

The Strategy of Madrasah Quality Improvement towards Alternative Educational Institutions in the Competitive Era

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The Madrasah is one of the educational institutions in Indonesia that have special characteristics. It is expected to be a component of social change and to fuel the journey through this age with its aspirations, thoughts, and charitable efforts reflecting the values of Islamic teachings. To help future madrasah trends, it is necessary to implement modern management systems that emphasise transparency and visionary attitudes. Even though many studies have been done on the madrasah, only few relate to the implementation of Total Quality Education (TQE). The Research Questions (RQ) are: (1) what are public perceptions on the madrasah in Indonesia, and (2) to what extent has the transformation of madrasah management contributed to making it a viable alternative educational institution. This research is a participatory action research (PAR) using a qualitative approach. The data is collected using documentation study, interviews, observations, and focused group discussions (FGD) involving the principals of the madrasah, the vice principals, teachers, parents, and the community. Data is analysed using domain analysis. The results of the research are: (1) the community has a positive perception on the madrasah, and it started to notice the importance of madrasah education for their children; and (2) the steps of madrasah quality improvement are conducted in 3 (three) steps, namely 1) conducting training for classroom action research (CAR) and workshop on the curriculum 2013 (C-13), 2) preparing the madrasah development plan (MDP), and 3) developing TQE within the madrasah management framework.

Key words: *Madrasah, community perception, teacher quality, Madrasah Development Plan, Total Quality Education.*

Introduction

In the context of modern Indonesia, the madrasah, as one of the schools characterised by Islamic religious education and a component of social change, is expected to accelerate the journey through this age with its aspirations, thoughts, and charity, all of these which reflect the values of the Islamic doctrine. Many people are confident of its ability to adapt and innovate in accordance with the development of the era (Maksum, 1999: 81-82). The madrasah was established for the mission, which is to enhance Islamic preaching (*da'wah Islamiyah*). Besides the religious mission, it is part of worship in the form of *shodaqoh jariyah* (Mastuki, 2001, 36-37). Thus, the leaders of the madrasah should maintain the existence and the actualisation of the role of madrasah in the national education system (Maimun & Fitri, 2010: 3). It is time for madrasah management to employ a modern management approach, through rational, accountable, and futuristic calculations. It is important to create a spirit of togetherness, to develop dreams and hope for its future progress. The indication progress is dependent on good leadership, precise development strategy, a strong system, valid quality measuring instruments, continuous evaluation, highly-motivated staff, and solid teamwork (Sallis, 1993: 130).

The unique characteristics of madrasah are its emphasis on religious and moral education which are developed based on Islamic values. They became the key elements supporting madrasah existence in Indonesia since 1990s. Furthermore, they strengthen the madrasah and make it a favorite choice among society, in terms of numbers enrolled and in terms of the quality of education as perceived by society (Mastuki, 2001: 35).

In the middle of the materialistic, hedonistic, liberal, and individualistic society, which exists at present, religion offers true happiness and develops the spirit which seeks broad, tolerant, deep truth (Madjid, 1993:19). Therefore, religion has a fundamental solution for the insecurity and inner discontent within human life. Education within the family should consist of the inculcation of religious beliefs, cultural values, moral values, and skills (Soedomo, 1995: 14).

In addition, the madrasah has a noble mission. It is not only providing general education, but also a more comprehensive religious education when compared to public schools, so its graduates master both the general and religious fields within education (Bustamam-Ahmad, 2015: 31).

However, not all madrasahs can be an alternative institution for Muslims as it is commonly perceived to be. There are some madrasahs which have become a great concern (Furchan, 2004: 38) to educators. In some places, many madrasahs are classified as "fringe classes". They are established, lose money and are abandoned by the developers (Fadjar, 2005: 246).

This condition is due to the fact that the leaders of the madrasah have not practiced leadership using modern management which places emphasis on competitiveness (Hamruni & Kurniawan, 2018: 153). Competition provides great value for educational institutions as it challenges people (Everard, et.al, 2004: 101). It also builds the spirit to seek progress and win the competition.

Such weaknesses can be said occur frequently in almost all madrasahs, especially in private madrasahs (Furchan, 2004: 38; Abdillah, 1997: 17). In fact, the number of private madrasahs in Indonesia exceeds that of the state madrasahs. Also, the management of the private ones are more complicated than the state ones (Mulyono, 2009: 63). The data of EMIS in 2016 shows that the number of madrasah in Indonesia is 49,337. From this total, 45,451 or 92.1% consist of private madrasahs. Only 3,886 or 7.9% are state madrasahs. In Indonesia, the East Java province dominates with a total of 12,248 madrasahs.

