**The Implementation of the Madrasah Principal's Policies in Enhancing the Competence of Educators and Educational Staff of Islamic Junior High School (Perspective of the Independent Curriculum)**

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the policies, implementation strategies, and impacts of the madrasah principal's policies. The focus of this study is on the madrasah principal's policies in enhancing the competence of educators and educational staff at Tsanawiah Madrasah. This research adopts a qualitative approach with a case study method. The informants in this study are the madrasah principal, curriculum vice principal, educators/teachers, and educational staff. Data collection is conducted through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentary studies. Data analysis techniques utilize the Miles and Huberman model. The results of the research show that: (1) the policies implemented by the madrasah principal include: recruitment of educators and educational staff is always adjusted to qualifications or abilities, placement of educators and educational staff is based on competencies, the madrasah principal maintains active and communicative relationships with educators and educational staff, the madrasah principal rewards outstanding educators and educational staff; (2) the strategies of the madrasah principal include: regular meetings, training, supervision, Subject Teacher Working Groups (MGMP), advanced studies, and benchmarking; (3) the impacts of the madrasah principal's policies include: increased accreditation, improved student achievements, and high community trust. The conclusion of this research is that the implementation of madrasah policies in enhancing the competence of educators and educational staff is in accordance with the perspective of the Independent Curriculum.**Keywords :**

Madrasah Principal's Policies, Educator Competence,

Educational Staff Competence

**INTRODUCTION**

Education plays a crucial role in preparing the future of the younger generation. The implementation of education in Indonesia often undergoes changes and developments, especially in curriculum development. One of the new policies at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia is the Independent Curriculum (Nurcahyono, 2023). The Independent Curriculum is expected to be a solution to various issues, particularly in terms of setting the orientation of educational goals (Muslimin, 2023). The policy of independent learningemerges in the era of the fourth industrial revolution and society 5.0. The era of the fourth industrial revolution and society 5.0 poses challenges as well as opportunities for all educational institutions in Indonesia. In the context of the fourth industrial revolution era, the primary requirement for advancement and development is that educational institutions must have innovation capabilities and collaborate. The Independent Curriculum encompasses both student-centered learning (freedom to learn) and teacher-centered teaching (freedom to teach). The Independent Curriculum can be implemented across various educational levels, from kindergarten to higher education. In this regard, Tsanawiyah Madrasah (MTs), hereinafter referred to as Madrasah, has an equal opportunity for implementing the Independent Curriculum. The Independent Curriculum is characterized by diverse intracurricular learning, where students have ample time to delve into concepts, strengthen competencies, and develop character, particularly in line with the Pancasila Student Profile (Rizky: kurikulum.kemdikbud.go.id, 2022).

Learning with the concept of freedom to learn prioritizes the interests and talents of students, allowing learning outcomes to cultivate creativity and making the learning process more enjoyable (Shalehah, 2023). The Independent Curriculum is characterized by intracurricular learning that is optimized with diverse learning content, providing sufficient time for students to explore knowledge concepts and strengthen their competencies (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

The Independent Curriculum has been implemented in Indonesia since 2020. However, from previous research results, it is known that there are still many obstacles/issues in its implementation. In Prakoso's study (2023), it is stated that the new curriculum called "Independent Curriculum" still requires input for its development, thus research is important as a reference for progress. There are several factors that influence the success of implementing the Independent Curriculum, namely: Teachers, Students, School/Madrasah Principals, and Educational Staff. According to Bastian et al (2023), the linchpin of the success of implementing the Independent Curriculum lies with the school principal and teachers because the autonomy of the school is under their control. In the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in schools, whether for "Independent Learning, Independent Change, or Independent Sharing," it is aligned with the research conducted by Damiati et al (2024) which indicates that implementing independent curriculum requires readiness from school principals and teachers to learn new things. In the planning process, teachers still rely on teaching modules provided by the central authority. There are new aspects to consider in the independent curriculum with the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5).

