

THE PRINCIPAL'S EFFORTS IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

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Abstract. The principal of the madrasah is the main point in optimizing the quality of education in educational units, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many challenges must be overcome by school leaders in facing this period, especially in school management. Therefore, this study aims to explore the efforts of the principal of the madrasah at MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen to improve the quality of education. This study is a descriptive qualitative study. Data were obtained entirely from the principal of the madrasah at MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen through interviews, observations, and documentation. Data were analyzed by involving four stages, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and concluding. The research findings show that the implementation of the strategy of the principal of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen was carried out with several efforts, namely: 1) technological infrastructure by evaluating needs, procuring equipment and infrastructure, training teaching staff, and socializing to students and parents; 2) online learning platform by identifying needs, consulting with teachers and staff, platform trials, financial considerations, and data security; 3) digital curriculum by analyzing needs, training teachers, developing digital materials, adjusting the curriculum, evaluating and updating, collaborating and developing content; 4) teacher-student interaction by scheduling online learning, monitoring teacher and student attendance, interactive and collaborative, and training and technical support; 5) health and safety by implementing health protocols, providing sanitation facilities, increasing awareness, hybrid learning, readiness to handle positive cases, collaboration with external parties, and routine health monitoring; 6) parental involvement by holding regular online meetings, parent training, forming parent committees, socializing learning programs, and supporting parent welfare.

Keywords: quality of education, efforts of madrasah principals, technological infrastructure, digital curriculum, teacher and student interaction.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of education is the most vital element in the structure of education (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022). This is because quality determines the certainty and decision of parents to send their children to one of the educational units. In choosing a place for their children to study, parents will assess the quality of education at a school first. Parents will look at the level of accreditation, the output of the school, teachers and educational staff, student exam results, facilities, and school achievements.

The quality of education at a school will be achieved if it meets several requirements for a quality degree for schools. According to (Díez et al., 2020), Quality schools will be seen from graduates, the use of developmentally appropriate curriculum, student learning activities, standardized assessment and evaluation systems, learning facilities, school environment, and support from the surrounding community. Quality schools will be able to carry out learning from planning to evaluation effectively (Habibi et al., 2024). The quality of school education can also be seen from the satisfaction of students which leads to the achievement of the expected educational goals (Murwaningsih & Fauziah, 2023; Sunarsi et al., 2020).

The realization of maximum education quality cannot be separated from the role of the principal/madrasah. The principal is a leader in an educational institution who is expected to bring change to the institution. The role of the principal is very central in managing the school from

planning to assessment (Marmoah et al., 2023). The principal must be able to make appropriate policies and breakthroughs to improve the quality of the institution (Sari & Marmoah, 2022). The efforts of the principal/madrasah can be very diverse, starting from planning that is different from schools in general to developing existing programs.

The central role of the principal is in accordance with the conditions in the field, precisely at MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen. The MA is a private madrasah that has outstanding achievements specifically in the field of religion. The excellence obtained cannot be separated from the efforts of the madrasah principal. However, general learning at MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen has not been running optimally, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic due to limited facilities in line with that period. Teachers have maximized the student learning process online. However, the process is still not fully effective. This is due to the limited ability of teachers to supervise students while they study at home.