The logic of professional competition has not been realised within the madrasah environment. Some leaders consider modern management as a luxury as opposed to a necessity, so they feel there is no need to develop it in the madrasah that already has its own management system (Karim, 1991: 133-134). As a result, many madrasahs fail to compete with public schools (Maimun & Fitri, 2010: 7). However, the need for high-quality madrasahs is still needed by society, especially within the upper-middle-class of society which is now expanding (Fadjar, 2005: 245).

This social phenomenon should be made as a central issue for madrasah leaders to do reformation and development in order to make the madrasah as an alternative institution (Fadjar, 2005: 245-246). Yet, many leaders of madrasah are reluctant to use the opportunity. As a result, many muslims ignore the existence of madrasah. The main priority of increasing the quality of madrasah is to improve the image of the madrasah itself within society and to prove that it can provide good quality education (Hamruni & Kurniawan, 2018: 152).

The condition requires all parties caring for the improvement of the quality of the madrasah to initiate breakthrough, particularly in the management and academic fields, in order to make the madrasah compete on equal terms with other public schools (Furchan, 2004: 43). To achieve this goal, there must be measures taken to improve the management of the institution and the quality of education in line with the competitive nature of the education market (Hady, 2001: 5).

The management of the madrasah cannot merely rely on intuition and experience factors. This should be replaced with modern management, emphasising transparency and showing visionary attitude (Furchan, 2004: 71). Modern management provides the opportunity to accommodate stakeholders (parents, educational experts, and the local society) to be

positively involved in the performance improvement of the madrasah. This is reflected in the formulation of the vision, mission, and objectives that are developed collaboratively. Since the concept of madrasah is from and for the society, the deep involvement of all the stakeholders becomes important (Mastuki, 2001: 36).

The researcher investigates quality improvement in the madrasah through participatory action research (PAR). It is expected that madrasahs will be more competitive to face the global education challenge and able to be alternative institutions. Even though many studies have been carried out on the topic of the madrasah, only few researches relate to the implementation of Total Quality Education (TQE). This research is expected to provide a significant and urgent contribution to literature on the madrasah in particular and related parties in the field of education in general.

This research focuses on:

- 1) what are public perceptions on the madrasah in Indonesia,
- 2) to what extent has the transformation of madrasah management contributed to making it a viable alternative educational institution

Literature Review

The regulation in the document of the Minister of Religious Affairs Number 90 of 2015, concerning the implementation of madrasah education, Chapter I Paragraph 1 Article 2, states that the madrasah is a unit of formal education under the Minister of Religious Affairs which initiates and implements Islamic, general and vocational education. This includes the development of Raudhatul Athfal, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Madrasah Tsanawiyah, Madrasah Aliyah, and Madrasah Aliyah Vocational Institutions. Institutionally, the madrasah is equal to other public schools at the same level. Objective conditions of the madrasah differ from one country to another.

In many countries, including Egypt and Lebanon, the madrasah are determined by state, private, secular, or religious educational institutions. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, schools usually use Islamic religious schools. Overall, the madrasah have academic implications depending on the cultural, political, and geographical context (Mohd Arif, etc., 2017: 94).

It is important to continuously examine and develop main components in the madrasah system, such as: (a) learners as basic input; (b) educators and other educational staffs as leader elements of the teaching-learning process; (c) an educational program in the form of curriculum with other tools as instrumental input; and (d) a reliable output out of madrasah education, which has added value and high competitiveness in the society, nation, and state

(Soedomo, 1995:17). Out of all the components, it is important to prioritise the teacher quality improvement component to make teachers qualified to teach students with the most effective methodologies (Mastuhu, 1999:61).

To make the madrasah competitive with other public schools at the same level, it is necessary to improve madrasah educational staff. They must be: (a) dedicated and disciplined; (b) honest; (c) innovative; (d) skillful; and (e) resilient (Tilaar, 1998: 59). Furthermore, according to Tilaar, there are two indicators of effective professional educational staff, namely: (1) strong basic knowledge, (2) mastery of professional skills based on education research and practice in which there is mutual influence between the theory and practice of education (Tilaar, 1998: 292-293).

In the early part of the 21st century, society began to pay their attention to the madrasah as an educational institution that fosters a religious spirit (Bustamam-Ahmad, 2015: 37). People were proud to have their children in a madrasah. Annually, there was constant increase in the number of parents sending their children to a madrasah. This sense of belonging develops a deep emotional connection (Mastuki, 2001: 38). Even the number of people interested in madrasah education increases every year (Maimun & Fitri, 2010: 19).

