



Research Paper

Strategic Management of the Madrasah Head in Optimizing the Tahsin and Tahfidz Program: A Case Study at MDTA Al-Ikhlas Damsari

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how the head of a madrasah implements strategic management to optimize the tahsin (Qur'anic recitation improvement) and tahfidz (Qur'an memorization) program at MDTA Al-Ikhlas Damsari. The study used a qualitative case study design, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that the madrasah head systematically performs the functions of planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating to improve the quality of the tahsin and tahfidz program. The strategies implemented include a tiered program structure by grade level, the assignment of dedicated teachers, the use of the Qiroati and Yanbu'a methods, a daily "one day one verse" target, and routine monitoring of students' progress through achievement cards, promotion examinations, and an annual khotmil Qur'an ceremony. The tahsin program has achieved its targets, while the tahfidz program still requires strengthening because some students need further reinforcement of their memorization. In conclusion, the strategic management implemented by the madrasah head contributes significantly to optimizing the tahsin and tahfidz program and to improving students' Qur'an reading and memorization skills. These findings have important implications for the management of madrasahs seeking to improve the quality of Qur'an-based education.

Keywords: Strategic Management, Madrasah Head, Tahsin, Tahfidz

1. Introduction

Islamic education aims to develop individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also possess deep spiritual qualities and good character. One significant way to build such religious character is through Qur'an memorization programs. However, the success of these programs depends heavily on efficient management and organized support from various parties [1], [2]. Education in Indonesia has entered the era of regional autonomy, or educational decentralization, in which school heads and education managers hold broad authority to manage their institutions.



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Schools must therefore adopt strategies to attract public interest, and the tool for formulating appropriate strategies is strategic management. Evidence from public organizations shows that strategic planning has a positive effect on organizational performance [3].

One of the key elements in implementing strategic management is the school head. Strategic management guides educational institutions in formulating well-organized program strategies, and the head's skill in determining policies strongly influences the prevention of problems and the improvement of quality. The madrasah head has a significant influence on all aspects of management in the institution, including strategic management, and is responsible for guiding teachers, managing all organizational resources, and working with teachers to educate students in order to achieve educational goals [4], [5]. The managerial activities of a madrasah head include (a) planning, namely setting programs at the end of each year before the new academic year in line with the goals of the institution while prioritizing noble character (*akhlakul karimah*); (b) organizing, namely dividing tasks according to established job descriptions; (c) actuating, in which the head optimizes their duties and functions by acting promptly; and (d) controlling, in which the head supervises the responsibilities of teachers and staff, monitors the learning process, evaluates the curriculum, and ensures compliance with school policies [6].

A professional madrasah head is able to manage and develop the madrasah comprehensively, making the head's position highly strategic in realizing the madrasah's vision, mission, and goals. In carrying out their duties, professional heads apply various strategies to improve quality and produce good outputs and outcomes [7]. Heads must also respond to problems such as limited resources, a lack of continuous training, and the need for a holistic approach to teacher development [8]. Beyond leading the institution, the head determines and implements the religious culture of the madrasah through planning, partnerships, habituation, organizing, and adequate facilities, as well as direction, supervision, and evaluation [9].

In recent years, tahfidz (Qur'an memorization) programs in both formal and non-formal educational institutions have been well received by the public. Institutions that offer special tahfidz programs attract attention and increase parents' confidence in enrolling their children. Memorizing the Qur'an from an early age is believed to strengthen students' memory, and tahfidz programs are no longer limited to Islamic schools and pesantren but have also been adopted by public and private formal schools [10]. Many institutions have made the tahfidz program their flagship program, and the number of prospective students wishing to join such programs continues to grow [11].

The *Madrasah Diniyah Takmiliyah Awaliyah* (MDTA) is a non-formal Islamic educational institution that provides basic religious education equivalent to the elementary school (SD) or *madrasah ibtidaiyah* (MI) level over four years, complementing the education received by children enrolled in formal schools [12]. MDTA Al-Ikhlas was selected as the research site because it has been accredited with an A grade and has several achievements and flagship programs, the implementation of which involves the madrasah head and its teachers (*asatidz* and *asatidzah*). Previous studies have examined the management of tahfidz programs in schools and pesantren [1], [2], [13], but studies on how the head of a non-formal MDTA applies strategic management to Qur'anic programs remain limited. This study therefore examines how the head of MDTA Al-Ikhlas Damsari implements strategic management to optimize the tahsin and tahfidz program.

