

The Effectiveness of School Principal Leadership in Implementing the Independent Curriculum (Case Study at MIN 1 Mataram)

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Abstract

The emergence of independent learning has shifted the educational paradigm in Indonesia, emphasizing a student-centered approach. Consequently, the responsibility for curriculum development has been delegated to schools, enabling them to tailor the curriculum to their local needs and conditions. This research aims to examine the central role of the school principal in leading the implementation of the independent curriculum at MIN 1 Mataram. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology, the study is conducted at MIN 1 Mataram, employing data collection methods including interviews, document analysis, and observations. Primary data sources encompass the school principal, educators, and other stakeholders, while secondary data sources include scholarly journals, online publications, websites, books, and various academic literature. Data analysis follows a systematic approach involving data reduction, presentation, and verification or drawing conclusions. Ensuring the validity of the findings entails assessing internal validity (credibility), external validity (transferability), reliability (dependability), and objectivity (confirmability). Observation findings reveal several challenges, including limited teacher competencies related to the independent curriculum, suboptimal implementation of differentiated learning strategies, and incomplete integration of information technology into various activities, particularly learning processes. In addressing these challenges, the Head of MIN 1 Mataram assumes a multifaceted leadership role encompassing planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating the independent learning initiatives within the educational unit.

Abstrak

Munculnya pembelajaran kurikulum merdeka telah menggeser paradigma pendidikan di Indonesia, dengan menekankan pendekatan yang berpusat pada siswa. Akibatnya, tanggung jawab untuk pengembangan kurikulum telah didelegasikan kepada sekolah, sehingga memungkinkan mereka untuk menyesuaikan kurikulum dengan kebutuhan dan kondisi lokal mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat peran sentral kepala sekolah dalam memimpin implementasi kurikulum mandiri di MIN 1 Mataram. Dengan menggunakan metodologi

penelitian kualitatif, penelitian ini dilakukan di MIN 1 Mataram, dengan menggunakan metode pengumpulan data termasuk wawancara, analisis dokumen, dan observasi. Sumber data primer meliputi kepala sekolah, pendidik, dan pemangku kepentingan lainnya, sedangkan sumber data sekunder meliputi jurnal ilmiah, publikasi online, situs web, buku, dan berbagai literatur akademik. Analisis data mengikuti pendekatan sistematis yang melibatkan reduksi, penyajian, dan verifikasi atau penarikan kesimpulan. Memastikan keabsahan temuan-temuan tersebut memerlukan penilaian validitas internal (kredibilitas), validitas eksternal (transferabilitas), reliabilitas (dependabilitas), dan objektivitas (konfirmasiabilitas). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan beberapa tantangan, termasuk terbatasnya kompetensi guru terkait kurikulum merdeka, penerapan strategi pembelajaran yang berbeda yang belum optimal, dan integrasi teknologi informasi yang belum lengkap ke dalam berbagai kegiatan, khususnya proses pembelajaran. Dalam menjawab tantangan-tantangan ini, Kepala MIN 1 Mataram mengemban peran kepemimpinan multifaset yang mencakup perencanaan, pengorganisasian, implementasi, dan evaluasi inisiatif pembelajaran mandiri di unit pendidikan.

Kata kunci: Efektivitas ; Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah ; Kurikulum Merdeka

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted rapid and significant changes in the Indonesian education system. Educational institutions and the government have made tremendous efforts to enhance students' preparedness in the learning process. School leaders play a crucial and strategic role in improving the quality of education (Day et al., 2016; Fathoni et al., 2021; Rachman et al., 2023; Sebastian et al., 2016). As managers and directors of their institutions, school principals must ensure that students' needs are effectively met.

An educational institution continuously strives to keep up with every change and societal demand. However, each educational institution has varying levels of adaptability to changes and societal needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that each educational institution has different approaches to providing learning services. Some educational institutions support educators in utilizing technology for learning, while others still struggle to adapt to technology.

Educators must have the ability to change their views that educational effectiveness does not only mean using uniform methods. Educational effectiveness is the ability to

understand the characteristics and needs of students. Educational units can initiate learning reforms focused on student needs by implementing independent learning policies (Day et al., 2016; Kinshuk et al., 2016; Novayanti et al., 2023; Sa'adah, 2020). The world is constantly changing, and students must be prepared to adapt every day. Therefore, the task of educational unit leaders is to encourage educators to implement adaptive curricula by maximizing independent curriculum policies.