According to the statement, it is crucial for the madrasah principal to understand their roles and functions well so that they can implement the concept of freedom to learn effectively in the school they lead. The research findings of Isa et al (2022) state that the school principal fulfills their role as a mediator and motivator by involving teachers in curriculum training. Additionally, the principal acts as a participant in regular meetings or discussions and also serves as a supervisor and evaluator in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The success or failure of learning objectives in the school depends on the leadership applied by the madrasah principal. Leadership is about the strategies a leader employs to influence, motivate, and empower every available resource to achieve organizational goals (Sari et al, 2021).

According to Safitri & Mappincara (2021), the school principal has primary duties and several functions. The principal's primary duties include planning programs, implementing work programs, conducting supervision and evaluation, carrying out school leadership, and implementing the school information system. Meanwhile, the primary duties of the madrasah principal are managerial tasks, entrepreneurship development, and supervision of teachers and educational staff (Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 58 of 2017). The functions of the madrasah principal include organizing planning, management, supervision, and evaluation functions. In relation to these duties and functions, the madrasah principal has responsibilities such as developing a medium-term work plan for a period of 4 (four) years, drafting annual work plans, curriculum development, determining the allocation of tasks and utilization of teachers and educational staff, signing diplomas, certificates of final examination results, certificate replacements, and other academic documents, developing entrepreneurial values, and conducting performance assessments of teachers and educational staff.

The Madrasah principal is not only required to perform their primary duties and functions but also to fulfill various roles. The principal must be able to carry out roles as an educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator, commonly abbreviated as EMASLIM (Mulyasa, 2012). These roles can be briefly described as follows: (1) As an educator, the Madrasah principal should enhance the professionalism of educators and educational staff in the school, create a conducive school climate, provide advice to school members, encourage all educational staff, and provide acceleration for above-average students. (2) As a manager, the Madrasah principal should empower educators and educational staff through collaboration, provide opportunities for professional improvement, and encourage the involvement of all educational staff. (3) As an administrator, the Madrasah principal should manage the curriculum, teachers, educators, educational staff, students, personnel, facilities, infrastructure, readiness, and finances. (4) As a supervisor, the Madrasah principal should adhere to democratic principles, focusing on educators and educational staff. (5) As a leader, the Madrasah principal should provide guidance and supervision, enhance the willingness of educators and educational staff, facilitate two-way communication, and delegate tasks. (6) As an innovator, the principal should establish harmonious relationships with the environment, seek new ideas, and set an example for all educational staff. (7) As a motivator, the Madrasah principal should provide motivation to educational staff as part of their duties and functions, encouraging them to enhance their creativity in school development, thus providing inspiration and motivation to subordinates to maximize the learning process.

The opinion is consistent with the perspective of the National Education Policy, as outlined by the Ministry of National Education (2007), which identifies seven main roles of a school principal: Educator, Manager, Administrator, Supervisor, Leader, Creator of a good working climate, and Entrepreneurship.

The Madrasah principal plays a crucial role in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, starting from planning, implementation, evaluation, and reflection. Before implementing the Independent Curriculum, the madrasah principal must determine the category of Independent Curriculum implementation according to the readiness of the educational institution they lead. The readiness categories for educational institutions are "Independent Learning-Independent Change-Independent Sharing" for the academic year 2023/2024 (Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia Regulation No. 56 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum, 2022).

That aligns with the research conducted by Kusmanto et al (2023) which states that the School Principal in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has several roles, including: (1) Participating in workshops on learning activities and assessments of PSP (School Driver Program). (2) Participating in Reflection Activities of Educational Institutions together with expert supervisors and teachers who have attended training. (3) Participating in accelerating the utilization of the free teaching platform. (4) Participating in PMO activities. (5) Participating in field visits by School Driver Facilitators. (6) Participating in the orientation activities of mentoring programs for the first cohort of School Driver programs. (7) Coordinating intensively with teachers involved in the learning committee. (8) Conducting academic supervision activities together with the management team. (9) Providing motivation and full assistance regarding the implementation of P5 (Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project). (10) Being a learner. (11) Inviting experts to provide insights into the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in educational institutions to all teachers.