Strategic Management in Madrasahs

Strategic management can be understood as the combination of knowledge and skills used to formulate, implement, and evaluate strategic decisions that help an organization achieve its goals. It integrates environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and evaluation and control, and it emphasizes the assessment of opportunities and threats in the

external environment in relation to the organization's strengths and weaknesses [3]. In madrasahs, strategic management involves all stakeholders, including the head, teachers, education staff, and the community. Strategies are implemented through flagship programs tailored to the needs of the madrasah, such as tahfidz, tilawah, and the development of madrasah culture, and are supported by efforts to improve teacher professionalism and motivation [8], [9].

The Madrasah Head as Leader and Manager

The madrasah head plays an important role as the leader responsible for the success of the educational process and administration of the madrasah [8]. The head's task as a leader is to help teachers develop their abilities to the fullest and to create a healthy madrasah climate that encourages teachers, administrative staff, students, and parents to unite their intentions, thoughts, and actions in effective cooperation. The quality of a madrasah is often seen as a reflection of the quality of its head's leadership, which is regarded as a key factor in the success or failure of an organization [6]. Research on school leadership confirms that principals' behaviors, particularly instructional management, internal relations, and the development of teachers, are associated with better teacher and student outcomes [4], [5], and that the effectiveness of these behaviors depends on the context in which leaders work [14]. Transformational leadership, in which leaders inspire and motivate followers to reach their full potential and adapt to change, combined with instructional leadership, has been shown to contribute to improved student outcomes [7].

The Tahsin and Tahfidz Program

To obtain the virtues and benefits of reading the Qur'an, it is important to read it properly by following the rules of *tajwid* and improving the quality of recitation (*tahsin tilawah*). *Tajwid* refers to the rules for pronouncing letters from their points of articulation with their proper characteristics, while *tahsin* is the practical application of those rules to improve and perfect Qur'anic recitation [15]. The benefits of the tahsin method include a better understanding of the pronunciation of *hijaiyah* letters, more orderly and fluent recitation, and the refinement of every verse recited [16]. Tahfidz programs, in turn, require discipline, attention, and memory, and help shape students' character because students learn not only to read and memorize the Qur'an but also to internalize its moral teachings [17]. The success of tahfidz programs requires adequate resources and good management in planning, implementation, and evaluation, and because maintaining existing memorization is as important as adding new verses, students must routinely repeat their memorization in front of their teachers [1], [13].

2. Method

Research Design

This study used a qualitative case study design. A case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident [18]. In this study, the case is the strategic management of the madrasah head in developing the tahsin and tahfidz program at MDTA Al-Ikhlâs, a non-formal Islamic educational institution located on Jl. Raya Damsari, Paguyangan, Brebes Regency, Central Java.

Data Sources and Collection

The data consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from the statements of informants regarding the role of the madrasah head in the strategic management of the tahsin and tahfidz program. The informants were the madrasah head and several teachers (*asatidz* and *asatidzah*), who were involved in developing the program. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, following the types of data sources recommended for

case study research [19]. Secondary data included madrasah documents, such as program structures, schedules, and students' achievement cards.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in six stages: (1) organizing and managing the data; (2) reading the data and making memos; (3) describing the case and its context; (4) classifying the data into categories and patterns; (5) interpreting the data; and (6) representing the findings in narrative form [19]. The use of several informants and three data collection techniques allowed the findings to be cross-checked, thereby strengthening their credibility [20]. The findings were then described and related to relevant theories and previous studies.

Research Ethics

The informants were informed of the purpose of the study and participated voluntarily. In this article, they are identified only by their roles in the madrasah.

3. Result and Discussion

Profile of MDTA Al-Ikhlas Damsari

MDTA Al-Ikhlas is a non-formal educational institution located on Jl. Raya Damsari, Paguyangan, Brebes, and is known for its commitment to quality education based on Islamic values. The madrasah is part of a pondok pesantren and has three flagship programs: tahsin, tahfidz, and *ilmu alat* (the study of classical Islamic texts, similar to that in pesantren). Its most prominent characteristics lie in the tahsin and tahfidz programs. In addition to leading the madrasah, the madrasah head also serves as the principal of SMP BU Bumiayu, an Islamic institution under the same foundation, dividing his time between serving as school principal in the morning and as madrasah head in the afternoon. In both roles, the head manages the institution so that students comply with the rules, creates a comfortable working environment, provides appropriate rewards and sanctions, and motivates teachers, staff, and students to improve performance and achievement.