Educators adapted quickly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The high encouragement for teachers to improve competencies, adjust to technology, and innovate in teaching is its positive effect (Isa et al., 2022). A teacher's active learning can help them become more professional in their job. Therefore, one of the principal's responsibilities is as a manager, who must assist every teacher in implementing good innovations. The Indonesian curriculum has changed several times. According to Sukmadinata, the curriculum is an important part of the national teaching system, and education and teaching are integral parts of the curriculum (Azis, 2018; Nurkholis & Santosa, 2022; Tubulau, 2020).

In the implementation of independent learning curricula, school principals have a dual role as educators, managers, administrators, supervisors, leaders, innovators, and motivators (Darmansah, 2023; Kastawi et al., 2021; Koch et al., 2015; Mestry & Govindasamy, 2021). In the context of school principal leadership, especially their roles in supervision and educational implementation, it is crucial to empower all school resources for the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

In relation to the Merdeka Belajar program in schools, MIN 1 Mataram has begun implementing the concept of the independent curriculum in current teaching practices. This program focuses on three main aspects. First, mentoring and consultation activities in the form of collaborative programs organized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud) and local governments. This program aims to provide guidance, coaching, and support in the implementation of Merdeka Belajar at MIN 1 Mataram. Support from the government is expected to help the school overcome various challenges that arise during the process of implementing the new curriculum.

In addition, MIN 1 Mataram also conducts intensive and extensive training (coaching) with trainers from Kemendikbud. This training is aimed at strengthening the human resources at the school, including the principal, teachers, and educational staff. With this training, it is hoped that educators at MIN 1 Mataram will be more prepared and skilled

in applying the Merdeka Belajar concept. Lastly, the school also creates learning activities with a new paradigm that focuses on strengthening competencies and student development in accordance with the Pancasila student profile. This new paradigm emphasizes more flexible, innovative learning that is oriented towards the needs and potential of each student, thereby creating a more enjoyable and effective learning environment.

Observations on the implementation of the independent curriculum at MIN 1 Mataram show that there are still several issues in its application, namely: (1) limited teacher competence in relation to the independent curriculum, (2) the implementation of differentiated learning is not yet optimal, and (3) the use of IT in various school activities, especially in learning activities, is not yet comprehensive. Based on these issues, the role of the principal is crucial in resolving and addressing these problems. Various efforts can be made to achieve the goals of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, including regular supervision and periodic meetings to discuss findings and formulate solutions to these problems as part of the guidance and improvement in implementing the independent curriculum at MIN 1 Mataram.

This research relates to the role of the principal in the implementation of the independent curriculum. Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify the role of the principal in applying the independent curriculum at MIN 1 Mataram, thus clearly and detailedly describing the implementation of the independent curriculum at the school. In this context, the principal has a crucial role because they are the main drivers in implementing policies that support the learning process. Through this research, it is hoped that various strategies and approaches used by the principal in implementing the independent curriculum, as well as the challenges and solutions they face during this process, can be identified.

The principal is the main supporter in policy-making within the school. The policies made by a principal must be able to support an innovative and effective learning process, with the main goal of producing graduates who are competent and have character according to the demands and needs of the times (Berkovich, 2018; Elfrianto et al., 2020; Puspita Eka Putri et al., 2022). In the implementation of the independent curriculum, the principal at MIN 1 Mataram is responsible for ensuring that all school components, including teachers, educational staff, and students, are ready and able to adapt to the changes brought about by this curriculum. This research will provide a comprehensive overview of how the principal

at MIN 1 Mataram manages this transition and how their policies and actions contribute to the successful implementation of the independent curriculum at the school.

The role of the principal in efforts to improve the quality of education related to Merdeka Belajar involves the active involvement of the principal in the curriculum development process. This involvement aims for the principal to mobilize educational staff in creating and developing a student-centered learning process. As a leader in the school, the principal must be able to translate government policies into policies implemented in the school to improve the quality of education (Brown & Zhang, 2017; Stein, 2016). With this ability, the principal is expected to fulfill their role as a leader in accordance with the demands of Merdeka Belajar that have been implemented. This role involves effective coordination, making accurate decisions, and providing the necessary guidance and support to teachers and other staff.