The Madrasah Principal's policies in implementing the Independent Curriculum are one of the determining factors for the success of the curriculum implementation. This is because improving school quality requires appropriate policies, such as creating programs that align with the school's goals, vision, and mission. Policy is a directive from leadership that differs from existing rules; it is imposed on individuals or groups who cannot and cannot meet the general rules (Ilham, 2021). In line with this opinion, Hidayati & Rustyawati (2019) define policy as the result of wise decisions made for individuals or groups to achieve desired goals and move forward into the future. Thus, policy represents the wisdom of the party determining the policy. Meanwhile, the school principal's policy is a directive from the school principal consisting of a series of principles that form the basis for planning the implementation of a task and the actions taken to achieve educational quality.

In creating educational policies at schools, there are stages involved. The three stages of policy development are: formulation, implementation, and evaluation (Hidayati & Rustyawati, 2019). The Madrasah Principal, as a professional officer, is required to formulate, implement, and evaluate these policies. Various models of approach can be used in policy development, including: (1) Pure Rational Model: This model involves developing policies in a rational manner. (2) Economic Model: This model develops policies based on economic factors. (3) Sequential Decision Model: This model involves decision-making based on several alternative policies. (4) Satisfactory Model: This model makes decisions based on the most satisfactory alternative policy without critically evaluating other alternatives. (5) Optimal Model: This model bases decision-making on a combination of several integrated methods to produce optimal policies acceptable to all parties. The use of these models ensures that decision-making is acceptable to all parties involved.

In addition to the leadership of the Madrasah Principal, teachers play a crucial role in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Generally, the duties of teachers encompass: (1) Professional Duties: These include educating, teaching, guiding, directing, training, assessing, and evaluating students in early childhood education, formal education pathways, and secondary education, (2) Humanitarian Duties: These involve fostering a caring and supportive environment for students' well-being and growth, (3) Societal Duties: These entail contributing positively to the community and fostering social awareness and responsibility among students (Republic of Indonesia Law Number 14 of 2005). Madrasah teachers, as professional educators, have the primary duty of educating, teaching, guiding, directing, training, assessing, and evaluating students in the Madrasah (Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 58 of 2017).

In order to fulfill their duties effectively, Madrasah teachers can apply competencies, which are a set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that teachers must possess, internalize, and master in carrying out their professional duties. In Republic of Indonesia Law Number 14 of 2005, it is mentioned that teachers must have four competencies: pedagogical, personality, social, and professional competencies. To support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, teachers need to have Technological Competence. Teachers must be able to use information and communication technology to support learning, such as using engaging teaching media, e-learning, and online platforms. By applying these five competencies, teachers will be able to conduct effective, relevant, and engaging learning for students. This will support the success of implementing the Independent Curriculum in creating independent, creative, and innovative students. Therefore, teachers need to continuously upgrade and develop their competencies to implement learning, especially within the Independent Curriculum framework.

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum cannot be separated from the role of teachers, who are the key figures in education, tasked with educating, guiding, training, and developing various aspects of students. In the Independent Curriculum, teachers as learning leaders act as facilitators who facilitate a differentiated learning process. Learning is tailored to the diverse potentials, interests, and talents of students, so that the learning experiences provided are expected to be meaningful and serve as preparation for students to achieve their life goals in society (Kemendikbud, 2020). In implementing the Independent Curriculum, it is essential to create a conducive, enjoyable, engaging, safe, active, creative, and innovative learning atmosphere that allows students to explore their abilities, thus enabling them to achieve learning objectives (Rusman dalam Annisa Alfath dkk., 2022). Teachers are the key to success and determine the success of curriculum implementation, as they are influential factors who manage the classroom and determine the continuity of the learning process, greatly affecting the success of students' learning (Nurcahyono, 2023).

