

Building Quality Madrasah: Integrating Competency-Based Curriculum, Transformational Leadership, and Community Empowerment

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Abstract:

This study focuses on developing madrasahs to improve the quality of education by integrating three main aspects: competency-based curriculum development, transformative leadership of madrasah principals, and community empowerment. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data collection techniques were done through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The data obtained were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and verification processes to ensure the validity of the findings. The study results indicate contextual and competency-based curriculum development helps students acquire more applicable skills. Transformative leadership of madrasah principals plays a role in creating an innovative work culture and increasing teacher motivation in the learning process. Meanwhile, community empowerment creates a more supportive and inclusive education ecosystem. Integrating these three strategies forms a more holistic and sustainable madrasah development model. The implications of this study emphasize that madrasahs need to adopt a collaborative approach to improving the quality of education. Madrasah-based education policies must consider the role of madrasah principals as transformative leaders, the relevance of the curriculum to local needs, and community involvement in the education process.

Keywords: *Competency-Based Curriculum, Community Empowerment, Transformational Leadership*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini berfokus pada strategi pengembangan madrasah dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan melalui integrasi tiga aspek utama, yaitu pengembangan kurikulum berbasis kompetensi, kepemimpinan transformatif kepala madrasah, dan pemberdayaan komunitas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi. Data yang diperoleh dianalisis melalui proses reduksi data, penyajian data, dan verifikasi untuk memastikan validitas temuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengembangan kurikulum berbasis kontekstual dan kompetensi membantu siswa memperoleh keterampilan yang lebih aplikatif. Kepemimpinan transformatif kepala madrasah berperan dalam menciptakan budaya kerja yang inovatif

dan meningkatkan motivasi guru dalam proses pembelajaran. Sementara itu, pemberdayaan komunitas berkontribusi dalam menciptakan ekosistem pendidikan yang lebih suportif dan inklusif. Integrasi ketiga strategi ini membentuk model pengembangan madrasah yang lebih holistik dan berkelanjutan. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa madrasah perlu mengadopsi pendekatan kolaboratif dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan. Kebijakan pendidikan berbasis madrasah harus mempertimbangkan peran kepala madrasah sebagai pemimpin transformatif, relevansi kurikulum dengan kebutuhan lokal, serta keterlibatan komunitas dalam proses pendidikan.

Kata Kunci: *Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi, Pemberdayaan Masyarakat, Kepemimpinan Transformatif*

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INTRODUCTION

Madrasah education strategically shapes character and improves students' academic and social competence (Fernandez-Perez & Martin-Rojas, 2022; Rahman et al., 2024; Suryanto et al., 2021). However, amid the dynamics of national education development, madrasahs still face challenges in adapting to evolving quality standards (Benavot et al., 2024; Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022; Tavares et al., 2022). Social facts in this case show that many madrasahs experience gaps in the implementation of competency-based curricula relevant to the times' needs. In addition, leadership in madrasahs is a key factor in creating a conducive learning environment. This is according to the latest data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Kemendikbudristek (2023). As of August 2023, almost 70% of education units in Indonesia have implemented the Independent Curriculum through various programs such as Driving Schools, Central Vocational Schools of Excellence, and the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum. On the other hand, the role of the community in supporting education in madrasahs is still not widely optimized (Moeis, 2022; Nawas et al., 2024; Sopandi et al., 2023). Therefore, a more comprehensive madrasah management strategy is needed to improve the quality of education.

Research in the field of madrasah education has shown that adaptive curriculum development strategies, transformative leadership, and community empowerment have a significant impact on improving the quality of education. According to several related sources, madrasahs that implement a contextual-based curriculum and competencies tend to produce graduates with more applicable skills in the world of work (Adam et al., 2025; Diab, 2024; Meletiadou, 2022). Meanwhile, a study by Karim et al. (2025) emphasized that innovative madrasah head leadership positively correlates with teaching effectiveness. In addition, the latest research by Schmid & Garrels (2021) shows that community involvement in managing madrasah education contributes to increasing student learning motivation and parent participation. These various studies show that these are key factors in building a madrasah education system that is more responsive to changes and global demands.