As a leader responsible for the implementation of school organization, the principal is able to carry out their duties and responsibilities in implementing Merdeka Belajar accurately. Through the strategic role they possess, the implementation of Merdeka Belajar is expected to be carried out optimally in line with the desired objectives, namely the realization of human resources based on the Pancasila student profile (Fitriyani et al., 2023; Husain Nurisman et al., 2023). The principal must ensure that all school components, including the curriculum, teaching methods, and evaluation, are designed to support student-centered learning. Thus, the principal plays a key role in ensuring that the vision and goals of Merdeka Belajar are achieved, producing graduates who are highly competent, have strong character, and are ready to face future challenges.

Researchers have the perspective that the principal is a central figure in the implementation of Merdeka Belajar. The principal is the determinant of progress in a school, and therefore, the principal's role is very significant in the implementation of Merdeka Belajar, especially within the educational unit (Ham et al., 2015). Based on this, this research is necessary and important to be conducted as a positive and beneficial contribution to the development of education in the future. The principal is not only responsible for the administration and management of the school but also plays a key role in motivating and inspiring teachers and students to achieve higher educational goals. This research aims to delve deeper into how principals can direct and facilitate the necessary changes to effectively implement the independent curriculum.

The novelty of this research lies in the transformation of the education world in Indonesia in creating a student-centered learning process. In the implementation of Merdeka Belajar, the national education system indicates that curriculum development is handed back to the educational units. Based on this, schools as educational units have the freedom to develop curricula according to their competencies independently. This allows schools to tailor the curriculum to the specific needs and characteristics of their students, thereby optimizing the learning process and educational outcomes. This research will highlight how principals can leverage this freedom to develop innovative and relevant curricula and how they can engage the entire school community in this process to create a dynamic and supportive learning environment.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach to investigate the dynamics of education at MIN 1 Mataram. Data collection methods include interviews, documentation, and observation. The collected data is divided into two types: primary and secondary. Primary data are obtained from the school principal, educators/education personnel, and other relevant parties. Meanwhile, secondary data are obtained from sources such as journals, online newspapers, websites, books, and other literature. The data collection process also involves documentation and participatory observation. Data analysis is conducted through stages of data reduction, data presentation, and verification or conclusion drawing. To ensure the validity of the data, this research adopts internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity tests, following the framework proposed by (Huberman, A. M., & Miles, 2002).



Figure 1. Huberman and Miles Interactive Data Analysis Model

Figure 1 illustrates the data analysis process and conclusion drawing followed in this research. The data analysis stages include data reduction, data presentation, and verification or conclusion drawing. Data reduction involves simplifying the collected data, data presentation focuses on visual or narrative representations of the data, while verification or conclusion drawing includes the process of ensuring the accuracy and validity of the analysis results. The overall process ensures that the research findings are based on a thorough and detailed analysis of the collected data, thus providing a better understanding of the phenomena studied at MIN 1 Mataram.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The Role of the School Principal in Independent Learning

The principal of MIN 1 Mataram is tasked with nurturing the institution to successfully achieve its educational goals. Therefore, as the school principal, they must be capable of providing direction and coordinating all activities. The principal has a responsibility in managing the school as the educational institution they lead, especially in designing a curriculum that aligns with educational goals, both on a small scale such as learning objectives, and on a larger scale, namely national educational goals. The role of the principal of MIN 1 Mataram, as a manager in efforts to improve the quality of education, involves planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating. Planning is carried out in three stages, which are explained as follows.

Firstly, the principal, along with the school management team, holds coordination meetings. These meetings aim to formulate and establish programs for the implementation of independent learning to be applied at MIN 1 Mataram. In addition to programs, various variables needed as supports in program implementation, such as costs and time allocation required for the upcoming academic year, are also determined in these meetings. Secondly, the principal and the school management team hold follow-up meetings or extended meetings together with all teachers and education personnel to reach agreements, determine, and socialize the independent learning implementation program that has been formulated by the principal along with the school management team. In this meeting, task divisions, extracurricular mentors, class teachers, teachers, and educational personnel in the implementation of independent learning programs to be carried out at MIN 1 Mataram are

also agreed upon. Thirdly, the principal and the school management team, teachers, and educational personnel hold meetings with parents to socialize and provide transparency regarding the program that has been formulated and agreed upon by the school. In this case, the program has been agreed upon to be implemented by the principal, school management, teachers, and educational personnel in the MIN 1 Mataram environment. And to support the implementation of the program, agreements are also made in meetings with parents.

