

Islamic Leading School Innovation (Study of Strategies to Improve the Quality of Islamic Schools in North Sumatra)

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ABSTRACT

Educational innovation has the meaning of creating various new variations, or what can also be called renewal, in the implementation of specific learning activities. Innovation also provides a reflection of the modernization of an education system, which refers to the school system or a broader system, namely the national education system. The aim of this research is to critically describe the strategies developed by superior Islamic schools in North Sumatra to improve the quality of education in today's highly competitive times. The presence of leading Islamic schools in various regions of North Sumatra is a symptom that provides new hope in efforts to address the gap in educational quality among Islamic schools in North Sumatra. The research was conducted at three Islamic-based schools, namely, CT Foundation Superior High School, Darul Hasan Padangsidempuan IT High School, and Shafiyatul Amaliyyah Medan Private High School. The research was carried out using a field research mechanism, with a description of the findings carried out using aspects and components of qualitative research. The results of the research show that the three schools in this study, Darul Hasan Padangsidempuan Integrated Islamic High School, CT Foundation Deli Serdang Superior High School, and Medan Plus Shafiyatul Amaliyyah Private High School, have played a role in improving the quality of superior Islamic educational institutions in the North Sumatra region. One of the indicators is the use of various information technology-based applications and media in learning. Likewise with the use of foreign languages.

Keywords: Innovation, Education, Islamic Leading Schools, Quality Improvement Strategy

A. INTRODUCTION

Education is one effort to improve the quality of community resources. The main function of education is to prepare human resources to have the ability to face all the challenges they will face in their lifetime. In the 21st century, the national education system faces complex challenges in preparing quality human resources that can compete in the global era. One of the best ways to prepare quality human resources is through education, which is considered the main and most important vehicle for forming individuals with good abilities and qualities.

The dream of realizing a quality Indonesian society starts with the national education system. In order to achieve national education goals, the government has implemented various efforts to improve the quality of education at various types and levels. According to Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system, it is stated that national education functions to develop abilities and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation in order to make the nation's life more intelligent. Education aims 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, independent, and democratic and responsible citizens.

According to Makagiansar's view, there are seven paradigm shifts in society. First, the learning pattern that previously ended after school has changed to a lifelong learning pattern. Second, the focus of learning, which was originally only on mastering knowledge, has become a focus on a holistic learning system. Third, the relationship between teachers and students, which was previously confrontational, becomes a partnership relationship. Fourth, the emphasis on scholastic aspects shifts to an emphasis on values. Fifth, apart from illiteracy, there is also technological, cultural, and computer illiteracy as a challenge in the era of globalization. Sixth, the previously isolated work system has changed to a teamwork system. And seventh, exclusive and competitive concentration turns into a cooperative system (Al-Tabany, 2017). Islamic education has had a significant place in the national education system since independence. Mahmud Yunus, the religious supervisor at the teaching office in Sumatra, suggested to the head of teaching that religious education in public schools be properly structured and the teachers' salaries be the same as regular teachers, and the request was accepted (Tafsir, 1992).

The phenomenon that can be seen today in Indonesia is the rapid growth and development of superior schools with Islamic characteristics throughout the archipelago. Islamic flagship schools are a form of modern school or educational institution managed by private Islamic education institutions with the addition of Islamic values like those applied in

Islamic boarding schools. The dynamics of Islamization provide opportunities for Islamic educational institutions to become alternative schools of choice for parents. Before the 1990s, many wealthy Muslim families sent their children to Christian schools, which, since the Dutch era until now, were known for their good quality, and they even felt a sense of pride when their children attended Christian schools.

However, currently, Islamic Flagship Schools and Model Madrasas are popular choices for Muslim parents. One of the main reasons is the perception that superior Islamic schools and model madrasas are safer than state or public school environments. This may be due to the view that superior Islamic schools and model madrasas can provide education that is more in line with religious beliefs and Islamic values, as well as protect children from negative influences that are not in accordance with the teachings of their religion. Apart from that, the emergence of superior Islamic schools and model madrasas has also changed the paradigm that Christian schools are the only option for quality education. Now, many Muslim parents view superior Islamic schools and model madrasas as a valid alternative for getting a good education that is in line with their religious values.