Although previous studies have examined aspects of curriculum development, madrasah leadership, and community empowerment separately, there is still a gap in the literature that discusses integrating these three elements

in a single framework of strategies to improve the quality of madrasah education. Existing research tends to focus on individual aspects, such as the effectiveness of a competency-based curriculum (Imanipour et al., 2022; Malhotra et al., 2023; Škrinjarić, 2022). Alternatively, the leadership role of madrasah heads is to improve teacher performance (Chu et al., 2021; Maheshwari, 2022; Shaked, 2021). However, few studies have highlighted how the synergy between curriculum development, transformative leadership, and community empowerment can form a more comprehensive and sustainable madrasah education model. In addition, previous studies are still minimal in explaining how these strategies can be applied in the specific context of madrasas in Indonesia, especially when facing the challenges of globalization and the digitalization of education. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gaps in the literature by offering an integrative approach that can be a reference for madrasah managers in designing more effective and adaptive education policies.

This research offers novelty in an integrative approach that connects curriculum development strategies, transformative leadership of madrasah heads, and community empowerment as a single model for improving the quality of madrasah education. In contrast to previous studies that focused on one aspect separately, this study explores how these three factors can support each other in creating a more responsive and sustainable madrasah education system. In addition, this study also emphasizes the implementation of strategies in the context of madrasas in Indonesia by considering local and global challenges faced by Islamic educational institutions. This approach is expected to provide new insights for academics, education practitioners, and policymakers in designing madrasah development programs that are more holistic and innovative and that meet the needs of the times.

The central assumption in this study is that competency-based curriculum development, transformative leadership of madrasah heads, and community involvement directly correlate with improving the quality of education in madrasas. The hypothesis of this study states that madrasas that implement a contextual-based and competency-oriented curriculum will produce graduates with better readiness to face academic and professional challenges. In addition, the participatory and innovative leadership of madrasah heads is expected to improve the quality of teaching, while community involvement will create a more supportive and sustainable educational ecosystem. This research is expected to be used as a reference in the development of madrasah education policies based on actual needs in the field.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, focusing on MTs Negeri 1 Bandar Lampung as an analysis unit. The selection of this location is based on the relevance and characteristics of madrasas that have implemented curriculum development strategies, strong madrasah leadership, and community empowerment in improving the quality of education. This case study explores the phenomenon in depth by examining how the strategies implemented in madrasas impact various aspects of education (Aurini et al., 2021; Barroga et al., 2023; Song

et al., 2024). Using this approach, the research can provide a broader and deeper picture of the internal dynamics that occur in madrasas and how interactions between madrasah heads, teachers, students, and communities affect educational effectiveness. A narrative approach is also applied in this study to record the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders who are part of improving the quality of education in the madrasah.

The source of information in this study involves several groups of respondents selected by purposive sampling to ensure the representation of informants who deeply understand educational development strategies in madrasas. The primary respondents consisted of madrasah heads, deputy madrasah heads, teachers, students, and community leaders who play a role in community empowerment. The head of the madrasah and the deputy head of the madrasah are the key informants in understanding the leadership policy and management of education in the madrasah. Teachers provide perspectives on curriculum implementation and learning dynamics while students convey their learning experiences related to implementing strategies by madrasas. Community leaders are also involved to provide insight into the extent to which the community plays a role in supporting education in madrasas. By involving these various sources of information, the research can explore the data comprehensively and obtain a more diverse perspective on the effectiveness of strategies implemented in madrasas.

The data collection techniques in this study were carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation analysis. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured guidelines to understand curriculum development, leadership, and community empowerment strategies better. Observations are carried out in various academic and non-academic activities to observe firsthand how these strategies are applied in daily life in the madrasah. Meanwhile, documentation includes analysis of academic reports, policy archives, and recordings of meetings between madrasas and communities. The data obtained is analyzed through data reduction, presentation, and verification. The data reduction stage is carried out by sorting out relevant information from the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Furthermore, the reduced data is displayed in tables and descriptive narratives to provide a more systematic picture. Verification is carried out by triangulation of sources to ensure the validity of findings and avoid bias in data interpretation.

