



The Managerial Strategy of the Principal in Integrating the Independent Curriculum and Tahfidz Program at Darussalam Selokerto Integrated Islamic Elementary School

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ABSTRACT

A Islamic-based elementary schools face unique challenges and opportunities in integrating the Kurikulum Merdeka and Tahfidz program. This study explores the managerial strategies applied by the head of SDIT Darussalam Selokerto to harmonize national curriculum objectives with Islamic values. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were gathered through interviews, documentation, and classroom observation. The results reveal that strategic planning, organizational alignment, and continuous evaluation are essential elements in merging the two programs effectively. The headmaster's roles as a leader, innovator, and motivator proved instrumental in executing the integration without compromising academic excellence. These findings emphasize that collaborative and adaptive leadership is vital for optimizing both religious and general educational outcomes in integrated Islamic schools

INTRODUCTION

The integration between the Merdeka Curriculum and the Qur'an memorization program in Islamic educational institutions, particularly in Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools (SDIT), is a complex and multidimensional strategic effort. This integration is not merely about juxtaposing two learning programs with different orientations, but rather an effort to harmonize the demands of strengthening 21st-century competencies with the internalization of religious values that form the foundation of students' character. This effort demands a planned, adaptive, and collaborative managerial approach across various lines of implementation.

The Merdeka Curriculum, launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, represents a new paradigm in the national education system. This curriculum emphasizes the development of competencies through differentiated learning, the application of project-based learning through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), and provides extensive autonomy for educators and students in determining contextual learning methods and strategies (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022). This characteristic of flexibility is oriented towards the formation of students who are faithful, devout, virtuous, creative, critical thinkers, independent, cooperative, and globally diverse.

LITERATURE RIVIEW

On the other hand, the tahfidzul Qur'an program, which is a hallmark of integrated Islamic schools, emphasizes the formation of strong religious character through the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor internalization of the Qur'an. Memorizing the Qur'an is not merely an academic activity but a form of worship that instills values of perseverance, patience, discipline, sincerity, and love for the Qur'an. The tahfidz process requires a learning approach that is repetitive, continuous, and intensive, as well as conducive environmental support from schools, families, and the surrounding community (Zuhairini et al., 2004). The imbalance in the management between formal academic activities and tahfidz activities has the potential to cause overlapping learning burdens, which can result in physical fatigue and mental fatigue for the students.

In this context, the role of the principal as a managerial leader becomes very vital. The principal not only serves as an administrator or supervisor who executes procedures but also as a visionary leader who can read the direction of change and an instructional leader who can foster collaboration within the school environment. Effective managerial leadership will enable schools to design aligned curriculum integration, develop realistic achievement indicators, build synergy between Quran memorization teachers and classroom teachers, and create a holistic and proportional evaluation system (Mulyasa, 2013). The principal also plays a role in translating the institution's vision and mission into work programs that align with the demands of the national curriculum and the need to strengthen religious character.

The ideal integration process does not merely place the tahfidz program as an additional or extracurricular program, but rather strives to make the content of the Qur'an a part of the hidden curriculum or integrated curriculum that encourages the achievement of students' multiple intelligences. The principal is required to possess managerial competencies in aspects of planning, organizing, mobilizing, and supervising that are inclusive and participatory. Without adaptive and responsive leadership to the dynamics on the ground, this integration process risks becoming merely formal or symbolic, failing to touch the essence of the holistic goals of Islamic education.

Studies on the managerial strategies of school principals in integrating the national curriculum with Islamic programs such as tahfidz have not been extensively examined in academic literature. Most existing research focuses more on the technical aspects of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum or the achievements of students' memorization results separately. The lack of studies highlighting how school principals design, implement, and evaluate the integration of these two curricula with different orientations has become a significant research gap (Susanti & Maulana, 2022). In fact, the managerial challenges in managing two programs with high complexity, both in terms of time, competency achievements, and the workload of teachers and students, are realities faced by almost all SDITs in Indonesia.

Therefore, this research offers a new approach by focusing on the managerial strategies of school principals in synergistically integrating two different curricula in Islamic Elementary Schools (SDIT). The urgency of this research lies in the need for an adaptive and collaborative leadership model to address the challenges of curriculum integration, which are not only administrative but also ideological and pedagogical.

