of a privileged enclave, but the extent to which its successful practices can improve learning quality across classes.

Analysis/Discussion

The cross-case findings support a process-based interpretation of educational excellence. A conventional selective model assumes that high outcomes follow from high input: schools identify already high-performing students, concentrate them in a special class, and then interpret their later achievements as evidence of program quality. The three cases complicate this logic. Selection remains present, but the managerial proposition emerging from the study is that middle input can produce excellent output when the learning process is deliberately strengthened. The proposition is consistent with recent excellent-class research that associates learning achievement with student-centered management rather than selection alone (Mawardi 2023). It also resonates with curriculum innovation studies in Islamic education, which treat program quality as an interaction among curriculum design, learning methods, resources, and institutional capacity (Assegaf, Zainiyah, and Fahmi 2022; Judijanto, Akib, and Risnawati 2024).

This process orientation has a practical advantage: it identifies levers that schools can actually improve. Intake quality is partly external to the school, whereas curriculum enrichment, teacher assignment, learning time, digital infrastructure, assessment, remediation, and coaching are managerial decisions. The study therefore relocates the idea of excellence from student labeling to organizational design. Such a shift is important in Islamic education because it makes excellence compatible with the principle that education should develop human potential rather than simply sort learners. Recent debates about gifted underachievement reinforce this point: even students identified as highly able may underperform when motivation, relationships, emotional-social factors, or environmental support are weak (Raoof et al. 2024). Conversely, students with less spectacular entry profiles may thrive in well-designed environments.

The student-centered dimension of the model also requires careful interpretation. A school does not become student-centered merely because teachers add discussion or digital slides. Student-centered learning changes who makes meaning, how tasks are structured, how feedback is used, and how learners connect knowledge to problems, projects, peers, and reflection. The field evidence of discussion, assignment, presentation, project activity, group learning, outdoor learning, and digital media represents movement in this direction, but uneven teacher understanding shows that the shift is incomplete. This is why professional learning is a core management function. Research on digital competence and differentiated instruction consistently indicates that teacher capacity must be developed through sustained, context-sensitive support

(Kahmann, Droop, and Lazonder 2022; Mintasih, Sukiman, and Purnama 2024; Reksiana et al. 2024).

Technology should likewise be interpreted as part of the process, not as evidence of innovation by itself. The cases used LCDs, computers, internet resources, e-books, e-libraries, and laboratories. These resources can expand representations, access, practice, and collaboration, but their educational value depends on the task structure and teacher decisions surrounding them. Reviews of secondary-school ICT integration identify curriculum alignment, infrastructure, training, technical support, and stakeholder collaboration as recurring conditions for success (Msafiri, Kangwa, and Cai 2023). Research in Islamic education adds the need to connect digital literacy with the aims and values of the subject rather than separate technological competence from ethical and spiritual learning (Marganingrum and Shahib 2023; Susanti et al. 2024). Digital modules and multimedia can therefore support excellent processes, but only when they deepen learning rather than merely modernize presentation (Qurrotu'ain, Shohib, and Nubail 2024).

The spiritual-learning component is one of the study's distinctive contributions. The cases did not define excellence exclusively through academic scores. Religious curriculum, character, discipline, service, and teacher responsibility were embedded in the institutional meaning of quality. Contemporary Islamic character-education research shows that values become formative when they are integrated into curriculum, routines, relationships, and institutional culture (Miftahuddin, Aman, and Yuliantri 2024). This helps explain why the dissertation's phrase academic excellence based on spiritual learning is more than rhetorical: it describes a management principle in which academic processes are expected to operate within a moral frame. The risk, however, is that spiritual language can remain symbolic unless schools translate it into observable practices such as fair treatment, collaborative learning, honesty in assessment, responsible technology use, and respect between excellent and regular classes.

The equity issue is therefore central. The original study records a paradox: excellent classes can raise school performance and public confidence, while also producing psychological distance between groups and encouraging teachers to compare excellent and regular students. This finding is not a reason to discard enrichment. Rather, it suggests that differentiation should be designed as a flexible continuum of support. Systematic evidence shows that high-achieving learners can benefit from differentiated instruction in mixed-ability classrooms, and that implementation barriers often involve teacher resources, confidence, and classroom conditions (Ziernwald, Hillmayr, and Holzberger 2022). A strong school-wide strategy would therefore preserve intensive enrichment for students who need it while diffusing project work, digital resources, enriched tasks, formative feedback, and high expectations to regular classes.

Leadership becomes the mechanism through which that diffusion can occur. Ninković (2024) shows that leadership effects on teaching frequently operate through professional collaboration and learning rather than direct managerial control. In the three cases, the organizing function already allocates teacher roles, curriculum clusters, schedules, and resources. The next step is to use those same structures for professional learning communities in which excellent-class practices are evaluated and adapted for wider use. This would transform the excellent class from an isolated flagship program into a research-and-development space for whole-school instructional improvement. Such an approach is also compatible with recent Islamic education management

research that calls for adaptive, innovative, and future-oriented institutional management (Shofiyyah, Komarudin, and Hasan 2023).

The findings also suggest that evaluation should move beyond the accumulation of test results and competition medals. The current system includes formative and summative tests, performance tasks, observation, and try-outs, which gives the schools a useful foundation. However, a process-based model of excellence requires indicators of student engagement, collaborative competence, digital literacy, spiritual-ethical development, transfer of learning, and the distribution of opportunities across classes. Digital learning research demonstrates that technology can help track progress and diversify learning evidence, but it must be used with clear educational purposes (Hamdi et al. 2024; Hafiduddin and Abdullah 2024). A broader dashboard would allow schools to detect whether high competition is strengthening learning or merely intensifying pressure.

Finally, the cross-site pattern is best treated as a transferable management logic rather than a fixed recipe. Because the schools differ in curriculum packaging, selection, program duration, group size, facilities, and religious emphasis, continuous improvement should preserve local identity while consistently strengthening process quality, spiritual grounding, and equitable learning services (Kusno 2024; Fathurrohman et al. 2024; Nur Intan, Sirozi, and Karoma 2025).

D. CONCLUSION

This multi-case study shows that the three schools organize excellent classes through a shared process logic: middle-level input can become excellent output when planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation build an excellent learning process. The process combines enriched curriculum, student-centered pedagogy, digital resources, extended learning time, enrichment, remediation, coaching, moving classes, and layered assessment.

Schools should strengthen teacher competence, review the program continuously, and extend successful innovations to regular classes so that excellence does not become permanent labeling. Future research should examine the socio-psychological effects of ability grouping and test the sustainability of the middle-input/excellent-process/excellent-output model in different school contexts.

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