Another impact of the emergence of featured Islamic schools and model madrasas is the improvement in the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia as a whole. With the existence of featured Islamic schools and model madrasas that have good educational standards, this encourages other Islamic schools to improve the quality of their education so that they remain competitive and can meet the increasing educational needs of the Muslim community. But keep in mind that each educational approach has its own advantages and disadvantages, including featured Islamic schools and model madrasas. It is important for parents to choose a school that suits their family's needs and values and to ensure that the education their children receive remains balanced between religious and academic aspects.

The phenomenon of Islamic schools in Indonesia, including superior Islamic schools, has a long history that began in the early 1980s and developed as the Indonesian economy improved. One of the Islamic schools that was its predecessor was the Al Azhar Islamic School, located at the Al Azhar Mosque in Kebayoran Baru, South Jakarta, which was inaugurated by Buya Hamka in the 1960s. The Al Azhar school became a model for similar schools that were established in the early 1980s. Several leading Islamic schools implement a policy of studying in the morning and returning home in the afternoon (full-day school) with a busy schedule, similar to public schools in general. However, there are also leading Islamic schools that facilitate their students with a boarding school system that adopts an educational pattern similar

to Islamic boarding schools, where students live in school dormitories under the care and supervision of the caretakers of their respective educational institutions.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational Innovation

The rapid progress and changes in social life and information technology have greatly influenced the world of education. This change can bring its own challenges to education. For this reason, all elements involved in the world of education are required to continue to innovate. Innovation in the world of education is innovation that is used to solve educational problems or achieve certain educational goals. the terms invention and discovery. Invention and discovery are two related concepts in the context of innovation. According to the English dictionary, invention (kb) is the result of a discovery or creation. Discover : finding, discovering, knowing: (Adi Gunawan, 2008). According to Indonesian Dictionary, the word inventive is defined as being good at creating or designing something that does not yet exist.

Etymologically, innovation comes from the Latin word *innovatio*. This means an update or change. The verb *innovo* means updating and changing (Rusdiana, 2014). the Big Indonesian Dictionary, innovation is defined as the introduction of new things—a new discovery that is different from an existing or previously known one (idea, method, or tool). So that innovation is an effort to introduce various new things with the intention of improving what is already used for the emergence of new practices both in methods or ways of working to achieve goals (Wijaya, 1999). Sa'ud concluded that innovation is an idea, practical matter, method, way, or man-made good that is observed or felt as something new for a person or group of people (society). The new thing can be an invention or discovery that is used to achieve certain goals or solve problems (Sa'ud, 2011). Principles of Educational Innovation Peter M. Drucker, in his book *Innovation and Entrepreneurship* (Tilaar, 1998), put forward several principles of innovation, namely as follows: Innovation requires an analysis of the various opportunities and possibilities that are open, Innovation is conceptual and perceptual, meaning that it starts from the desire to create something new that can be accepted by society, Innovation must start small. Not all innovation starts with big ideas that are out of reach for real humans, Innovation is directed at leadership or pioneering (Hoel & Mason, 2018).

Innovative Learning Model

Innovation in learning models involves the development and implementation of new approaches, methods, and strategies aimed at increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the learning process (Aljawarneh, 2020). Innovations in this learning model aim to activate

students, encourage critical thinking, build collaborative skills, and connect learning with the real world. By adopting this innovative approach, it is hoped that the learning process will become more interesting, meaningful, and effective for students. Some innovative learning models include:

1. Project Based Learning:

According to Peggy Heally in Mahtumi, Project Based Learning is an application of active learning. Simply put, project-based learning is learning that attempts to link technology with everyday life problems that students are familiar with, or with school projects (Mahtumi et al., 2022).