This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions in enriching the study of Islamic education management, as well as practical contributions in formulating an integrated curriculum management model that can address both the academic and spiritual needs of students in integrated Islamic schools. In addition, the results of this research are expected to serve as a policy reference for managers of Islamic educational institutions, policymakers, and education practitioners in developing more effective, efficient, and sustainable curriculum integration strategies. The purpose of this research is to examine and describe the managerial strategies of the principal of SDIT Darussalam Selokerto in integrating the Merdeka Curriculum with the Qur'an memorization program in a systematic, effective, and contextual manner.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply describe the managerial strategies of school principals in integrating the Merdeka Curriculum and tahfidz program (Sugiyono, 2018). This approach is used because it is suitable for studying social phenomena in a natural and contextual manner.

The research subjects consist of 1 principal, 14 educators divided into classroom teachers and tahfidz teachers, as well as 3 administrative staff at SDIT Darussalam Selokerto. The selection of subjects was conducted purposively, considering their direct roles in the implementation of the integrated curriculum.

Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. Interviews are conducted semi-structured, observations are made on learning and managerial activities, and documentation is obtained from school archives such as schedules, work plans, and evaluation reports.

Data analysis uses the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data validity is obtained through source and technique triangulation to ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings (Sugiyono, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Data Findings:

The interview results show that the Principal of SDIT Darussalam Selokerto has implemented a systematic planning strategy in integrating the Merdeka Curriculum and the tahfidz program. The strategy includes:

- Preparation of a 38-hour lesson allocation per week, with around 10 hours specifically allocated for tahfidz.
- Setting the target of memorizing two juz per academic year.
- The tahfidz schedule is conducted in the morning and during thematic activities such as "Jum'at Qurani".
- Planning is formulated through teacher deliberations and annual evaluations.

The principal also initiated a parenting forum to involve parents in supporting their children's memorization and academic development.

Discussion:

This planning strategy reflects the application of strategic management principles in education, as explained by Mintzberg (1990), who emphasizes the importance of leaders understanding the internal strengths of the institution to design adaptive policies. At SDIT Darussalam Selokerto, the principal acts as a transformational leader (Bass, 1990) who not only formulates an integrative vision and mission for the school but also communicates it participatively to all stakeholders through work meetings, workshops, and parent forums.

The integration of the tahfidz program into the Merdeka Curriculum structure also demonstrates the application of flexibility and differentiation principles in learning according to Permendikbud No. 47 of 2023. The integrative vision being built aims to produce Pancasila students who are religious, independent, and critical thinkers, with a contextual approach based on Islamic values.

Furthermore, operational planning is carried out through the development of integrative learning modules, the procurement of competent human resources, and the proportional allocation of time between general

subjects and tahfidz. This demonstrates how the principal plays a central role in strategic planning as mandated by Permendiknas No. 19 of 2007 concerning Education Management Standards.

With visionary, communicative, and collaborative leadership, this integration planning is capable of creating a balanced learning ecosystem between academic achievements and character development based on Qur'anic values. This strategy also contributes to the positive image of the school as an educational institution excelling in strengthening Islamic literacy and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

Organizational Strategy

Data Findings:

Interviews with the principal and teachers indicate that the organization of tahfidz learning at SDIT Darussalam Selokerto has been carried out through the formation of a local content development team consisting of tahfidz teachers, class teachers, and subject teachers. This step was taken as a strategy to integrate the tahfidz program into the thematic learning of the Merdeka Curriculum. However, significant challenges still arise, namely the non-permanent status of tahfidz teachers and the recruitment system still based on honorarium, which affects the continuity of the learning process.

Discussion:

The organizational strategy implemented by SDIT Darussalam Selokerto demonstrates the application of collaborative-based management principles in the implementation of an integrated curriculum. The principal formed the Integrated Curriculum Team as a strategic unit to design integrative lesson plans (RPP). In this structure, tahfidz teachers, classroom teachers, and subject teachers collaborate to design theme-based learning with a contextual and spiritual approach, in line with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The integration of thematic learning with Islamic values reflects the application of the teaching team model that bridges the academic and spiritual dimensions. For example, the integration of science material such as the solar system with the interpretation of QS. Al-Baqarah: 164 not only enhances students' understanding but also fosters spiritual awareness. This aligns with the principle of knowledge integration according to the concept of tauhidic education, where there is no dichotomy between worldly knowledge and religious knowledge.

However, the main obstacle in the organization is the high turnover rate of tahfidz teachers due to the absence of a permanent teacher appointment system. This issue affects the quality of the relationship between students and tahfidz teachers. Mulyasa (2013) emphasizes that the quality of students' memorization is greatly influenced by the emotional and spiritual closeness between the teacher and the student – a dimension that is difficult to build if the teacher frequently changes.

