The Strategy of Private Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Responding to Educational Challenges

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ABSTRACT: The research aims to analyze the strategies of private Islamic madrasah tsanawiyah in responding to both external and internal educational challenges. Through qualitative research-case study at MTs. Hidayatul Muta’alimin Sidoarjo, data were collected by interviews, observations, and document studies. The research subjects were the foundation supervisor and the principal of the madrasah, who were selected purposefully. Data analysis proceeded through stages of data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing, triangulation of subjects, methods, and time as checks on data validity. The results indicate the external challenges faced by MTs. Hidayatul Muta’alimin includes economic, political, information technology, and socio-cultural challenges. The economic strategy adopted is adjusting to the community's purchasing power through affordable costs for quality education. In political and information technology conditions, the madrasah has improved the quality and competence of human resources. In response to socio-cultural challenges, the madrasah accommodates student diversity by providing non-discriminatory best services. The madrasah also addresses internal challenges such as educational funding, infrastructure, graduate competencies, and sustainable education in addressing educational funding by strengthening business units and optimizing assistance and grants. For infrastructure challenges, the madrasah has gradually improved and fulfilled educational infrastructure according to government standards. Regarding graduate competencies, the madrasah designs student soft skills programs and Islamic character formation. For sustainable education, the Madrasah foundation managers establish and organize secondary Madrasah education to accommodate junior high school graduates.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Madrasah Tsanawiyah, as an educational institution, plays a strategic role in social advancement to meet the needs of society through graduates who have intellectual creativity, character, and good mental and spiritual resilience based on Islamic values at the secondary education level (Hidayat, 2016). An interesting phenomenon nowadays shows that society has made Islamic educational institutions the first choice for educating their children, whether to madrasahs, pesantren, or Islamic full-day schools (Lista, 2023). This condition indicates that Islamic educational institutions can meet the community’s need for education that integrates religion and intellect for their sons and daughters (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2016). Institutions not only conduct teaching and learning activities, but all educational activities within them must be imbued with Islamic values (Daradjat, 2018).

As times change rapidly, social and political conditions and globalization pose challenges for an Islamic educational institution, especially in realizing societal well-being in education (Abdullah, 2017). Something different from before encourages the emergence of new things, new procedures, or other actions to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the institution (Rusdiana, 2016). Therefore, Islamic educational institutions must be able to prepare appropriate strategies and management to improve quality in line with the educational institution's vision, including madrasahs (Ulfah, 2021). As trusted educational institutions by parents, Madrasahs are important to continuously innovate and identify educational market opportunities to prepare their students well (Asadullah & Maliki, 2018). Especially for private madrasahs, they

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undoubtedly face stiff competition in attracting students among other private and public educational institutions and in terms of educational industrialization (Idris, 2023).

Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) Hidayatul Muta'alimin Sidoarjo is one of the private Islamic educational institutions that has a strong spirit to compete for goodness, especially to educate students with noble character. By carrying the vision of becoming a madrasah that realizes Muslim generations in entrepreneurship-based education and Quranic memorization, this madrasah is driven to continuously improve and reform to become better. Established in 2018, the madrasah strives to maintain its existence and sustainability amid positive competition with similar educational institutions in the surrounding area to become an outstanding Islamic school (Arifin, 2023). The madrasah realizes the importance of adapting to various educational challenges to maintain the existence of the educational institution it leads. Therefore, it is important to develop consistent strategies to demonstrate the school's excellence to gain public trust and thus improve its position in society (Eny, 2023).

A strategy is a comprehensive plan that integrates all resources and capabilities with long-term goals to achieve an objective. It is important to establish and implement this strategy in developing the managed institution (Burgelman, 2020). Strategy is important to assist educational institutions in improving their quality by focusing on the desire for continuous improvement and development of capabilities sustainably (Ramísio et al., 2019).

Previous research indicates that it is important for an educational institution to analyze the surrounding environmental conditions and internal weaknesses to anticipate changes (Armitage et al., 2019). Regarding the ability to anticipate, private educational institutions must be more creative in devising strategies through appropriate external and internal analysis, such as school funding and student self-development, so that the uniqueness and excellence of their schools can be demonstrated to the public (Alkaabi et al., 2022). However, it is not uncommon for private educational institutions to fail to respond to changes and challenges due to conflicts originating from within the institution itself (Sulistyorini, 2017), so the managers of educational institutions must be able to anticipate this by building shared commitments and determining the right patterns to maintain the sustainability of the educational institution (Johnson & Hoba, 2015).