To maintain the privacy of the source, each informant is given a unique code in the data collection technique. The following is the coding table of the speakers:

Table 1. Informant Code

Code	Position	Data Collection Techniques
I_KM	Head of Madrasah	Interviews, Observations, Documentation
I_G1	Teacher	Interview, Observation
I_S1	Grade IX Students	Observation
I_TM	Community Leaders	Documentation

Table 1. Explain data collection techniques with each resource person based on their role in the madrasah. The head of the madrasah is the main informant for

policy and leadership, while the teacher provides insight into applying strategies in learning. Students represent students' perspectives on the impact of the strategies implemented, and community leaders provide an overview of community involvement in madrasah education. With this coding system, research can ensure that the information collected remains anonymous and does not reveal the true identities of the informants, thereby increasing their trust and openness in providing data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Curriculum Development Strategy to Improve the Quality

The results of this study show that developing a curriculum that is based on local needs and social relevance is very important to improving the quality of education in madrasahs. From interviews with madrasah heads and teachers, it was revealed that they are very focused on developing a more contextual and competency-based curriculum. The speakers emphasized the importance of having a flexible curriculum, which not only adapts to the development of science but also to the surrounding community's needs. This relevant curriculum will help increase students' motivation to learn. In addition, it also prepares them with the skills needed to adapt to an ever-evolving society. The head of the madrasah even stated in an interview where he said, "We have compiled a curriculum that accommodates the development of science and the needs of the surrounding community" (I_KM, 2023). Thus, developing the right curriculum can strengthen the foundation of education and create a more relevant environment for students.

The results of in-depth interviews show that curriculum development in madrasahs not only focuses on academic aspects but also on strengthening religious values, ethics, and practical skills. One of the madrasah teachers explained that they strive to ensure that students are competent in lessons and have a strong understanding of religion and relevant skills for the world of work. "We want students to not only succeed academically but also be prepared to face life's challenges with the religious values and skills they learn," he said (I_G1, 2024). These findings show that the madrasah's curriculum development strategy aims to strengthen academic quality while building student character. In addition, many madrasahs are now adapting theme-based curricula, which connect various subjects to global issues. This provides a broader perspective and helps students understand the world beyond the classroom. With this approach, madrasahs not only teach theory but also prepare students to become competent and characterful individuals. From a series of interviews, thematic analysis was conducted to find and determine patterns and themes through the data the researchers had collected. The results of the thematic analysis carried out are shown in Table 2.

From the results of the thematic analysis table, as shown above, it is identified that the curriculum development in madrasahs must be flexible and always follow the development of community needs and the advancement of science and technology. An effective curriculum should not only focus on academic achievement but also pay attention to the importance of social and religious values. Thus, students not only learn theory but can also apply the knowledge they have in daily life. The development of a curriculum that is

relevant to the local and global context is significant. This helps madrasas produce graduates who are both excellent in academics and ready to face life's challenges in the real world, both in society and the professional world. Madrasas, who can adapt to these changes, will be better prepared to equip students with the skills they need to succeed in the future regarding knowledge and the life values they uphold.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description of Findings
Context-Based and Competency-Based Curriculum Development	Relevance of the Curriculum to Local Needs	The development of a more contextual and competency-based curriculum, adjusting to the development of science and the needs of the surrounding community to increase student motivation.
	Flexibility and Curriculum Suitability	A curriculum that is flexible and can be adjusted to the needs of the times and society so that students are ready to face challenges in a society that continues to develop.
	Focus on Student Competency Development	The curriculum is focused on developing student competencies, both academic and other skills needed in work and social life.
Strengthening Religious Values, Ethics, and Practical Skills	Integration of Religious Values and Practical Skills	Curriculum development also includes strengthening religious values, ethics, and practical skills to prepare students for life outside of school and the world of work.
	Character and Ethics Education	Strengthening students' character through teaching religious and ethical values is an important part of the curriculum prepared by the madrasah.
	Skills for the World of Work	The curriculum is also designed to provide practical skills that are relevant and needed by students to work in the professional world.
	Theme-Based Curriculum and Global Issues	Many madrasahs adapt theme-based curricula that relate lessons to global issues, providing a broader perspective for students.