To address this challenge, senior teachers proposed the formation of a Special Content Team consisting of permanent tahfidz teachers. This team not only focuses on the implementation of memorization but also on aligning learning targets by grade level. This shows the importance of HR stability as a

prerequisite for the successful implementation of the integrative curriculum. In addition, for schools to be able to retain competent and dedicated teachers, support for incentive policies and career paths for tahfidz teachers is needed, in accordance with the principles of strategic human resource management.

Overall, the organizational strategy implemented by the school has been systematic and structured, but it requires strengthening the sustainability aspect of the educators. With a collaborative work structure and the reinforcement of personnel policies, the school will be better prepared to achieve a sustainable and meaningful integration of general education and tahfidz.

Implementation and Supervision Strategy

Data Findings:

The implementation of the integrative program between the Merdeka Curriculum and tahfidz at SDIT Darussalam Selokerto is carried out by applying a combination of methods: memorization submissions, muroja'ah, and tasmi'. This program is supported by control media such as communication books and monthly evaluations. Supervision of the implementation is carried out by the principal through classroom supervision and reports from the tahfidz teachers, while weekly evaluations are conducted by the curriculum team. On the other hand, the class teachers apply a tawhidic approach in managing learning and resolving student issues, by incorporating the values of the Qur'an.

This program also emphasizes a healthy competitive culture by assigning role model status to students who memorize more than one juz. Additionally, the transparency of students' tahfidz results is communicated to parents every month through the Tahfidz Report Card. The principal actively facilitates Islamic culture-based activities such as halaqah, one day one verse, and student sermons as part of strengthening religious culture.

Discussion:

The implementation of the integration strategy between the Merdeka Curriculum and the tahfidz program at SDIT Darussalam Selokerto demonstrates the application of value-based implementation and a strong school culture.

Memorization activities are conducted systematically through the methods of submission, review, and recitation. This method supports learning based on repetitive practice that aligns with the characteristics of elementary school students. The presence of role models among students as a form of peer motivation indicates the effective implementation of peer learning. This learning model aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum approach, which emphasizes student agency and character strengthening.

This implementation is also combined with the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) method in general subjects, creating a functional integration between Islamic values and academic material. According to Wena (2009), PjBL encourages students to be active, critical, and able to connect concepts with real life – including in the context of religious values.

In terms of supervision, the principal plays a role as a quality controller through periodic supervision and program evaluation. This supervisory approach is in line with Permendiknas No. 19 of 2007, which emphasizes that the

principal is responsible for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational programs.

Moreover, supervision is not only administrative but also educational and spiritual. The class teacher uses a tawhidic approach to resolve student conflicts, namely by instilling moral and spiritual values through verses of the Qur'an. This shows that supervision is conducted holistically, encompassing affective, cognitive, and spiritual aspects.

School culture becomes an important foundation in the successful implementation of this strategy. Schein (2010) emphasizes that organizational culture greatly influences the way work, interaction, and communication occur within the organization. At SDIT Darussalam Selokerto, a culture of collaboration and religiosity is built through halaqah tahfidz programs, kultum, and a community of practicing teachers to strengthen pedagogical competencies and integrate Islamic values.

In addition, the existence of a memorization report system to parents every month through the Tahfidz Report Card demonstrates the principles of transparency and family participation in supporting the students' learning process. Sallis (2008) states that the success of an educational program is inseparable from continuous evaluation and the involvement of all stakeholders, including families.

Overall, the implementation and supervision strategies at this school are running synergistically. The principal plays the role of a transformational leader by building a culture that supports the vision of curriculum integration. The implementation of the program is carried out not only at the managerial level but also at the level of learning practices and school cultural values. This strategy strengthens the school's branding as an educational institution that prioritizes the balance between academic and spiritual intelligence.

Partnership and External Support Strategy

Data Findings:

Field findings indicate that the involvement of parents and external parties is an important element in supporting the tahfidz program at SDIT Darussalam Selokerto. The principal initiated a parenting forum each semester to provide parents with an understanding of the memorization targets and methods. In addition, the monitoring of memorization is conducted through a WhatsApp group between teachers and parents.

"We have parenting sessions every semester." "There, parents are given an understanding of the methods and memorization targets," explained Mr. Junaedi. Support from the foundation is also quite significant, such as teacher training and the provision of learning facilities. "The foundation helps with teacher training and provides the necessary learning tools," added Mrs. Tina. This partnership serves as the foundation for creating a collaborative and integrated learning ecosystem.