2. Problem-Based Learning

The term problem-based learning is adopted from the English term Problem Based Instruction. According to Deutch quoted by Aris Shoimin, the problem-based learning model is a teaching model characterized by real problems as a context for students to learn critical thinking and problem-solving skills and gain knowledge. Students are given challenges or complex problems to solve. They apply the knowledge and skills they learn to analyze problems, develop strategies, and seek creative solutions (Shoimin, 2021).

3. Collaborative Learning

This learning model encourages students to work together in small groups or teams. They learn through discussion, sharing ideas and collaborating in achieving learning objectives. According to Deutch (Feng Chun, 2006), collaborative learning is learning that uses small groups of students who work together to maximize their learning outcomes.

4. Technology-based Learning

The utilization of technology in learning, such as the use of software, applications, or online platforms, can provide wider access to learning resources, interactivity, and flexibility in the learning process.

5. Game-based Learning

This approach uses game elements to increase student motivation and engagement in learning. Students learn through challenge, competition, and immediate feedback. Based on the author's experience, inviting students to learn with games is very fun. Some applications that the author has practiced with students, such as Quizziz, World Wall, ProProfs, and Puzzle Maker, successfully make students focus on learning.

6. Design-Based Learning:

Students are given the opportunity to design or create a product, artwork, or solution to a specific problem. They apply concepts and skills in a creative design process. According to the author's experience with students, when designing by utilizing Canva for education, students are very eager to complete projects such as making posters, creating presentation designs, and several others.

7. Experiential Learning

This learning model involves hands-on experiences, such as field trips, experiments, or internships, which provide students with in-depth and relevant learning experiences.

Education in Islamic Perspective

Education according to Ahmad Tafsir is personal development in all its aspects. What is meant by personal development includes education by oneself, education by the environment, and education by others (teachers). All aspects mean that it includes the body, mind, and heart. In other words, education is guidance given to someone so that he develops optimally (Tafsir, 1992) Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System has also explained that education is a place or container to develop all the potential that exists in humans.

Some experts define education differently. First, according to Omar Muhammad al Toumy al Syaibani, education is the process of changing individual behavior in personal life, society, and the natural surroundings by teaching as a basic activity and as a procession between basic professions in society (Nata, 2016). Second, according to Hasan Langgulung, education is a process that has a goal, which is usually to create certain patterns of behavior in children or people who are being educated. Third, according to Ahmad Fuad Al Ahwaniy, education is a social institution that grows from the views of each community. Education is always in line with society's philosophy of life, or education essentially actualizes the philosophy in real life. Fourth, according to Ali Khalil Abul A'inain, education is a program of a social nature, and therefore, every philosophy adopted by a society is different from the philosophy adopted by another society according to its character as well as the forces of civilization that influence it, which are linked to efforts. upholding spiritual and philosophical values chosen and approved to obtain the comfort of his life. Fifth, according to Muhammad Athiyah al Abrasyi, Islamic education is not entirely religious, moral, or spiritual in nature, but this goal is the basis for achieving useful goals (Nata, 2016).

C. RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is field research using phenomenological research. If viewed in terms of the data obtained, this research is qualitative. Several steps were taken in collecting and obtaining information through the interview and observation stages by asking open-ended questions to participants and recording field notes, analyzing data based on themes and categories, and looking for general patterns, generalizations, theories, and themes (Salim & Syahrudin, 2012). themes or categories created, as well as presenting aspects of generalization or theory from literature and personal experience. The research was carried out at three (3) schools: Darul Hasan Integrated Islamic High School Padangsidempuan, CT Foundation Superior High School in Labuhan Deli District, Regency, and Shafiiyyatul Amaliyah Private High School Medan.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Suyatno (2009) in (Syafaruddin et al., 2016), in carrying out educational innovations in schools, it is necessary to have innovative teachers available. The creative attitude of innovative teachers is characterized by: openness to new experiences, flexibility in thinking, freedom in self-expression, appreciate fantasy, interest in creative activities, belief in one's own ideas and, independence in giving your own considerations.