Although there have been some relevant previous studies, research exploring madrasah strategies remains interesting for further investigation because each study will bring its objective data that can enrich subsequent research (Priadana & Sunarsi, 2021). In this context, it is about the strategies a private madrasah employs to achieve the established vision. Based on these considerations, researchers are motivated to analyze the strategies of MTs further. Hidayatul Muta'alimin Sidoarjo, both internal and external strategies, in overcoming challenges.

II. METHOD

The research is a qualitative case study conducted at MTs. Hidayatul Muta'alimin, Sawocangkring district, Sidoarjo. It aims to explore and analyze further regarding the strategies employed in addressing the educational challenges faced (Cresswell, 2015). The consideration of site selection because of this madrasah is relatively new compared
to other similar educational institutions in the district, so it must withstand the existing educational competition.

The data collection technique using interviews with the foundation supervisor and principal selected purposively, observation, documentation study, and the researcher as human instrument (Sugiyono, 2016). The researchers validated the research data by triangulating subjects, methods, and time and then analyzed them through data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion. In the data condensation stage, the researcher gathered information relevant to the research objectives to ensure that the obtained data meet the needs. Furthermore, in the data presentation stage, the researcher reviewed the relevant data as the basis for concluding the research issue Miles et al., (2014) as outlined below:

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementing strategies within an organization is a complex process aimed at generating comprehensive and integrative approaches to guide actions in competition (Ahmad, 2020). An institution determines its strategies, whether intentional or unintentional, based on analysing changes in the external and internal environments that provide information to be acted upon. The external and internal environments present opportunities and challenges for an institution to discover and manage its potential (Christie & Tippmann, 2024).

MTs. Hidayatul Muta'alimin Sidoarjo has gradually undertaken development improvements since its establishment in 2018, starting from human resources to infrastructure. Technically, the foundation carries out this development based on inputs

Figure 1. Flow chart of research
from the madrasah’s leadership to devise the appropriate strategic formula to address emerging challenges (Arifin, 2023).

**Strategy for External Challenges**

Research findings in the field reveal that the management of MTs. Hidayatul Muta'alimin Sidoarjo has devised strategies to address external challenges as follows:

1. Economic challenges

Based on field findings, the madrasah responds to economic challenges by striving to become an educational institution accessible to the community's purchasing power without compromising the quality of education offered. The institution targets students from lower-middle-class families who are vulnerable to dropping out of school due to economic issues. The lower-middle-class segment of society is at high risk of dropping out of school due to economic problems, hence the need for alternative schools such as Madrasah Ibtidaiyah and Madrasah Tsanawiyah to provide opportunities for learning religious and general knowledge in good educational institutions (Eny, 2023). Being prepared to accept students from lower-middle-class backgrounds does not come without risks for the management. However, with internal empowerment-oriented activities, affordable yet quality education is hoped to be provided (Arifin, 2023).

Any organization, including educational institutions, must address economic challenges. The economy dictates the flow of daily money, information, and goods and services. Economic conditions influence human reactions to desired goods and services and vice versa. Economic growth will positively impact investment in educational capital (Liu et al., 2024). Educational institutions’ strategies to offer affordable fees are commendable. Apart from adding value, affordability can also serve as positive branding for the institution by assisting low-income families with high aspirations to obtain affordable quality education amid increasing economic needs (Tooley, 2023).

2. Political challenges

In response to changes in the country’s political climate, which also affect educational institutions, the madrasah management complies with and adheres to applicable regulations while making some institutional adjustments (Eny, 2023). One government regulation that has positively impacted the existence of this madrasah is the zoning policy for New Student Admissions (PPDB) each year. The enthusiasm of parents to enrol their children is quite high because the location of the madrasah in Sawocangkring Village is inhabited by many newcomers who do not have Sidoarjo domicile IDs. As a result, MTs. Due to its entrepreneurship and Quran memorisation programs, Hidayatul Muta'alimin becomes a choice for enrollment. To meet parental enthusiasm, the madrasah management consistently creates academic and non-academic programs for students. Nevertheless, promotional activities are conducted conventionally by providing information to various elementary schools in the vicinity, regular banner placements, and the use of social media (Arifin, 2023).