The organizational stage is carried out by the Principal of MIN 1 Mataram by dividing tasks for the structural team and program implementers responsible for the independent learning implementation. This is done during meetings with teachers and educational personnel at MIN 1 Mataram, after the program has been agreed upon. Task divisions are adjusted based on the fairness and competencies of the human resources available at MIN 1 Mataram. In the implementation stage, the implementation is carried out in accordance with the previously planned program. In terms of implementation, it is guided by the School Activity and Budget Plan (RKAS) that has been prepared for the current academic year in accordance with the independent learning implementation program created and the academic calendar. The implementation of the program is inseparable from the school's objectives and the vision and mission that have been previously established. The evaluation stage is conducted through supervision with flexible timing, adjusted to the schedules of teachers and supervision assessment teams. Evaluation is also carried out through regular meetings between the principal and the school management team, or between the principal, the school management team, and teachers and educational personnel. In addition, there are tentative meetings conducted based on findings obtained at the school. Generally, these meetings are held to make minor changes and find solutions to issues found in the implementation of independent learning at the school.

As a leader in the educational unit, the principal of MIN 1 Mataram plays roles as: (a) monitor, where the principal is obligated to monitor students, teachers, educational personnel, facilities, and the school environment; (b) mediator between teachers and students, in this case, the principal of MIN 1 Mataram serves as a counseling point for teachers and students in various issues encountered to foster closeness; (c) disciplinarian, where the principal of MIN 1 Mataram instills discipline among teachers, students, and educational personnel through the appropriate and fair application of punishments and rewards; (d) motivator, as a school principal at MIN 1 Mataram, they often provide motivation to students

who tend to easily become weary, not only to students but also to teachers and educational personnel to continue to ignite the spirit to implement independent learning to the fullest and create students with Pancasila learning profiles; (e) mediator, the principal of MIN 1 Mataram is a mediator or connector. This means the school principal is a mediator between the school and external parties in cooperation to improve the quality and standards of the school in accordance with the independent learning implementation program established; (f) mentor, in this case, the principal of MIN 1 Mataram is someone who can continuously mentor students, teachers, and educational personnel by mapping and facilitating school residents according to their competencies; (g) coach, the principal of MIN 1 Mataram is a coach in enhancing the abilities of students, teachers, and educational personnel in improving their competencies and self-potentials in realizing the independent curriculum implementation program in accordance with the established goals; (h) decision-maker, in this case, the principal of MIN 1 Mataram must be able to study the independent learning policies made by the government, then make policies that are adjusted to the MIN 1 Mataram environment, of course, in accordance with the goals set by the government in the independent learning curriculum and not deviating from the school's vision, mission, and objectives; and (i) innovator, the principal of MIN 1 Mataram must have the ability to develop or modify learning as an innovation in efforts to improve the quality of learning at MIN 1 Mataram.

The school principal should ideally be a democratic leader, although full decision-making authority lies with the principal (Sehgal et al., 2017), but these decisions are generally based on consensus from teachers and the school community, so as not to make decisions based on personal desires. The principal of MIN 1 Mataram, as a leader, is someone who is brave and able to make the right decisions or policies in consultations and agreements with teachers and educational personnel. A comprehensive humanistic approach to all school residents is carried out by the school principal, as a form of monitoring of policies that have been made and implemented, as part of the independent learning implementation.

The principal of MIN 1 Mataram in the environment of the educational unit they lead is known to be quite responsive, especially when programs do not proceed as desired or when issues are identified as problematic, the principal makes new innovations to address them. This is done so that the program can proceed according to the established determinations, thus ensuring that the goals of the independent learning implementation program can be

achieved to the fullest extent. Regular and periodic reviews are routinely conducted by the Principal of MIN 1 Mataram in the school environment to ensure that the school environment is conducive from students, teachers, educational personnel, and facilities. This is done as an evaluation, for improvements in the future.