Based on this problem, it is necessary to explore in depth the process of the madrasah principal's efforts to restore previously achieved achievements and expand into other general fields as a form of improving the quality of education at MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen. This study aims to explore the efforts of the principal of the madrasah at MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen in improving the quality of education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a field research with a qualitative approach. Field research is used because this method is considered very appropriate with the aim of exploring interrelated phenomena towards subjects in certain situations (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This research was conducted at MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen, Banyumas. Data were obtained from the main sources, namely the principal of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen and teachers.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were made by observing the activities of the principal and teachers at the research location. The results of the observation showed the efforts of the principal in maintaining the quality of education in his madrasah. Interviews were conducted by conducting oral questions and answers to the principal and teachers. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with the help of interview guide instruments. Documentation was used by taking written data that already existed in the madrasah, especially about the efforts of the principal to improve the quality of education. Data were analyzed using an interactive model (Miles et al., 2014). This model includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and concluding. Data reduction is done by sorting important data and deleting irrelevant data. Data presentation includes data presentation in various forms, such as narratives, tables, images, or diagrams. Concluding is done after the data is presented by making final conclusions from the research information as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion in this study is that the efforts of the principal of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen in improving quality are carried out by involving all school residents and external parties of the school. Efforts made include providing technological infrastructure, providing online learning platforms, updating digital curriculum, increasing teacher-student interaction, providing health and safety, and parental involvement. The principal is the main key in ensuring that these efforts run efficiently and effectively. These efforts also allow for open integration of technology in the curriculum that is in accordance with student needs.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The efforts of the madrasah principal to maintain the quality of the school are carried out in various ways. The main approach used is the John Dewey approach with the center of quality improvement on relevant and real experiences for students. This strategy can be manifested in the use of technology and cooperation between school residents. In line with John Dewey's theory, the principal of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen has made several efforts as follows:

1.1 Technological Infrastructure

MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen has realized the importance of technological infrastructure in learning in this digital era. Moreover, after the pandemic, teachers have become accustomed to using technology in learning. Initially, the school experienced obstacles, especially in terms of network and internet connection. Both of these things were unstable and slow, thus hindering learning. From this problem, the head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen took several actions, including:

First, evaluation of needs. The head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen said through an interview that they had conducted a technology needs audit. They also evaluated the availability of devices, internet connections, and digital skills of teachers and students. The head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen added that several things that had been mentioned were the basis for the success of online learning. The school also ensures that resources are allocated wisely. The head of the madrasah and the IT team have taken proactive steps to evaluate network and internet needs.

Second, procurement of equipment and infrastructure. This indicator is needed to increase network speed and reliability. The deputy head of the madrasah for facilities and infrastructure said, "We have updated hardware such as routers and switches to ensure adequate capacity in handling the increasing network load and updated the software to the latest version." These improvements have a direct impact on the effectiveness of online learning. In addition, the head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen also set a policy to expand server capacity in handling a larger number of users. This also has an impact on system resilience. This finding is in line with previous research. The addition of server capacity has benefits, such as the system becoming more durable against sudden additions of users, preventing a decrease in service quality, and ensuring good availability and performance in meeting online learning needs.

Third, teaching staff training. Training is carried out so that teachers adapt to online learning technology and ensure that teachers are skilled and knowledgeable enough in utilizing online learning platforms. The head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen stated, "we have prepared a series of intensive training that focuses on aspects of using new infrastructure, understanding virtual platforms, and adapting to technological developments." In addition, the madrasah also provides other technical support in optimizing technology. Teacher training related to the use of infrastructure and virtual learning platforms has enormous benefits. As found by previous research, teacher training is important for several reasons: 1) the availability of quality education, 2) the improvement of teachers' digital skills, 3) student involvement, 4) fostering student creativity through the use of

creative features in online learning platforms, 5) flexibility of learning, especially in emergency situations, 6) and improving the quality of madrasas (Dung, 2020; Trisnawati et al., 2022).

Fourth, socialization to students and parents of the school is a step taken by the head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen. He realized that the involvement of students and parents is very important in the success of online learning. The Madrasah has conducted intensive socialization and online meetings with parents. The Madrasah explained about the infrastructure improvements that have been carried out. Parents also responded positively to the activity. This is in accordance with the opinion of experts who say that infrastructure improvements help students gain confidence and comfort in learning (Marlena et al., 2022; Marmoah et al., 2019). In addition, socialization to parents is also a form of transparency of the madrasah with their commitment to maintaining the quality of learning and education in their madrasah.