The political situation of a country often influences policies implemented in educational institutions. Politics directly or indirectly affects regulations that may disadvantage or even benefit educational services (Hafiz, 2023). One government policy impacting private educational institutions is the zoning policy, as some private educational institutions feel marginalized (Khasanah, 2019). Essentially, zoning policies aim to eliminate the stigma of favourite schools and equalise all schools’ opportunities to
become the best and preferred options. However, it presents a challenge for private educational institutions to collaborate internally to realize established plans for school development (Thoha & Gazali, 2020).

3. Information technology challenges

Addressing challenges in information technology, MTs. Hidayatul Muta'alimin Sidoarjo focuses on improving its human resources. The foundation conducts selection processes for teachers and educational staff who must master and operate information technology, especially for units closely related to information technology use (Arifin, 2023). After the selection process by the foundation, madrasah resource development continues through training facilitated by the Sidoarjo Regency Education Office or partners. These training sessions are attended by teachers or educational staff on a rotating basis, both online and offline (Eny, 2023).

Information technology significantly influences organizational development, especially in education. Rapid technological advancements affect the design of learning activities and the improvement of competitive advantages of educational institutions (Assar, 2015). Moreover, mastery of information technology is a competency that teachers, students, and school staff must possess (Mukul & Büyüközkan, 2023). Mastery of information technology by human resources in educational institutions is crucial due to job demands in a competitive environment (Li & Fu, 2022).

4. Socio-cultural challenges

MTs. Hidayatul Muta'alimin Sidoarjo is in an area with diverse communities, including native Sidoarjo residents and newcomers from outside Sidoarjo, leading to diverse student populations. The diversity in backgrounds, economic statuses, educational backgrounds, and parental occupations impacts the adjustment in implementing school cultural values. The goal is accommodating all interests without favouring any particular group (Arifin, 2023). Managing diversity in origin and economic status is seen as a strength and unique selling point for the madrasah as it indirectly becomes its market strategy. Similarly, the madrasah employs different handling and conditioning methods for students in classroom teaching activities. These approaches include using appropriate learning methods based on student learning styles and interests (Eny, 2023).

While students' and families' social and cultural characteristics pose challenges, the management maintains educational quality to continue providing excellent services. The presence of middle-class families can become new consumers in supporting the development of goods and services (Maxwell & Yemini, 2023). Referring to a society where not everyone belongs to the "affluent" class, the existence of a school that provides well-coordinated education becomes an alternative needed by middle to lower-middle-class families who wish to educate their children while considering their social characteristics (Ullah & Mukherjee, 2023).

Strategy for Internal Challenges

Research findings in the field reveal that the management of MTs. Hidayatul Muta'alimin Sidoarjo has devised strategies to address internal challenges as follows:

1. Education funding

Student education financing is crucial for the development of an educational institution. Therefore, MTs. Hidayatul Muta'alimin positions itself as a madrasah offering
affordable education, leading to the optimization of business units under the Foundation for operational education financing needs. Additionally, school business units such as traditional beverage processing and dry food manufacturing, driven by students, are also considered as selling points (Arifin, 2023). In addition to optimizing business units, the madrasah management maximizes government aid funding such as the School Operational Assistance (BOS) fund, Ministry of Religious Affairs grants, Sidoarjo Regency Government grants, and resident donations. The student financing process through education donations is cross-subsidized to manage the financing of students who receive full scholarships due to coming from financially disadvantaged families (Eny, 2023).

Managing education financing poses its challenges for educational institutions. Financing in running an educational institution is an essential element that must be available, both for direct and indirect financing (Tan et al., 2024). Financing is a process of seeking and utilizing obtained funds for the educational institution's efficient and effective operational activities (Fahmi, 2016). To maintain financial stability, all activities must undergo planning, analysis, and proper cost allocation as part of effective education management strategies (Dwangu & Mahlangu, 2021).

2. Educational infrastructure

According to the National Education Standards, MTs support the education and learning processes. Hidayatul Muta'alimin Sidoarjo, the foundation, has prepared land with madrasah buildings that are continuously being developed. The school's design integrates with all activities carried out by students during the learning process, from classrooms to laboratories and school business units (Arifin, 2023). The development of infrastructure continues to meet the needs of classrooms and student activities, ensuring quality improvement alongside improvements in infrastructure (Eny, 2023).