Implementation of Independent Learning

The emergence of independent learning represents a significant transformation in the world of education in Indonesia. The policy of independent learning is outlined in Circular Letter of the Ministry of Education and Culture Number 1 of 2020. Essentially, the independent learning curriculum aims to create a learning process centered around students. This is evidence that independent learning is a development from previous curricula, attempting to prioritize student-centered learning formulations. Educational administrators, especially school principals, face extraordinary challenges in understanding this implementation of independent learning. Besides facing new learning habits, they also confront significant curriculum changes. This is due to the introduction of the independent curriculum at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, which promotes new habits for a healthy lifestyle.

In the implementation of independent learning, the national education system signals that curriculum development is delegated back to educational units. Based on this, schools as educational units have the freedom to develop the curriculum independently according to their competencies. Therefore, school principals and school management teams must be able to develop themselves to implement independent learning. The presence of the independent learning curriculum is actually an answer to the need for an adaptive curriculum. A curriculum that can be implemented according to the school's potential and reflected upon at any time.

As the Principal of MIN 1 Mataram, who plays a central role in the implementation of independent learning programs in the educational unit they lead, they must be responsible according to the workload they carry. The workload includes:

1. School management, as the main managerial task.
2. Entrepreneurship, as character development.
3. Supervision, related to guidance, coaching, monitoring, and evaluation of the performance of both teachers and educational personnel.

Understanding this workload seems to be fully mastered by the Principal of MIN 1 Mataram in order to lead the school towards success in implementing the independent learning program. The steps taken by the Principal of MIN 1 Mataram to implement the concept of independent learning in the programs they have established at the school include:

1. Implementing policies conducive to independent learning implementation.
2. Mentoring teachers to have open characteristics and characters in teaching activities to create creative and enjoyable learning experiences for students.
3. Conditioning students in learning, meaning preparing students' readiness and mindset for learning so that students can actively participate with their curiosity in learning.
4. Active participation of parents in monitoring learning outcomes and collaboration between schools, homes, and the community in shaping the Pancasila student profile character for students.
5. Conducting various independent learning implementation training to improve the quality and potential of teachers in implementing independent learning in teaching.

In line with the indicators of successful implementation of independent learning at the school, the implementation of independent learning at MIN 1 Mataram is carried out by:

1. Increasing student participation in learning evenly. The equalization of learning with quality improvements to be accessible to all students and school residents to support maximum learning, in achieving independent learning entirely.
2. Effective learning. In the maximum effort of the independent learning implementation program carried out by MIN 1 Mataram, students are involved, especially in learning. Through various activities to improve the potential of teachers in creating quality, creative, and enjoyable learning experiences, it is hoped that full and comprehensive student involvement in learning can be achieved, thus making learning more effective in achieving educational goals.
3. There are no students left behind or lagging behind in the learning process. In independent learning, students are not allowed to lag behind in learning. However, if there are students lagging behind in learning, then the teacher's task is to provide specific guidance and assistance to help the student catch up, according to the student's potential. This is intended to equalize opportunities for students to achieve their maximum potential in learning.

Based on the explanations above, it can be understood that the role of the Principal of MIN 1 Mataram in the implementation of independent learning is very important, as evidenced by the routine and comprehensive monitoring of the principal in various aspects. Various suggestions and input to teachers based on evaluations and findings to further optimize the implementation of the independent learning program are carried out by the principal, both directly and indirectly. The role of the Principal of MIN 1 Mataram in the implementation of independent learning can be felt quite maximally, especially as a director to teachers and educational personnel to adapt according to the curriculum demands.

As a supervisor in the independent learning implementation program, the School Principal conducts monitoring, assessment, and guidance through planning supervision, implementation supervision, and assessment supervision of teachers and educational personnel periodically, although the time set is in accordance with agreements. As a manager, the Principal of the school prepares the School Work Plan and school curriculum documents, assigns tasks to teachers and educational personnel, leads and controls the implementation of teaching and learning, and monitors the implementation of the programs that have been made. In addition, the Principal of MIN 1 Mataram is a facilitator in the implementation of independent learning by providing facilities and opportunities for school residents to be independent in learning and teaching.