1.2. Online Learning Platform

The Head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen has given assignments and selected online learning platforms according to the needs and conditions of the school. There are several things that the Head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen has done to realize this, namely:

First, identifying the special needs of the school, such as the ability to organize online classes, the availability of learning recordings, and online discussion rooms. In an interview, the Head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen said, "we realize that we need to organize online classes effectively, ensure the availability of learning recordings, and create online discussion rooms that can support interaction between teachers and students." The Head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen has also formed an internal team including teachers, Administration staff, and IT. They are tasked with making a list of special school needs, such as infrastructure and teacher training. The Head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen feels that teacher training is very important so that it is included in the list of special programs. The available platform is certain to encourage teachers and students to discuss easily through questions and answers, discussions, and other interactive activities.

Second, consultation with teachers and staff has been conducted by the head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen as a form of obtaining input and suggestions on preferences and experiences using online learning platforms. Through interviews, the head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen stated,

"I openly discussed the challenges faced by the school and gave them the opportunity to speak. We also compiled a list of structured questions to ensure that every aspect was covered, such as their preferences for online learning platforms and the obstacles they faced. Some positive experiences with the platform were also conveyed by them. We really appreciate all the input and finally we decided to adopt an online learning platform that is friendly and easily accessible to teachers and students."

Third, the platform trial was conducted using several platforms, such as zoom, google meet, Microsoft teams. The platform was used to ensure that learning continued to run smoothly and effectively. Overall, the platform trial provided valuable insights. The school remains open to improving and striving for the best online learning experience for students. In addition, the head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen also ensured that the video quality, connection, and interactivity of the platform were adequate. From the results of observations, the learning experience of teachers during online learning was greatly assisted when they got a good connection without interruption. In line with that, the interactivity of learning was also getting better. The head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen stated that the interaction between teachers and students had run optimally during the platform trial. This is a good opportunity for teachers and students to learn using technology.

Fourth, the head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen said that they also consider finances. Through the results of the interview, the head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen said, "one of the steps we took was to make careful financial considerations. Cost analysis is important in our considerations. We also evaluate the platforms used and ensure that costs are within budget." Schools continue to look for free options specifically for educational institutions. In addition, schools prioritize the use of

funds for the most urgent and strategic needs, while revising the budget that focuses on developing online learning.

Analysis of the cost of using a learning platform is important because of several advantages obtained by schools. These advantages include: 1) financial efficiency as a form of providing the best value according to needs and preventing waste; 2) quality of learning as a form of providing a quality learning experience; 3) availability of resources as a form of technical support and system updates; and 4) evaluation of return on investment as a form of assessment of the existence of investment/added value from using an online learning platform with the costs incurred (Al-Busaidi & Al-Muharrami, 2021).

Fifth, the head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen ensures data security and privacy for each platform. The platform chosen is zoom. This decision takes into account adequate features and good responses from teachers and staff during the trial. In an interview, the head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen said, "we have ensured the security and privacy of our students and teachers, such as evaluating data encryption so that personal information is not easily accessed by unauthorized parties. Login security and protection against cyber attacks are our main focus." In addition, it was also conveyed that the school ensures that the platform has a clear Privacy Policy and regulations. The school also has a special team responsible for monitoring the security and privacy policies that have been determined. The zoom platform has many advantages. As previous findings show, zoom has proven itself as a catalyst for successful online education, such as affordability and accessibility (Namboodiri, 2022). Zoom opens the door to education without physical limitations. Zoom also provides the flexibility needed such as the availability of learning recordings and archives that students can use at any time (Zulu et al., 2021). The drag and drop functionality, layout, and navigation of the zoom application easily help in reducing technological barriers. Zoom features also provide facilities for student interaction and active participation through learning dialogues, as well as creating a dynamic learning environment.

1.3. Digital Curriculum

The Principal of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen is aware of the importance of adjusting learning in digital format. Like other departments, the school also conducted a needs analysis to understand the demands of online learning and identify essential materials effectively. The Principal of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen stated, "we have conducted a survey to understand the internet access, hardware and software available in each home. We also analyzed our curriculum in depth."