The phenomenon is inseparable from the new trends in society which implies market reorientations in educational model demands and expectations. In this case, the madrasah has a great opportunity to fulfill the new and emerging demands of society. This is due to several reasons, one of which is the emergence of a new consciousness, which is in implementing religious thought (*santrinization*), especially in the upper-middle class of urban society, which is a result of the re-Islamisation process (Maimun & Fitri, 2010: 11-14). The *santrinization* of elite society implies that the demands and hopes for education, social status, and religion go hand in hand. Therefore, the selection of educational institutions is at least based on these requirements (Fadjar, 2005: 247).

Well-educated society considers more factors in choosing schools for their children. If the madrasah wants to attract more students, it must be able to offer unique advantages such as offering curriculums which can build in learners strong spirituality, the intellectual aspect, skills, and moral integrity (Mulyono, 2009; 58). Nowadays, society employs more rational, pragmatic, and long-term thinking in determining their children's education (Fadjar, 2005: 247).

To improve the quality of the madrasah in order to fulfill the expectations of society, it is necessary to develop the Madrasah Development Plan (MDP). Its development considers: (1) society perceptions on education which change rapidly, (2) the world of education which is now regarded as a long-term investment, (3) the policy of educational institutions

(schools/madrasah) cannot be done sporadically, and (4) the stages of education institution policy should be clearly mapped and operational (Maimun, 2011: 1). To achieve effective results, according to Everard et al (2004: 276), it has to be directed in a specific, temporal, integrated, adaptable, and cost-effective way. The preparation of the MDP aims to provide the madrasah with complete information on the necessary action that should be taken to achieve its objectives, obligations, and development goals (Nurhadi et al., 2008: 62). MDP lists as its priorities, historical background, vision, mission, objectives, programs, objective condition, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges, educational services, and management.

The making of MDP must involve all stakeholders in the madrasah such as the principal of madrasah, teachers, parents, local community, and also the educational experts. In the process, they are expected to: (1) map the objectives of the madrasah, (2) arrange the strategic steps of the madrasah for the following 5 (five) years, (3) identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of the madrasah, and (4) to be a reference for carrying out institutional activities (Maimun, 2011:3).

The madrasah also needs modern management. To develop modern management, the madrasah can employ the Total Quality Management in Education (TQM) or according to English & Hill (1998) it is referred to as Total Quality Education (TQE), an adaptation of TQM. The implementation of TQE is namely: (1) continuous improvement of educators' quality and education, (2) cultural change by creating a comfortable environment in the workplace and encouraging the staff to pursue success and achievement, (3) an effective network with parents, (4) a close relationship with parents, (5) services for parents, (6) effective communication with the parents, (7) the professionalism of the principal of the madrasah indicated with institutional vision and mission; and (8) the improvement of learning quality, which is oriented towards the learning process and graduate quality (Sallis, 2002: 24-29).

To achieve the goals, Tilaar's thinking (1998: 56-57) was adapted, which states that in the effort towards building quality madrasah a leader needs: (a) a strong moral foundation to do the hard work and carry out trust; (b) an ability to develop networks; (c) an ability to build a solid work team; and (d) have the love for high quality. Besides, the madrasah must be maintained with modern management, with the following indicators namely, it must be: (a) planned; (b) open; (c) innovative; and (d) professional.

If the madrasah leader can take strategic steps to repair the weaknesses, the madrasah will survive and become a viable alternative institution. In reality, parents will send their children to good madrasahs. One of the examples is the integrated madrasah in Bandung street, Malang East Java. Many parents register their children to this madrasah annually. To be

accepted in this madrasah, one child must compete with 4-6 other children. The number of people interested in this madrasah can beat that of public schools, not only in Malang but also in East Java. The last prestigious achievement by Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 3 Malang is winning eight medals at the National Science Olympiad 2017 held in Pekanbaru, Riau, July 2 – 8, 2017 (Malang Radar, July 11, 2017).

Methods

This research is essentially a participatory action one, using a qualitative approach and based on the philosophy of post-positivism with a model of pseudo-participation (quasi participation). The researcher did not stay at the research site, but only came in accordance to the agenda of activities compiled and agreed upon by the researcher and the madrasah.

The research site is located in Batu City. Batu City has 3 sub-districts, consisting of 20 villages and 4 urban centres. Batu City which was established in 2001, as a part of the Malang regency, has 127 state and private schools/madrasahs ranging from elementary school (SD) to senior high school (SMA). However, there are only 21 madrasah, 14 private MI, 1 State MTs and private 3 MTs, and 1 state MA and 2 private MA (data published by the office of Kemenag Batu City, 2017).