Strategic Planning: A Tiered Program Structure

The madrasah head designed the tahsin and tahfidz program in stages according to the students' age and grade level. The program begins in the Qur'an education park (*Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an*, TPQ), which accepts children aged 6–7 years, who are introduced to the *hijaiyah* letters. The madrasah then admits students from the second grade of elementary school, aged around 8 years. In grades 1 and 2 of the *diniyah*, students learn to read and write the Qur'an (*Baca Tulis Al-Qur'an*, BTQ), while in grades 3 and 4, the tahsin and tahfidz program is applied, along with the study of five basic classical texts. The madrasah head explained, "For grades 1 and 2, we require BTQ, and the meaning is still written in Latin script, that is, in Indonesian, but it is different for grades 3 and 4, where students are already required to read the *hijaiyah* letters, followed by reading and memorizing the Qur'an." The learning of *hijaiyah* letters aims to enable students to recognize, name, and pronounce the 29 *hijaiyah* letters correctly and to understand the vowel marks (*harakat*) that accompany them.

The program also sets clear long-term targets. As the madrasah head explained, "Because the program at this institution lasts for four years, students are required to complete (*khatam*) the Qur'an by reading (*binnadzri*) at least once, which will be celebrated at the beginning of the month of Muharram, both in the *khotmil Qur'an* event for TPQ students and for the madrasah."

Organizing: Curriculum Time and Teacher Assignment

Several subjects are compulsory at the madrasah, such as the history of Islamic civilization, *aqidah* and *akhlak*, Qur'an and Hadith, *tajwid*, and *fiqh*. However, each of these subjects is taught for only one hour, while the following hour is devoted to the tahsin and tahfidz program. Students are given a special learning schedule and designated teachers for memorization. For grades 1 and 2, memorization is carried out through a deposit system (*setoran*), in which students recite their memorization to the teachers, while for grades 3 and 4, students are required to read and recite their memorization to their class teachers every day.

Actuating: Learning Methods and Daily Targets

The madrasah implements two methods for learning to read the Qur'an. The first is the Qiroati method, developed by KH. Dachlan Salim Zarkasyi in Semarang, which teaches correct and measured (*tartil*) recitation in accordance with the rules of *gharib* and *tajwid*, and which is followed by the Iqro' method. The Qiroati books used at the madrasah consist of volumes 1 to 10. Students with high ability and motivation can complete them one or two years faster than their peers, with the target of completion by grade 4 of the *diniyah*. The second is the Yanbu'a method, which enables students who cannot yet spell to read directly, quickly, and correctly in accordance with the rules of pronunciation, using the Uthmani script (*rasm Utsmani*) and the punctuation and pause marks found in the *mushaf* [21]. The Yanbu'a materials consist of five volumes for reading, two volumes on *gharib* and *tajwid*, and one volume for memorization. Changing from one Yanbu'a book to the next presents its own challenges because the content of each volume differs.

For memorization, the madrasah applies the rule of "one day one verse," in which each student is given a daily task to memorize or improve their recitation so that they do not feel burdened, especially since they also attend formal schools and the pesantren. Students first memorize the *munjiyat* surahs, namely selected surahs that are often recited in daily life, such as Al-Kahf, Ar-Rahman, Al-Waqi'ah, Yasin, and Al-Mulk. After these have been deposited, they continue with Juz 30, from Surah An-Naba' to Surah An-Nas.

Controlling and Evaluation

Students' progress is monitored using an achievement card, which records the extent of each student's memorization and fluency, so that teachers can decide whether a student may continue to the next verse or should repeat the current one. Students who have completed Qiroati volumes 1–10 or Yanbu'a volumes 1–5 take a Qur'an promotion examination. At the beginning of each year, in the month of Muharram, the madrasah holds a *haflah* to mark the completion of a year of study, consisting of a *khotmil Qur'an* ceremony and a celebration of the Islamic New Year on 1 Muharram. This event also introduces students to the Islamic calendar and marks their achievements and promotion to the next Qur'an level, which is recognized with a certificate signed by the foundation and the madrasah head. The madrasah also awards trophies to the best students so that they feel proud and appreciated for their efforts and are motivated to complete the program. Teachers' assessment also considers students' manners and conduct.