According to Isa (2022), the implementation of the Independent Curriculum makes teachers more professional through various forms of guidance and training. The school principal carries out their role as a mediator and motivator by involving teachers in curriculum training. The principal also acts as a participant in regular meetings or discussions. Additionally, the principal serves as a supervisor and evaluator in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. One of the challenges faced by school principals is the lack of smooth internet connectivity as a means to facilitate teachers' use of technology in teaching. The expected outcomes of the theories in the research serve as considerations for school principals to make decisions in addressing issues and improving the quality of education through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

From the perspective of students, it is important to remember that it is the students who are learning, so it is only appropriate that efforts are made to ensure their success in achieving learning objectives. According to Ainia (2023) independent learning can encourage students to learn and develop themselves, cultivate care for the environment in which they learn, boost self-confidence, improve students' skills, and facilitate adaptation to the community environment. In line with this statement, in free teaching, students are no longer mere passive recipients of information. Students have roles, such as: (1) Asking meaningful questions, (2) Collaborating with fellow students as well as with teachers, (3) Developing independent skills by exploring various learning sources, (4) Students as the center of learning, (5) Students receive learning tailored to their respective potentials, interests, and talents. With the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which serves as an effort to transform education in preparing resilient, creative, and independent young generations, the role of students becomes crucial in the learning process. It can be said that in the Independent Curriculum, the role of students becomes central in the learning process.

The role of educational staff in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is to facilitate the administration of students, teachers, school principals, and educational units. Student, teacher, and educational unit data are directly integrated with the data held by the Ministry of Education and Culture, so well-managed data certainly supports the learning process. Student, teacher, and educational unit data, ranging from profiles to student learning outcomes, determine the quality and achievements of educational units through the Free Teaching Platform (PMM) (Hastasasi: Laman gurudikdas.kemendikbud.go.id, 2022).

The preliminary study conducted at the research site gathered information indicating that Labbaika Samarinda Madrasah had implemented the Independent Curriculum in 2023, specifically for 7th-grade students (1st year of Junior High School/MTs), which is the focus of this research. However, further research is needed regarding the implementation of the Independent Curriculum that has been carried out. Based on this description, the researcher is compelled to investigate the implementation of the Madrasah Principal's policy in enhancing the competence of educators and educational staff. The objectives of this research are to analyze the policies implemented by the Madrasah Principal; identify effective implementation strategies; and determine the impact of the Madrasah Principal's policies.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

This research adopts a qualitative approach using the case study method. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis (Sugiyono, 2019). The data collection techniques utilized are Observation, Interviews, and Document Studies. The informants in this study consist of the Madrasah Principal, Vice Principal, Educators/Teachers, and Educational Staff at the Tsanawiyah Madrasah. Data analysis technique employs the Miles and Huberman Model, with the following steps: (1) Data Collection, (2) Data Reduction, (3) Data Display, (4) Conclusion Drawing/Verification. Data validity is ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**The Policy of the Madrasah Principal in Implementing the Independent Curriculum**

The Madrasah Principal's policy-making involves coordination with the Vice Principal of Curriculum, educators, and educational staff through meetings and designing school programs. As stated by the Vice Principal of Curriculum of MTs Labbaika in the interview excerpt:

“…*the policy is formulated fairly and wisely by the principal through consultation (meetings)…*”. (R.II)

The policy-making process involves several stages: (a) formulation of programs, (b) organization of programs, (c) implementation of policy programs, (d) monitoring/evaluation of policies made by the principal. As stated by a teacher at MTs Labbaika in the interview excerpt:

“… *the principal has implemented policies with appropriate steps. First, he formulates the program carefully. Then, he organizes the organization of the program well. After that, the program is implemented properly by all relevant parties. And importantly, there is strict monitoring of the success of the program through evaluation processes. All of these steps ensure that the policies made by the principal can run effectively and efficientl….*”. (R.III)

Which states that the policy-making process involves planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating for the improvement of education quality. The results of this research are also in line with the findings of research conducted by Bastian et al (2023), which suggest that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum must be supported by adequate educational infrastructure and technology readiness, as well as effective and efficient policies, procedures, and funding.