Strengthening Madrasah Leadership in Improving the Quality of Education

Strengthening madrasah leadership is an important factor in improving the education quality in madrasas. The findings of this study show that madrasah heads who have strong leadership can create an atmosphere that supports better educational development. This leadership is not only limited to administrative tasks but also includes direct involvement in the learning process and managing existing human resources. Effective madrasah heads can motivate teachers to innovate, create a productive work culture, and ensure that the vision of madrasah education can be achieved. In addition, madrasah heads with good communication skills can also connect various parties, such as teachers, students, and parents, in a joint effort to improve the quality of education. With an inclusive and transformative leadership approach, madrasas can bring positive and sustainable changes in the quality of education presented to students.

The head of the madrasah, who implemented a transformative leadership style at MTs Negeri 1 Bandar Lampung, successfully created a conducive learning atmosphere, supporting education's progress. The head of this madrasah actively

organizes training for teachers to update their teaching methods, ultimately improving the quality of the learning process. The training positively impacts the motivation of teachers, who become more enthusiastic in carrying out teaching duties. In addition, the head of the madrasah also maintains effective communication with the parents of students to ensure that the education provided meets the community's expectations and needs. Through this collaborative approach, madrasah heads succeed in building strong relationships between schools, teachers, parents, and students, which in turn has an impact on improving the quality of education. With attentive leadership and continuous support, the learning atmosphere at this madrasah becomes more productive and has a positive impact. From the above findings, the strengthening of the leadership of MTs Negeri 1 Bandar Lampung in improving the quality of education is shown in Figure 1.

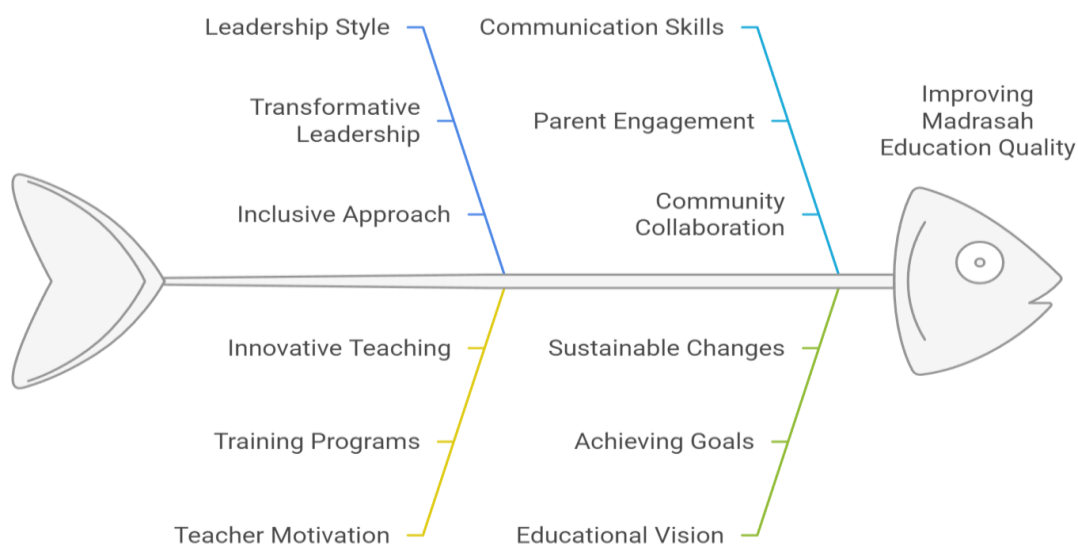


Figure 1. Strengthening the Leadership of MTs Negeri 1 Bandar Lampung

The findings above indicate that the leadership of the head of the madrasah dramatically influences the success of improving the quality of education in madrasahs. Madrasah heads who can implement transformational leadership based on teacher collaboration and empowerment create a conducive learning environment and encourage innovation in teaching. A leadership approach that listens to feedback, provides ongoing training, and supports teachers' professional development has been proven to increase their motivation and performance in creating better quality learning.