Research conducted by De Jong and Hartog (2007) found that there are 13 types of leader behavior that spur the emergence of innovation. The thirteen behaviors are related to idea generation and the application of innovation ideas. These behaviors are as follows: provide examples of innovative behavior, provide intellectual stimulation, invite employees to share their knowledge, provides vision direction, provide consultation, delegating, support innovation, provide positive feedback on the idea of the early stages of innovation implementation and ask for consumer opinion to know them in innovation activities, Confession, providing prizes for innovative activities, providing facility support, monitoring innovative activities, give assignments. (Syafaruddin et al., 2016).

SMA Islam Terpadu Darul Hasan Padangsidempuan

Based on onservation result, The curriculum at the Darul Hasan Padangsidempuan Integrated Islamic High School has been modified in such a way as to focus on developing students' morals along with the development of science and technology as well as other general subjects. Darul Hasan Padangsidempuan Integrated Islamic High School prioritizes subjects that are contested in the National Science Olympiad (OSN). Integrated Islamic High School

Darul Hasan Padangsidimpuan sent participants in several subjects, namely astronomy, biology, geography, earth physics, chemistry, and several other subjects. Students participating in the selection for the National Science Olympiad are guided by a special team that accompanies them while participating in competitions in these areas where their learning locations are coupled with curricular and extracurricular programs, as well as grade 12 students who are given intensive programs in order to face school exams. Another innovation in the field of curriculum implemented at the Darul Hasan Padangsidimpuan Integrated Islamic High School is that the teachers of the Darul Hasan Padangsidimpuan Integrated Islamic High School are given in-house training in an effort to increase their digital competence.

Other activities include commemorating Islamic holidays, Islamic boarding schools, religious lectures, and Islamic arts activities where students at the Darul Hasan Padangsidimpuan Islamic Integrated High School took part in the PAI stage event held at the Padangsidimpuan, Ministry of Religion Office, which held the *Musabaqah Tilawatil* competition. Quran, *Musabaqah Syarhil* Qur'an, calligraphy, and Al-Qur'an study Plus the Cooking Day activity, where students compete to serve dishes made by the group during the post-semester exam. Meanwhile, in the boarding school activity program, aside from studying in class from morning to noon, coaching is also provided at the hostel.

SMA Unggulan CT Foundation

Based on the interviews and observations that the author conducted, it is clear that the CT Foundation's Featured High School has many advantages. underprivileged families, then forged at the CT Foundation's Featured High School to become children who excel amid the economic limitations of their parents, according to the CT Foundation's Featured High School's motto "Break the chain of poverty with education".

CT Foundation's Featured High School proves that four advantages, namely fighting spirit, toughness, intelligence, and skill, will be able to make CT Foundation's Superior High School alumni contribute to society in the future, not just participate. Another advantage possessed by the CT Foundation Superior High School is in the operational field of teaching and learning activities, where students, apart from face-to-face learning, also study online using the Schoology application, which has not been widely used by schools in North Sumatra. Students are no longer working on assessments or midterm and final semester exams with paper; they are already working directly in the Learning Management System, or LMS.

In an effort to improve the quality of education, many other innovations have been implemented at the CT Foundation's Featured High School in terms of teaching staff. Teachers

at the CT Foundation's Featured High School are required to make learning videos and upload them on each teacher's YouTube account, including uploading them on LMS Schoology. So that students can access teaching materials anywhere and anytime. In terms of students, they have their own school account to enter the LMS and do what the teacher instructs. Apart from that, CT Foundation's superior high school students are also required to do research, where research proposals are arranged in class X and the final results of the research are carried out in the final semester ahead of the final exams. The goal is that when they finish their studies at the CT Foundation's Featured High School, these students will already be trained in conducting research.