The research was not done in all these madrasahs. The researcher employed purposive sampling and selected madrasahs considered as the ideal ones. They were MTs Negeri Batu and MA Bilingual Batu.

This participatory action research (PAR) employed a design adapted from Lewin (1993). According to Lewin, in general, action research can be done in two stages. Stage I: to observe the real situation and condition of the madrasah, through document tracking, observation, interviews, and focused group discussion (FGD). From this stage, the researcher found out that the madrasah faced several problems including the teachers' lack mastery on classroom action research (CAR) and curriculum 2013 (K13); one of the government policies which demanded the madrasah development plan (MDP) was also not available. It is necessary to develop a management model to anticipate the needs of the madrasah in the future, especially in facing the global competition of educational institutions. Stage 2: based on the data found at stage I, the researcher performed actions in the form of CAR training and workshop on K-13, prepared the MDP, and determined the model of Total Quality Education (TQE). This was done so that the madrasah management can improve on its quality.

The subjects of this research consisted of educational staff in both madrasahs and the local community. The research informants were 2 madrasah principals, 2 vice principals of

academic affairs, 4 subject teachers, 4 parents, and 6 people from the local community. The total number of informants was 18 people.

The data was collected using documented sources, interviews, and FGD involving the principal of madrasah, the vice-principals, teachers, parents, and the members of the local community. The data was analysed using domain analysis to obtain a general and thorough description of the research focus (Furchan & Maimun, 2005: 64). It was conducted in 3 (three) steps as stated by Dey (1995: 31) namely: data descriptions, data classification, and circumpolar data linking. The result of the analysis is that the proposition will be used as the material for drawing the conclusions.

To examine the validity and reliability of the data, the researcher employed (1) observation resilience; (2) triangulation, using data and method triangulation, (3) peer checking, and (4) member checking (Moleong, 2000: 175-182).

Findings

Based on the research findings, local society (4 parents and 6 locals) gave positive and appreciative opinions on the madrasah. For them, the madrasah is still an alternative institution because it can teach their children both religious and general lessons. More than that, by sending their children to the madrasah, the children, they all believe, improve their behaviour, and this they say is due to its positive social environment. Their hope is to make their children clever as indicated by their good national final exam score, they are better at worship, good at al-Qurán reading, and possess a noble character. The opinion reflects the real conditions in the madrasah. The positive perception leads to the increasing number of madrasah students, as advertising in this context is by way of mouth. The significant increase in the number of people interested in each madrasah was 1.5% for MTsN Batu and 1.7% for MA Bilingual.

To improve the quality of the madrasah, (findings were based on the discussion with the principals of both madrasahs), it was decided that the madrasahs will implement 3 (three) activities, namely training of classroom action research (CAR) and workshop on Curriculum 2013 to assist teachers in improving their professionalism, the preparation of Madrasah Development Plan (MDP), and the development of Total Quality Education (TQE) model.

The CAR training and workshop on K-13 for MTs and MA teachers was attended by 40 teachers. The CAR materials refers to that which is in the book written by Hopkins (2008) which among others includes the importance of CAR, the development of CAR focus, data collection and analysis methods, and reporting. The workshop material on K-13 refers to the Handbook of Curriculum Implementation 2013 issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs



(2014) which includes: rationale of K-13, learning approaches, and the preparation techniques for the lesson plan. The products of the training consisted of CAR proposals and lesson plans.

After evaluating the proposals, it turns out that most of the teachers can develop the proposal without problems. This can be seen in the way they develop the title, reveal the background of the problem, formulate problems and their resolution, describe the objectives and advantages of the research, establish a theoretical framework, describe the research methods (research setting and the characteristics of research subjects, action plan, data collection and methods of analysis), develop the schedule of research activities, and write the bibliography.

After classroom observation, the teachers of the madrasah it was found, can make lesson plans well. It can be seen from their ability to describe basic competencies into indicators, develop learning activities, define approaches and methods, make test questions, and determine the suitable learning resources.

In terms of the learning approach, most of the teachers of the madrasah in Batu have used the scientific method that was recommended in Curriculum 2013. This was confirmed when the evaluation found that their ability to carry out learning steps by inviting students to observe, ask, try, associate, and communicate with various strategies and learning methods, showed success.