At present, the program's success lies mainly in tahsin, while the tahfidz program has not yet reached its full potential, because daily Qur'an learning activities are hampered by students who still need reinforcement in their memorization.

Discussion

The findings show that the head of MDTA Al-Ikhlas carries out the four functions of strategic management in a systematic way. In the planning stage, the head structures the program progressively by age and grade and sets clear long-term targets, which is consistent with evidence that structured planning improves the quality of tahfidz programs [1], [2] and with the broader

finding that strategic planning enhances organizational performance [3]. In the organizing stage, the allocation of dedicated learning time and teachers for tahsin and tahfidz reflects the head's role as a manager who divides tasks according to clear responsibilities [6]. These practices are also in line with Firmansyah *et al.* [11], who found that principals' innovations in flagship tahfidz programs depend on deliberate program design and resource allocation.

In the actuating stage, the combination of the Qiroati and Yanbu'a methods with the "one day one verse" target shows how the head adapts learning methods to students' abilities and workload. This is consistent with studies showing that structured tahsin and Yanbu'a methods improve students' Qur'an reading skills [15], [16], [21]. In the controlling stage, the use of achievement cards, promotion examinations, and the annual *khotmil Qur'an* ceremony serves both as an evaluation mechanism and as a source of motivation, similar to the daily deposit and review (*muroja'ah*) practices reported in other tahfidz programs [13], [17].

The finding that tahfidz has not yet reached its full potential indicates that memorization requires more intensive reinforcement than recitation improvement. Similar challenges, such as differences in students' reading abilities and limited parental support, have been reported in other tahfidz programs [17]. In addition, the head's dual role as principal of a formal school and head of the madrasah illustrates how the effectiveness of leadership depends on its context [14]. Leadership research suggests that strengthening instructional leadership and teacher development, rather than relying solely on administrative management, can further improve student outcomes [5], [7]. For non-formal institutions such as the MDTA, which complement formal schooling and often face management constraints [12], a strategic approach that combines clear planning, dedicated teachers, appropriate methods, and continuous monitoring appears to be an effective way to optimize Qur'anic programs.

4. Conclusion

Based on the field research and analysis, this study concludes that the head of MDTA Al-Ikhlas Damsari functions not only as a leader but also as a manager in developing the tahsin and tahfidz program, carrying out planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling in a systematic way. The head structures the program progressively from TPQ to grades 1–4 of the *diniyah*, allocates dedicated learning time and teachers, applies the Qiroati and Yanbu'a methods together with the "one day one verse" target, and monitors students' progress through achievement cards, promotion examinations, and an annual *khotmil Qur'an* ceremony in Muharram. The head also manages the madrasah alongside his role as principal of SMP BU Bumiayu by dividing his time between the two institutions.

The tahsin program has achieved its targets, while the tahfidz program still requires strengthening. The madrasah is therefore advised to provide additional reinforcement and review (*muroja'ah*) for students who have difficulty memorizing and to involve parents in supporting students' memorization at home. This study is limited to a single non-formal madrasah and to the perspectives of the madrasah head and teachers; future research could include the perspectives of students and parents or compare several madrasahs to obtain a broader picture of strategic management in Qur'an-based education.

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Authors' contributions and responsibilities

Iqlima Aviatul Hikmah: conceptualization, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, writing – original draft. Enjang Burhanudin Yusuf: supervision, methodology, writing – review & editing.

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Availability of data and materials

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interest.

Ethical approval

This study involved interviews with adult informants on the management of an educational program. All informants participated voluntarily after being informed of the purpose of the study and are identified only by their roles in this article.

Additional information

No additional information from the authors.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this manuscript, Claude (Anthropic) was used to translate the manuscript from Indonesian into English, to improve its language and readability, and to format the manuscript and references according to the journal template. The tool was not used to generate research data, perform the analysis, or draw conclusions. The authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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