In addition, the policies of the MTs Labbaika Principal are as follows: (1) Recruitment of educators and educational staff is always adjusted to their qualifications and skills. (2) Placement of educators and educational staff is based on their abilities, without discriminating based on race, ethnicity, or culture. (3) Maintaining good, active, and communicative relationships with educators and educational staff. (4) Providing rewards to educators or educational staff who achieve outstanding performance. As stated by the MTs Labbaika Principal in the interview excerpt:

“… *firstly, in the recruitment of educators and educational staff, we always ensure that they match their qualifications and also have relevant skills. Furthermore, job placement is based on ability, without discriminating based on race, ethnicity, or culture. We also pay great attention to our relationships with educators and educational staff, always striving to maintain them well through active and continuous communication. Lastly, we provide recognition to those who demonstrate outstanding achievements. All of these efforts are made to create a conducive learning environment and provide motivation for all members of the educational community at MTs Labbaika…*”. (R.I)

The research findings Hanim et al (2020) indicate that the school principal's policies in providing solutions involve recruiting teachers, managing teaching hours, and assigning administrative tasks to administrative staff. These findings are also consistent with the research results of Nurulloh et al (2020) which suggest that the policies of the MTs Unggulan Hikmatul Amanah Principal in improving the quality and professional competence of teachers are carried out through coaching, seminars, training, workshops. In addition, communicating and behaving well with teachers, motivating, rewarding high-performing teachers, holding monthly meetings for evaluation, and providing incentives. Personal competence of teachers is prioritized through discipline in Madrasah activities or events.

**Effective Implementation Strategies**

Effective implementation strategies play a crucial role in ensuring the success of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools. Several key strategies can be employed to facilitate the effective implementation of the curriculum: Providing training, workshops, IHT (In-House Training), and giving educators and educational staff opportunities to continue their studies. As stated by the Head of Mts Labbaika in the following interview excerpt:

“… *the policy of developing the competencies of educators and educational staff at Mts Labbaika is indeed our priority. One of the efforts we make is by providing regular training and workshops. Additionally, we also organize In-House Training (IHT) activities tailored to the needs and latest developments in the education field. Furthermore, we provide opportunities for educators and educational staff to pursue further studies, whether it be through postgraduate programs or other advanced training…”.* (R.I)

The strategies implemented by the Head of MTs Labbaika include conducting regular meetings, training sessions, supervision, subject teacher working groups (MGMP), further studies, and benchmarking visits. As stated by the Head of MTs Labbaika in the following interview excerpt:

“… *the strategies we have implemented to ensure the smoothness and improvement of education quality at MTs Labbaika. One of them is by conducting regular meetings, where we discuss various current issues related to the provision of education. Additionally, we also organize periodic training and supervision to support the development of skills and performance of teachers and education staff. We are also active in MGMP (Subject Teacher Working Groups) activities to share experiences and learning among teachers. Not only that, we also encourage educational staff to pursue further studies or engage in benchmarking visits as efforts to continuously enhance their competence and knowledge...*”. (R.I)

Regular meetings serve as a platform for information exchange and performance evaluation attended by teachers and staff. In terms of training, one form of support and motivation provided by the Head of MTs Labbaika is by providing transportation allowances. Routine training conducted every year includes In-House Training (IHT). Supervision is carried out suddenly without prior notice to ensure that the teaching process proceeds as usual to maintain the objectivity of assessment. The Head of the Madrasah allocates time at the beginning of the academic year for teachers and staff to complete the necessary administrative documents required for assessment. Regarding MGMP, the Head of the Madrasah always encourages all teachers and staff to join MGMP groups. MGMP serves as a platform for teachers to exchange information and engage in discussions. The findings of this study are consistent with research by Tarhid (2017) which states that quality school principals can increase individual and group teacher engagement. Regarding further studies, the Madrasah head supports, advises, and grants permission to teachers and staff to pursue their education. Additionally, they facilitate teachers and staff to conduct benchmarking visits to other madrasahs. The aim is to broaden knowledge and insight to improve performance.