In addition, teacher training is also a focus of School Improvement. This is because teacher skills in teaching online will affect the quality of learning. The digital curriculum provides more flexible access for students and allows them to actively learn without having to be in class. Embedding technology in the curriculum can create a dynamic learning experience that is in accordance with the demands of the times. The academic team has collaborated with teachers to develop materials into digital formats.

The development of digital materials is a relevant solution in this digital era. Through collaboration between the academic team and teachers, learning materials can still be innovated. In addition, the principal and vice principal for the curriculum have also adjusted the learning sequence and set priorities for materials that are easily accessible online. Adjustments are made to ensure the smooth running of the learning process and reduce the negative impacts of online learning.

Furthermore, the head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen also conducted periodic evaluations of the effectiveness of digital materials and student responses. He also collected feedback for teachers and students as a form of renewal. Experts say that evaluation is not just a formality, but a commitment so that students can understand the material optimally. Collaboration and content development have also been carried out by MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen. This encourages collaboration between teachers and content creators to create innovative learning resources. In addition, the head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen also routinely monitors and supports technology for teachers and students. This is an effort to monitor the availability of technology in schools. Curriculum adaptation is a way

to improve the quality of online learning, student participation, and teacher ability to manage classes (Hidayah et al., 2022).

1.4. Teacher and Student Interaction

The implementation of online learning has ensured the existence of learning interactions. The Head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen has ensured that there is interaction between teachers and students by issuing policies, namely: 1) scheduling online learning regularly, 2) monitoring teacher attendance online, 3) monitoring student attendance automatically and online, 4) providing interactive and collaborative activities, and 5) training and technical support. In the observation, the Head of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen ensured that online learning sessions were well scheduled and provided an effective and interactive learning experience.

1.5. Health and Safety

As a leader, the principal of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen will continue to prioritize the health of the school community. The principal's efforts to optimize the health and safety of the school community are manifested in the form of: 1) the availability of school sanitation facilities, such as hand washing facilities and daily classroom cleaning; 2) increasing awareness in the form of banners, leaflets, and announcements in the school environment; 3) hybrid learning (online and offline); 4) collaboration with external parties such as local health centers; 5) routine health monitoring by health supervisors. These steps were taken by the principal of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen as a form of anticipation of the spread of disease between school residents and a response to the post-pandemic situation.

The impact is a healthier and safer learning environment for the school community. The availability of adequate facilities is also a way to deal with health emergencies (Shah et al., 2020). In addition, the campaign is a way to raise awareness among school residents so that they obey school rules. The campaign is also a long-term investigation in creating a productive learning environment. Collaboration with external parties provides benefits in the form of access to the latest health information that is important for schools to have in determining school policies. These efforts are also a force for improving the quality of learning and emotional support needed to overcome the psychological impact after the pandemic is over.

1.6. Parental Involvement

The principal's efforts to involve parents are manifested in the form of regular online meetings between teachers and parents. Teachers provide new information about students' learning progress. The principal of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen also invites discussions about homework and learning strategies that can be applied at home. The school also holds online training for parents so that they understand the best way to support their children's learning at home. The training is in the form of providing guidance on using the online learning platform. This training session can help parents understand their role and provide more effective support for their children.

The principal of MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen has also formed a committee of parents of students who are active in designing learning policies and providing constructive input. The committee is a forum for parents to share experiences and support. With the cooperation between schools and parents, the resulting learning policies can be right on target and relevant to the real needs of students.

The socialization of learning programs is also always carried out by MA Ma'arif NU 1 Kemranjen. This socialization is a relevant and effective strategy to maintain transparency and trust in the school. Parents are educational partners so this process is needed to accommodate questions and clarifications with parents. In line with this finding, the existence of this socialization also provides information for parents to know the progress of students' learning, such as their learning achievements (Susiani et al., 2022). The school also provides awards in the form of certificates to parents of students. These efforts reflect the school's commitment to involving the entire educational community in improving shared welfare.

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