The next PAR activity was to help teachers to prepare the MDP. MDP includes vision, mission, and objectives of the madrasah, graduation standards, curriculum, learning process, educators and educational staff, facilities and infrastructure, financing, management, and assesment. The preparation of MDP involves the principal of the madrasah, vice-principal of the madrasah, teachers, and the committee of the madrasah. The researcher found that everything was achieved with a high degree of satisfaction. The evaluation was carried out from 2 senior officers of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and found to be in accordance to standards.

The next activity was the development of institutional management using the TQE model. The form of TQE was to: (1) help the principal of madrasah make a job description for all personnels in the madrasah, and (2) help to develop the curriculum of the madrasah, especially local content. It was conducted during the implementation of research for about 1 month. All this was done within the 1 month period and evaluated by 2 senior officers of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. It was considered a success.

Discussion

As explained before, the local society gave a positive and appreciative opinion on the madrasah. They still consider the madrasah as an alternative institution. The positive perception leads to the increasing number of madrasah students. The increase is positive perceptions and is parallel to the increase in the participation rate of students attending the madrasah in East Java. According to Djumransjah (2001), the number of student participation in East Java has increased by 2-3% annually in the last five years. This tendency is expected to continue to increase by 3% for the next 5 years.

The increasing number of madrasah students, according to Fadjar (1998:10) is a form of social commitment to religious values. When society considers a madrasah as a high quality and promising school, they will regard it as an alternative. The purchasing power of the society is on the increase and as such if the school is quite high in ranking, parents, especially from the upper middle class will send their children to these schools although costs are high. This shows that high cost is not an important issue, as long as the school has excellent achievements and services.

During the CAR training in the school, during the process of proposal evaluation, it turned out that most of the teachers were able to make good proposals. CAR ability in teachers is important because their assignment is not only confined to teaching, but also in conducting research. Using the research culture, teachers will have more autonomous professionals. They will not rely on other researchers, innovators or supervisors (Hopkins, 2008: 37). Good CAR results will reflect upon their quality, and in turn, assist them to improve the quality of the process, product and learning. The final result of quality improvement is that the increase in the quality of graduates from the madrasah means it will improve the overall quality of education (Wahidmurni & Ali, 2008: 4). Furthermore, by using CAR teachers are expected to: (1) study personally, (2) teach professionally, (3) have intelligent accountability, and (4) have good network and cooperation skills (Hopkins, 2008: 183).

After the class observation, it was found that the teachers of the madrasah can develop good lesson plans. The ability to so is necessary for teachers, as it is part of the teacher's skills to teach effectively. Besides, this the observations showed that the teachers possessed the skills to prepare positive classroom environment, employ suitable learning-teaching techniques, and show professional behavior as was mentioned by Moore (2005: 8-9).

In terms of learning approach, most of the teachers of the madrasah in Batu have used scientific methods as recommended by Curriculum 2013. It is in accordance with Moore who said that the use of effective strategies or learning approaches for teachers must reflect: (1) clear and accurate verbal communication, (2) the effective use of questions and discussions,



(3) student engagement in learning process, (4) feedback to students, and (5) the flexibility and responsiveness in conducting the learning process (Moore, 2005: 9-10).

The next PAR activity was to help teachers develop the MDP, that which consists of vision, mission, and objectives of madrasah, graduation standards, curriculum, learning process, educators and educational staffs, facilities and infrastructure, financing, management, and assesment. Although it was time consuming, the results met the requirements of good MDP criteria, which are: integrated, multi-year, being evaluated and updated annually, multi-source, participatory, organised and the implementation is always monitored (Nurhadi, 2008: 62). A good MDP will ensure that all program activities to develop the madrasah have also considered the stakeholder expectations.

The last activity was the development of institutional management using the TQE model. TQE implementation was inspired by Sallis by citing the Deming theory that the improvement of the quality of all areas including educational institutions must meet 14 criteria, some of which are to reform the objectives for the improvement products and services, to adopt a new philosophy, to stop being dependent on the leader, to conduct training in the workplace, to have a visionary leader, etc. (Sallis, 1993: 48-49).

Conclusion

Based on the description of the findings and research discussion above, it can be concluded that: (1) society has a positive perception on the madrasah, as they began to notice the success and importance of madrasah education for their children. Success was proven by the increasing number of students who register each year; (2) the activities of madrasah quality improvement was conducted in 3 (three) activities, the first was classroom action research (CAR) training and workshop on Curriculum 2013 (K-13) and to assist teachers in improving their professionalism; the second was the activity to prepare the Madrasah Development Plan (MDP) to ensure that all programs undertaken to develop the madrasah consider stakeholder expectations; the third activity was to develop Total Quality Education (TQE) within the madrasah development framework, so that the madrasah can become an alternative institution in the competitive era. This was also achieved with success.



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