The findings of this study are consistent with the research conducted by Ariyani (2017), which indicates that teachers and staff are given opportunities to participate in training programs, certification courses, pursue further studies, and visit other schools. Furthermore, the results of the study by Khoirudin et al (2022) suggest that improving the professionalism of teachers at MA NU Sunan Ampel Baujeng requires conceptual frameworks and strategic plans to develop a quality madrasah. The strategies employed include enhancing teacher resources through seminars, training sessions, Teacher Working Group (KKG) activities, improving teacher welfare, and providing supportive facilities such as internet access.

**Impact Evaluation of the Madrasah Principal's Policies**

The results of the implementation of policies by the Principal of MTs Labbaika have brought positive impacts for the school, teachers, and students. Some of the impacts obtained are: (1) Improvement in accreditation score from the previous B to A (Excellent) with a score of 95, making it one of the outstanding schools in Samarinda. (2) Enhancement in students' achievements, both academically and non-academically. Despite being located on the outskirts of the city, the Madrasah focuses on students' achievements. Given the diverse talents of the students, efforts are made to unearth their potentials. The Madrasah's motto is "School for Champions". (3) Increased trust and perception of the community towards the Madrasah, evident from the rise in the number of student enrollments. (4) Excellent cooperation with the community, as seen from their enthusiasm in participating in all school activities. As expressed by the Vice Principal for Curriculum:

“… *we have successfully improved the school's accreditation score from B to A (Excellent) with a score of 95, and now we are one of the outstanding schools in Samarinda. Additionally, students' achievements, both academically and non-academically, have shown significant improvement. We focus on developing students' potentials with the motto 'School for Champions', acknowledging and nurturing students' talents in various fields...*”. (R.II)

 Similarly, a teacher at MTs Labbaika stated:

“… *the trust and perception of the community towards our Madrasah have improved, and alhamdulillah, there has been an increase in the number of student enrollments from the previous year…*”. (R.III)

Furthermore, the Principal of MTs Labbaika mentioned,

“… *our cooperation with the community is also excellent, as seen from the community's enthusiasm in participating in all our activities. Whenever we organize religious events or activities, the community is always involved…*”. (R.II)

The findings of this study are consistent with the research conducted by Banani (2017), which states that effective learning can be achieved through the implementation of competent leadership by school principals and teachers. Additionally, the results of the study by Pujiarti et al (2023) suggest that teachers should enhance their professional competencies with strong internal motivation and a sense of responsibility to carry out their tasks optimally.

**CONCLUSION**

The implementation of Madrasah policies in enhancing the competence of educators and educational staff aligns with the perspective of the Merdeka curriculum at MTs Labbaika, as evidenced by the following: (1) Madrasah Policies: The policies implemented by the head of the Madrasah include recruiting educators and educational staff based on their qualifications and skills, placing them in positions according to their competencies, maintaining active and communicative relationships with them, and rewarding those who excel in their roles. (2) Strategies: The strategies employed by the Madrasah head consist of holding regular meetings, providing training and supervision, facilitating subject teacher forums (MGMP), encouraging further education and study visits. (3) Impact of the Madrasah Policies: The impact of the Madrasah head's policies is evident in the increased accreditation status, improved student achievements, and high level of trust from the community.

These findings indicate that the Madrasah's policies and strategies have effectively contributed to the enhancement of educator and staff competencies in line with the Merdeka curriculum's objectives at MTs Labbaika.

**REKOMENDATION**

Based on the results obtained in this study, it is hoped that it can contribute to the literature regarding the implementation of the Madrasah principal's policies in enhancing the competence of educators and educational staff within the perspective of the independent curriculum.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

The researcher extends gratitude to the Head Of The Madrasah, the Vice Principal Of The Curriculum, and the teachers at Madrasah Tsanawiah Labbaika and all parties who supported this study and cooperated, enabling the acquisition of data to complement this research.

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