SMA Swasta Plus Shafiyatul Amaliyyah Medan

The Shafiyatul Amaliyyah Education Foundation (YPSA) is the only international school with Islamic nuances in Medan City, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The Medan Shafiyatul Amaliyyah Education Foundation has the motto "We Shall Create a Golden Generation of Discipline, Religion, and Smartness." The Shafiyatul Amaliyyah Medan Education Foundation takes care of educational institutions starting from kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, and high school. The results of the interview with Mrs. Dahliana, M.Pd., as Head of the Plus Shafiyatul Amaliyyah Medan Private High School and the research are outlined as follows:

Based on the results of the research, especially the results of interviews, observations, and document studies, researchers found that Shafiyatul Amaliyyah Private High School organizes their school with a distinctive Islamic feel, starting from the physical structure of the school. When entering the gate, what is visible is a magnificent 2-floor mosque as a place for students to pray in congregation and Dhuha prayers in the middle of school breaks. Every guest who comes is greeted kindly by security and then delivered to the person to be met. Several motivational pamphlets are displayed on several walls outside the building.

According to the author's observations, Shafiyatul Amaliyyah Plus Private High School has made efforts to increase teacher competence and student competence in order to improve school quality. Among these efforts is increasing teacher competence with digital mastery and participating in various webinars and workshops so that there are teachers who pass the selection of driving teachers and practical teaching, which is being promoted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia.

The unique thing about Plus Shafiyatul Amaliyyah Medan Private High School is that they have 3 programs that schools in general don't have, namely the Overseas Student

Activity program in the UK (City College Plymouth), the Homestay Program for class XI students, the Internship Program for class X students, and the Intercultural Development program, namely student exchange with foreign students. This means that there are foreign students who study at Plus Shafiyyatul Amaliyyah Private High School Medan, and vice versa, plus Shafiyyatul Amaliyyah Private High School students who study for 1 year abroad. This certainly confirms that the concept of developing and improving the quality of education at Private Plus Shafiyyatul Amaliyyah Medan High School emphasizes efforts to achieve educational quality and student quality that can meet or exceed market needs.

Specifically in the practice of Islamic attitudes and values and in the order of life at school, the author saw that, when he had the opportunity to attend midday prayers in congregation at the school mosque, apart from all the students, a number of staff and teachers also mingled in the congregational prayer row. Especially for female students who do not pray because they are unable to pray, they are gathered on the terrace of the mosque, supervised by female teachers who are on duty. Study activities and administrative work during prayer time are stopped and restarted after the lunch break. Apart from that, it is also about how female students dress; students wear Muslim clothing in their school uniforms. Likewise, in maintaining Islamic norms that are considered standard, there is a distance between male and female students.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and study of communication planning for educational council administrators in improving the quality of digital-era religious education in Aceh Tamiang Regency, it appears that this planning involves several important stages. First, the field mapping stage was carried out by collecting data on various schools, both formal and informal, in the area. This step provides the basic information needed to plan further steps. Second, communication planning is formed by considering the communicator's strategy, message, media, and communication. In this case, programs to improve the quality of religious education are carefully designed, including evening Qur'an recitation, Islamic character education, local content curriculum, guidelines for implementing Islamic law, and a child-friendly school approach. Various appropriate communication strategies are chosen, such as persuasive approaches, face-to-face communication, organizational communication, and Islamic communication. Third, the stages of the program to improve the quality of religious education are realized through activities that cover various aspects of the planned program. Socialization of these programs is also an important part of this stage, where communication based on

observation, monitoring, and community issues related to education becomes the basis for further development. In facing challenges, inhibiting factors such as program implementation that is not yet optimal, especially in terms of local content curriculum, are the focus. Education council administrators overcome these obstacles by communicating with authorities, collaborating across institutions, and being active in legislative efforts or policy changes.

On the other hand, the support of supporting factors, including the existence of qanuns and regent regulations that provide a legal basis, as well as the active participation of teachers, supervisors, school principals, and related institutions and agencies, also provide impetus in the implementation of communication planning. In short, the communication planning for education council officials in improving the quality of religious education in the digital era in Aceh Tamiang District involves structured steps, socialization of programs, and support from various parties who play an important role in efforts to improve religious education holistically.

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