Discussion:

Parental involvement and external collaboration are integral parts of the managerial strategy that strengthen the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the tahfidz program. According to Mulyasa (2013), the success of tahfidz learning is greatly influenced by the active role of parents in accompanying their children, both at home and in school activities. The irregularity of parental guidance can be an obstacle in maintaining the consistency of the child's memorization. To address this, the principal took proactive steps by forming a parenting forum as a space for communication, education, and strengthening the role of parents. This strategy aligns with the principle of community involvement in school-based management (SBM), which emphasizes the importance of community participation in the educational process.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) assert that social and emotional support from the immediate environment, including family, can enhance student motivation and academic achievement. In addition, collaboration with foundations as providers of resources and teacher training also demonstrates strategic partnership practices that can strengthen school capabilities.

Partnerships are not limited to internal relations, but also need to be extended to external parties such as educational consultants or other professional partners. Consultants can play a role in program evaluation and the development of internal guidelines that are more adaptive to changes in educational policies. A neutral external perspective also allows schools to engage in continuous reflection and innovation.

Thus, the partnership and external support strategy at SDIT Darussalam Selokerto is not only administrative but also substantive in shaping a participatory and collaborative culture. This strategy shows that the strengthening of the tahfidz program cannot be done in isolation, but rather through a solid support network between the school, parents, foundation, and external partners.

Challenges and Solutions

Data Findings:

The interview results identified several main challenges in the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and the tahfidz program at SDIT Darussalam Selokerto. First, the high mobility of tahfidz teachers due to their non-PNS status and unstable honorarium. "Often, tahfidz teachers do not stay long because of the unstable salary," said Mrs. Tina.

Secondly, the dynamic national curriculum policy requires teachers to make quick adaptations in the planning and implementation of learning processes. "We are trying to find solutions by recruiting tahfidz alumni and providing additional incentives," explained Mr. Junaedi. In addition, internal training and the preparation of customized teaching guidelines were conducted.

Thirdly, the lack of parental involvement in assisting memorization at home poses a significant obstacle. According to Mrs. Martina, most students do not receive intensive support outside of school hours.

Discussion:

The challenge of implementing the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and tahfidz program essentially reflects the complexity of managing education based on Islamic values, which demands human resource stability, adaptability to policies, and active participation from the families of students.

1. Human Resource (HR) Challenges

The high turnover of tahfidz teachers due to the lack of permanent employment status is an obstacle in creating continuity in learning. This inconsistency affects the memorization methods and the achievement of student targets. In line with Mulyasa (2013), a strong relationship between the tahfidz teacher and the students has a direct impact on the quality of memorization. Therefore, recruiting tahfidz alumni and providing additional incentives is a realistic and targeted solution strategy.

2. Adaptation to Curriculum Changes

The dynamic nature of the Merdeka Curriculum policy requires educational institutions to respond quickly. Internal training and the development of practical teaching guidelines are forms of structural and pedagogical adaptation. This is in line with the principle of organizational learning proposed by Senge (1990), where educational institutions that can learn from change will be better prepared to face systemic challenges.

3. Parental Involvement:

The lack of parental support for memorization at home reduces the effectiveness of tahfidz achievements. Therefore, technology-based communication strategies such as the use of WhatsApp groups and the implementation of periodic parenting forums are solutions that are not only functional but also emotional. According to Epstein (2011), parental participation in children's learning will be more optimal if supported by consistent two-way communication between school and home.

With the strengthening of human resources, policy adaptation, and family communication, schools are able to build a more resilient system. This strategy reflects a managerial approach oriented towards collaboration, participation, and innovation.