The Principal of MIN 1 Mataram has the ability and skills to influence, motivate, mobilize, and direct all available resources in the school in an effort to achieve desired goals, in this case, the desired goal is the maximum and comprehensive implementation of the independent learning program. The school principal plays a central role directly in the development of competent human resources in facing the development of the independent learning curriculum in accordance with the progress of the times. The demands of the independent curriculum include changes in student character, both in learning and outside of learning. These character changes are found in the Pancasila student profile, which can generally be categorized as critical thinking, creativity, communicative and collaborative skills, accompanied by character intelligence. The central role of the school principal in the independent learning implementation program can be seen and measured by appropriate and timely policies in facing various polemics in the implementation of independent learning programs and understanding the workload as a school principal consisting of main managerial tasks, entrepreneurship development, and supervision.

DISCUSSION

Role of the School Principal in Independent Learning

In discussing the findings of this research, the role of the Principal of MIN 1 Mataram as a leader in achieving the educational goals of the school becomes the main focus. As a leader, the school principal has a significant responsibility in coordinating and directing all activities in the school. In this context, the school principal is responsible for the planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating educational programs at MIN 1 Mataram, especially in the implementation of independent learning. This is supported by research (Chabibah & Sirojudin, 2023; Shulhan, 2018) findings that explain that the school principal as a leader in an institution carries out several tasks in coordinating, organizing, and managing the school to improve its quality. The planning process involves coordination between the school principal, school management team, teachers, educational staff, and parents to formulate programs that align with national educational goals and the school's vision and mission.

The organizational phase involves distributing tasks among structural teams and program implementers, based on fairness and the available human resources' competencies at MIN 1 Mataram. Meanwhile, the program implementation phase follows the RKAS (School Annual Work Plan) that has been formulated in alignment with the school's objectives and established vision-mission. Evaluation occurs through regular supervision and meetings among the school principal, school management team, teachers, and educational staff to ensure that the program is executed according to plan and to identify solutions to emerging issues.

During the organizational phase, roles and responsibilities are allocated to various teams and individuals within the school structure, considering both fairness and the competencies of the available human resources at MIN 1 Mataram. This ensures that tasks are distributed equitably and effectively, optimizing the utilization of skills and expertise within the school community. Subsequently, in the program implementation phase, the School Annual Work Plan (RKAS) serves as a guiding framework, aligning the execution of activities with the overarching goals and vision-mission of the school (Br Gultom et al., 2023; Qisom, 2019; Yulista et al., 2020). This strategic alignment ensures coherence and consistency in the implementation process, facilitating progress towards desired outcomes.

Furthermore, evaluation mechanisms, including regular supervision and meetings, play a crucial role in assessing the effectiveness of the implemented programs. Through ongoing monitoring and feedback loops involving key stakeholders such as the school principal, management team, teachers, and educational staff, any deviations from the planned course of action can be identified and addressed promptly. This iterative process not only ensures adherence to the established plan but also fosters a culture of continuous improvement, where solutions to emerging challenges are collaboratively developed and implemented. By implementing effective Supervision programs, enhancing communication and collaboration, and providing professional development support to teachers, educational management can achieve the goals of improving teacher performance and enhancing overall education quality (Admiraal et al., 2021; Díez et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Kalalo & Merentek, 2023).

The role of the school principal in MIN 1 Mataram is crucial, not only as a monitor, mediator (Aqodiah et al., 2023; Baiq Ida Astini, Aqodiah, 2023; Rachmah, 2018; Yunianto et al., 2021), and disciplinarian, but also as a motivator, mentor, facilitator, decision-maker, and innovator. The school principal is expected to be a democratic leader and responsive to the needs of the school, as well as capable of making appropriate decisions through consultations with teachers and educational staff. A comprehensive humanistic approach to all school members is also the school principal's strategy in monitoring and evaluating implemented policies.

In this context, the Principal of MIN 1 Mataram demonstrates a high level of responsiveness to issues that arise in program implementation by creating new innovations to address these challenges. Routine reviews are conducted to ensure that the school environment remains conducive and as an evaluation effort for future improvements (Gouédard et al., 2020; Kingston et al., 2018; Rachmah, 2018). Thus, the role of the school principal in managing MIN 1 Mataram in a holistic and adaptive manner is crucial in achieving the desired educational goals.