Community Empowerment Strategy in Improving the Quality

Community involvement is an essential element in efforts to improve the quality of education in madrasahs. This photo illustrates how various parties, ranging from madrasah heads, teachers, parents of students, and religious leaders to representatives of social institutions, participate in an event related to education. Their presence is not just a formality but reflects a shared commitment to building a better learning environment. Active community participation in

educational activities like this provides many benefits, especially in supporting the development of a curriculum more relevant to the needs of students and the surrounding community. In addition, the involvement of various elements of society also creates a more conducive academic atmosphere, where each party feels responsible for ensuring quality education for students. In the context of madrasas, community involvement is about providing resources and moral support, building student motivation, and ensuring that education remains in line with the times. With active community involvement, madrasas can function as formal educational institutions and as part of a broader social ecosystem where education is a shared responsibility.

Community involvement in the development of madrasas is not only limited to cooperation between schools and parents but also extends to various social organizations, religious institutions, and community leaders who have concerns about the world of education. The available documentation states that community empowerment programs involving job skills training for students and the community have succeeded in creating a more positive educational climate. Programs like these improve students' skills and provide direct benefits to the surrounding community. In other documentation, there is a note that parental participation in various educational activities in madrasas contributes significantly to increasing student learning motivation. Support from parents and the community is not only in the form of finances but also through active involvement in various discussion forums, training, and social activities that support the madrasah education ecosystem. This shows that education is not only the responsibility of teachers and educators but is a collective task that involves many parties. A strong relationship between the madrasah and the community gives students a broader and contextual learning experience, making them better prepared to face the outside world.

This study found that the community empowerment strategy implemented in madrasas was proven to significantly increase the quality of education that involves the community in the educational process. It can expand the scope of learning so that it is not only centred on the classroom. With the involvement of various parties, students can learn from teachers and the experiences and insights provided by community members with expertise in various fields. Internship programs, skills training, and seminars involving practitioners from outside the school are examples of how the community can improve the quality of education in madrasas.

In addition, the presence of religious figures in the learning process also strengthens the character aspect of students, ensuring that the education received not only forms intellectual intelligence but also moral and spiritual. With this approach, madrasahs not only produce graduates who excel academically but also individuals who have a good understanding of religion, strong ethics, and skills that can be applied in daily life. With closer cooperation between madrasahs and communities, education in madrasahs can develop sustainably and have a broader impact on society.

Active involvement in various forums and meetings like this helps to create a sense of ownership of education in madrasahs. With increasing community

participation, madrasas can gain more support in the form of resources, educational programs, and opportunities for students to develop their potential. Through this synergy, education in madrasas will be of higher quality and be more relevant to the needs of the times and the demands of the world of work. Therefore, community empowerment must continue to be developed and strengthened so that madrasas can become educational institutions that educate students in the classroom and prepare them to be part of a productive and highly competitive society.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that developing a curriculum tailored to local needs and social relevance is very important in improving the quality of education in madrasas. This aligns with research conducted by Ngoasong (2022), which emphasizes the importance of implementing a curriculum that is adaptive to the local context to achieve international standards. Thus, madrasas that can adapt their curriculum to the needs of the surrounding community not only increase the relevance of education but also ensure that students acquire skills appropriate to their environment's demands. The implication is that madrasas must proactively involve local communities in curriculum development to ensure their suitability and effectiveness. This can be done through consultation with community leaders, local needs surveys, and collaboration with various stakeholders. With this approach, the resulting curriculum will be more responsive to local social and economic dynamics, thereby improving the quality and relevance of the education provided.

The correlation between curriculum adjustment to local needs and education quality improvement can be explained through the theory of educational relevance, which states that learning materials in the student's context will increase motivation and learning outcomes. Research by Kim et al. (2022) This is supported by demonstrating that curriculum development policies that consider local contexts can increase student participation and involvement in the learning process. Thus, when madrasas integrate local elements into the curriculum, students feel more connected to the material being studied, increasing their motivation and learning outcomes. In addition, this approach also facilitates the development of skills relevant to the needs of the local market, thereby increasing job opportunities for madrasah graduates. Therefore, adapting the curriculum to local needs is a pedagogical strategy and a strategic step in preparing students for success in their environment.