Visualization of Managerial Strategy in the Form of a Flowchart

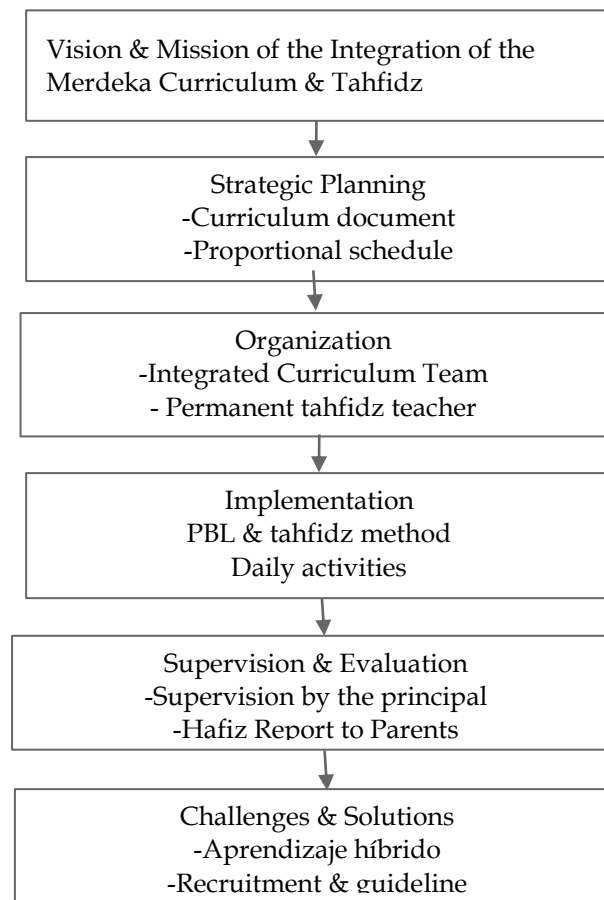


Figure 1. Visualization of Managerial Strategy in the Form of a Flowchart

The principal's managerial strategy in integrating the Merdeka Curriculum and the Tahfidz program begins with the formulation of an integrative vision and mission that emphasizes the importance of balancing academic achievements and the strengthening of Islamic values. This process is followed by strategic planning, such as the preparation of the annual curriculum, scheduling of learning times, and memorization targets.

The next stage is organization, through the formation of an integrated curriculum team and the appointment of permanent tahfidz teachers to maintain the consistency of the learning process. The implementation of integration involves contextual learning approaches, project-based learning (PBL), as well as specific tahfidz methods such as *setoran* and *tasmi'*.

The principal conducts supervision and evaluation through supervision, routine evaluations, and memorization reports to parents. The strategy is complemented by external support, such as parenting forums and collaboration with consultants.

As for challenges such as time and human resource limitations, they are addressed through innovations like blended learning, training, and adaptive internal guidelines.

Here is the SWOT analysis that illustrates the current condition of SDIT Darussalam Selokerto in integrating the Merdeka Curriculum with the Al-Qur'an memorization program:

Table 1. SWOT Analysis

Aspect	Analysis	Solution Strategy (Improvisation and Innovation)
Strengths	1. An Islamic and character-based school environment. 2. The principal has transformational leadership that supports innovation. 3. The teacher has basic competencies in the Merdeka Curriculum and the ability to read the Qur'an.	• Strengthening the collaboration between general teachers and tahfidz teachers through team teaching and internal coaching clinics. • Conduct regular training on the integration of P5 (Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project) with Qur'anic values.
Weaknesses	1. Learning time is limited to accommodate two curricula. 2. There are still teachers who have not fully mastered the Merdeka Curriculum tools (CP, TP, ATP).	• Create simple blended learning (offline & integrated tahfidz modules) • Conduct training on the preparation of integrated ATP for tahfidz with speakers from the Ministry of Religious Affairs or curriculum experts.
Opportunities	1. High community and parental support for Islamic-based education. 2. The government program (Ministry of Education and Culture) encourages the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum.	• Involving parents in the "Orang Tua Sahabat Tahfidz" program to strengthen their children's memorization at home. • Utilizing the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum by modifying P5 hours to align with tahfidz habituation.
Threats	1. The challenge in synchronizing general academic achievement targets and memorization targets 2. The limitation of human resources in the field of certified tahfidz.	• Collaborating with partners (tahfidz boarding schools or local ustadz) for intensive tahfidz teacher training. • Develop realistic and gradual achievement indicators for both programs (academic & tahfidz) with balanced priorities.

These findings emphasize that collaborative and adaptive leadership is crucial for optimizing religious and general education outcomes in integrated Islamic schools. However, this research is limited by its focus on a single case at SDIT Darussalam Selokerto, which may not fully represent the diversity of

strategies implemented in other Islamic-based elementary schools. Further research is recommended to conduct comparative studies in several institutions to gain broader insights into best practices in curriculum integration.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The integration of the Merdeka Curriculum with the Tahfidz program at SDIT Darussalam Selokerto is a complex process that requires a comprehensive managerial strategy, from planning, organizing, implementation, to evaluation. The principal acts as a transformative leader who integrates academic and spiritual visions into a holistic learning system. The success of this integration is supported by collaboration among teachers, parental involvement, and a school culture that is religious and open to innovation. The managerial model implemented can serve as a reference for other Islamic schools in achieving an education that balances the worldly and the hereafter.

Based on the limitations of the research, it is recommended that future studies be conducted comparably in several SDITs in various regions to obtain a broader and more representative picture. In addition, a mixed methods approach can be used to complement qualitative data with more measurable quantitative findings. Researchers can also involve the perspectives of teachers, parents, and students to make the analysis more comprehensive, and consider longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Tahfidz program on students' academic achievements and character development.

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