Implementation of Independent Learning

In discussing the research findings regarding the implementation of Independent Learning at MIN 1 Mataram, it is important to note that the presence of Independent Learning

represents a significant transformative step in the education system in Indonesia (Cahaya et al., 2022; F. Efendi et al., 2023; Sa'diyah et al., 2022). This policy encourages a student-centered learning approach, placing them as active subjects in the teaching and learning process (Muganga & Ssenkusu, 2019; Sijabat et al., 2022). However, the implementation of Independent Learning brings significant challenges for school principals and teaching staff, especially in adapting to fairly drastic curriculum changes, particularly in the context of the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, which introduces new demands related to healthy living habits.

In the implementation of Independent Learning, schools are given the freedom to develop curricula according to the local competencies and potentials they possess (Aulia et al., 2023; P. M. Efendi et al., 2023; Sulistyani et al., 2022). Therefore, school principals and school management teams play a crucial role in understanding and implementing the concept of Independent Learning. As leaders, the Principal of MIN 1 Mataram is responsible for leading and managing the implementation of the Independent Learning program in their school. This includes main managerial tasks, character development through entrepreneurship, and supervision of the performance of teachers and educational staff. This is in line with research (Andrikopoulos, 2022; Bakri et al., 2023; Rochaendi et al., 2021; Yasin & Mokhtar, 2022) indicating that school principals should have the ability to understand the aspects of planning/implementation, organization/management, and supervision in order to improve teacher performance and create a friendly and excellent school.

The steps taken by the Principal of MIN 1 Mataram to implement the concept of Independent Learning at MIN 1 Mataram demonstrate a commitment to creating an inclusive, responsive, and student-centered learning environment. Through supportive policies, teacher mentoring, student conditioning in learning, active parental participation, and Independent Learning implementation training, MIN 1 Mataram strives to achieve success indicators in the implementation of Independent Learning. At the implementation level, MIN 1 Mataram emphasizes student participation in learning, effective learning, and preventing student dropout rates. These steps are aimed at ensuring that every student has equal opportunities to access quality learning and support their optimal growth and development.

The central role of the Principal of MIN 1 Mataram in the implementation of Independent Learning is also reflected in supervisory actions, school management, teacher

mentoring, and policies taken to address emerging challenges in the implementation process. The seriousness and expertise of the school principal in leading and managing various aspects of the Independent Learning program are key to success in achieving the desired educational goals, which are not only related to academic achievements but also to the development of student characters in accordance with the principles of Pancasila.

Thus, the role of the school principal in the implementation of Independent Learning at MIN 1 Mataram is highly important, especially in guiding and directing teaching staff, effectively managing the school, and ensuring that every policy taken is aligned with the school's vision and mission as well as the needs of students and the community.

CONCLUSION

The role of the Headmaster of MIN 1 Mataram in carrying out duties as an educational leader in the school is the main focus. The headmaster has a significant responsibility in coordinating all activities in the school, including planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating educational programs, especially in the context of implementing the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) initiative. The planning process involving various stakeholders in the school, including teachers, educational staff, and parents, is crucial for the success of implementing Merdeka Belajar in MIN 1 Mataram. The organization carried out by the headmaster, by delegating tasks to structural teams, and the implementation of programs guided by the School Operational Plan (RKAS) and the school's vision-mission, are key steps in running the program.

The role of the headmaster is not only limited to monitoring and mediating but also as a motivator, mentor, guide, decision-maker, and innovator. The headmaster of MIN 1 Mataram shows high responsiveness to issues that arise in the implementation of programs by creating new innovations to overcome these challenges. Regular reviews are conducted to ensure that the school environment remains conducive and as an effort for evaluation to improve in the future. In the context of implementing Merdeka Belajar, the headmaster plays a central role in leading, managing, and ensuring the success of the program. The seriousness and expertise of the headmaster in leading and managing various aspects of the Merdeka Belajar program are key to achieving the desired educational goals, including academic achievement and the development of students' characters in accordance with the Pancasila principles.

Therefore, the role of the headmaster in managing MIN 1 Mataram in a holistic and adaptive manner is crucial in achieving the desired educational goals, especially in facing new challenges and demands in the world of education, such as the implementation of Merdeka Belajar.

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