Other findings from this study show that strengthening leadership in madrasas significantly improves the quality of education. Madrasah heads who apply transformative leadership styles can create a conducive learning environment and encourage innovation in teaching. This is in line with the study conducted by Tai et al. (2023), which found that the charismatic and democratic leadership style of the head of the madrasah contributed positively to improving the quality of graduates. The implication is that the development of leadership capacity among madrasah heads is crucial. Training and professional development programs focusing on developing transformative and participatory

leadership styles must be improved. In addition, madrasah heads must be encouraged to build an organizational culture that supports collaboration, innovation, and commitment to improving the quality of education. Thus, effective leadership in madrasahs can be a driving force in improving education quality.

The correlation between transformative leadership and improving the quality of education can be explained through the theory of transformative leadership, which emphasizes the role of leaders in motivating and empowering staff to achieve higher performance. Research by Sarwar et al. (2022) shows that madrasah heads who apply a democratic leadership style can increase teacher participation in decision-making and teaching innovation. Thus, madrasah heads who adopt a transformative approach motivate teachers to improve their performance and create a school culture that supports continuous learning and innovation. This ultimately positively impacts the quality of education provided to students. Therefore, investing in the development of transformative leadership in madrasahs is a strategic step to achieve sustainable improvement in the quality of education.

In addition, this study found that community empowerment has an important role in improving the quality of education in madrasahs. The active involvement of parents, religious leaders, and social organizations in the educational process creates comprehensive support for students and teachers. This is supported by research conducted by Juuti et al. (2021), which emphasizes that collaboration between madrasahs and communities can increase the relevance and effectiveness of educational programs. The implication is that madrasahs must develop strategies to involve the community more intensively. This can include the establishment of school committees involving community representatives, mentoring programs by community leaders, and other initiatives that encourage community participation in the educational process. Thus, madrasahs can utilize local resources and wisdom to support student learning and development.

The correlation between community empowerment and improving the quality of education can be explained through social capital theory, which states that the network of social relationships and trust in the community can increase collective effectiveness in achieving common goals. Several studies found that community involvement in curriculum development can increase the relevance and acceptance of educational programs by students and parents (Gandolfi et al., 2021; Khlaif et al., 2021; Mutambara & Bayaga, 2021). Thus, when madrasahs build strong partnerships with the community, they create a supportive environment where students feel supported by the school and their community. This increases students' motivation to learn and actively participate in school activities. Community involvement can also provide additional resources, such as local knowledge and material support, which can enrich the student learning experience. Therefore, community empowerment is not only a complement but an integral component of the strategy to improve the quality of education in madrasahs.

CONCLUSION

This research emphasizes that developing a contextual and competency-based curriculum, strengthening madrasah leadership, and community empowerment are the three main pillars of improving the quality of education in madrasas. The study's findings show that a curriculum tailored to local needs and social relevance increases student engagement in learning and equips them with more applicable skills for real life. In addition, the transformative leadership of madrasah heads has proven to play a crucial role in building a culture of innovation and commitment among educators, directly impacting the quality of teaching and teacher motivation. Community empowerment has also proven to be a key element that strengthens the educational ecosystem in madrasas, creating broader support for students, teachers, and madrasah managers. With close collaboration between madrasas and the community, education is no longer the sole responsibility of the school institution but also part of the collective involvement that holistically supports the growth of students. Therefore, strengthening education in madrasas must involve synergy between relevant curriculum, inspirational leadership, and an active community in the educational process.

This research contributes to integrating three strategic elements: curriculum, leadership, and community, simultaneously forming a more effective and sustainable model for strengthening madrasah education. In the academic context, this study enriches the existing literature by providing a new understanding of how the synergy between the internal policies of madrasas and external involvement can improve the quality of education. However, this study has limited sample coverage to specific madrasas, so the generalization of the results may need further testing in a broader geographical or social context. In addition, the qualitative research methods focus on exploring experiences and strategies without a quantitative approach that can provide more detailed statistical data regarding the interventions' effectiveness. Therefore, further research with a broader approach involving variations in location and age of students and more in-depth quantitative methods is urgently needed to get a more comprehensive picture. Thus, this research can be a foothold for policymakers in designing strategies to improve the quality of madrasah education that is more inclusive, adaptive, and based on real needs in the field.

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