A quality educational institution greatly emphasises managing its facilities (Patil, 2023). Facilities are tools used to achieve objectives, while infrastructure is used to carry out school functions (Jalaluddin, 2016). Direct and indirect development of school facilities impacts the quality of an educational institution (Perisic et al., 2023). Madrasah's well-managed infrastructure supports the optimization of student learning (Dewi & Noor, 2024).

3. Strengthening graduate competencies

MTs. Hidayatul Muta'alimin aims to produce Islamic, productive, and competitive graduates. This is reflected in its daily activities, which are intertwined with Islamic activities, from pre-class activities, memorization activities, and strengthening worship practices to instilling Islamic entrepreneurship spirit. These efforts aim to strengthen the added value of graduates to equip them for life by enhancing their competencies (Eny, 2023). The foundation also provides full support for students to pass exams and achieve academic grades and strengthen entrepreneurial values through optimizing school business units involving students. Strengthening entrepreneurial spirit in students is essential at MTs. Hidayatul Muta'alimin as it fosters resilience to improve family economics in the future (Arifin, 2023).

Student mentoring is a follow-up to meet student needs. Thus, appropriate decisions through suitable programs are vital if an institution desires high effectiveness in its graduates (Siahaan, 2023). The optimization of student affairs programs is also important, and it is supported by optimal teacher empowerment, school management
restructuring, and adjustments to changing plans (Amka, 2021). Quality graduates not only master the knowledge imparted but also reflect the school's vision through established indicators (Akbar et al., 2023).

4. Sustainable education

Input from parents and the school committee, as a commitment to realizing synergistic education, has led the foundation to prepare upper secondary formal education levels to accommodate MTs. Hidayatul Muta'alimin graduates to continue to madrasah aliyah under the same foundation. Offering structured education is a strategy to ensure the institution's existence is maintained, facilitating alignment in the education established in previous stages (Arifin, 2023). The existence of secondary education provided by the foundation greatly helps parents of students as an alternative for further education. The alignment of vision between Tsanawiyah madrasah and aliyah madrasah contributes to achieving academically proficient and spiritually strong graduates (Eny, 2023).

Preparing continuous education institutions aims to ensure that the organizational and academic cultures that were previously formed facilitate graduates' adaptation if they enroll in educational institutions under the same foundation. Offering structured education from basic to higher education levels is an effort to institutionalize values or norms existing in the organization (Rusdiana, 2016).

Figure 2. Educational challenges of MTs. Hidayatul Muta'alimin

The strategies formulated by MTs. Hidayatul Muta'alimin Sidoarjo in responding to educational challenges are institutional efforts. These strategies have previously undergone analysis of ongoing conditions while still referring to the established vision and mission (Amnillah et al., 2023). A formulated strategy will be achieved when it meets several components, namely the preparation of structure, process, and behaviour. Structural preparation involves determining who will be responsible for something, such as the school principal being accountable to whom. The process is how each personnel carries out tasks and responsibilities. This means that collaborative performance will facilitate goal achievement. Furthermore, behavior is a portrayal of behaviors that depict motivation, work ethic, appreciation, discipline, and so forth from the personnel within an institution. The emerging behaviour reflects various needs, making it a visible aspect that can be measured (Rahmi et al., 2024).

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All elements of educational institutions must be involved in implementing the formulated strategies. Collaboration among elements will promote the formation of communication among internal parties of the educational institution, thus achieving operational effectiveness (Rusdiana, 2016). Additionally, these strategies will also provide benefits for increasing awareness of challenges originating from the environment, thus enabling the institution to understand competitors, minimize organizational resistance, and turn those challenges into opportunities for further development, especially towards the era of society 5.0 (Hashim et al., 2024).

IV. CONCLUSION

Strategy of MTs. Hidayatul Muta'alimin Sidoarjo in facing educational challenges is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the internal and external conditions of the institution as a guide in formulating initial strategies. This madrasa adapts to the purchasing power of the surrounding community by providing affordable quality education, strengthening the school's superior values to attract new students, and increasing human resources in mastering information technology. In addition, this madrasah is committed to providing the best service without discrimination by accommodating student diversity. At the internal strategy level, madrasas overcome the challenges of financing education by optimizing school business units and external assistance, fulfilling infrastructure facilities according to government standards, strengthening graduate competencies with programs that shape Islamic character and entrepreneurial abilities, and providing further education to maintain the sustainability of the education provided. These strategies show the madrasa's commitment to facing educational challenges with adaptive and innovative steps.

V. REFERENCES


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