

Madrasah Leadership and the Continuity of Qur'anic Education: An Analysis of the Excellent Qur'anic School Program

Mohamad Fadeli Rhomadoni^{1*}, Badrul Mudarris²

Universitas Nurul Jadid, Indonesia

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*Correspondence

Address:

2352600033@unuja.ac.id

Abstract This research examines the role of madrasah leadership in implementing and sustaining the Excellent Qur'anic School program at MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul. The study addresses the challenge many educational programs face, particularly in Islamic institutions, in maintaining long-term success and impact. Given the importance of Qur'anic education in shaping students' academic and moral development, understanding the factors contributing to such programs' sustainability is crucial. This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, utilizing observations, interviews, and documentation analysis to explore how leadership strategies influence the effectiveness and longevity of Qur'anic education programs. The findings reveal that the head of the madrasah plays a central role in the program's success through effective leadership, strategic planning, and continuous evaluation. The study concludes that sustainable educational programs depend not solely on teaching methods but also on the leadership vision and practices that guide them. These findings have broader implications for madrasahs and other educational institutions, providing valuable insights into how leadership can foster long-lasting and impactful educational programs.

INTRODUCTION

In the face of an increasingly interconnected world, the role of education in shaping moral and intellectual foundations remains paramount (Li et al., 2024; Pike et al., 2021; Shibina & Vidyapeetham, 2022). Islamic educational institutions, such as madrasahs, are tasked with producing academic and spiritual generations (Abu Bakar et al., 2021; Jamilah et al., 2023; Nawas et al., 2024). However, despite their crucial role in fostering these qualities, challenges persist in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of educational programs within these institutions. Among the many initiatives undertaken to promote quality education, one program stands out for its long-lasting impact: the Excellent Qur'anic School program (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020; Haris et al., 2024; Kawakip & Sulanam, 2023). However, what factors contribute to such a program's success and continued relevance? How can madrasah leaders maintain their quality in a rapidly changing educational landscape? Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing the future of Qur'anic education in Islamic schools.

The role of madrasah heads is vital in implementing successful educational programs that focus on academic excellence and nurture spiritual growth. A cornerstone of many madrasahs' curricula is the teaching of the Qur'an, which aims to strengthen students' religious understanding and moral character. However, despite the prevalence of Qur'anic education, several programs face difficulties sustaining their impact. One prominent initiative, the Excellent Qur'anic School program at MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul, has proven its worth through consistent success and growing community support. The program's success hinges on a structured approach, combining innovative methods like Tilawati with dedicated leadership. Several studies have shown that educational programs in madrasahs, particularly those centered around religious texts, can significantly enhance students' academic and moral development (Al-Jarf, 2023; Asfiati et al., 2023; Ramírez-Montoya et al., 2021). However, program sustainability challenges remain due to limited resources, lack of structured evaluations, and leadership gaps, all of which require focused attention.

Despite the growing popularity of Qur'anic learning programs across madrasahs, many face the challenge of maintaining long-term sustainability and impact (Basir et al., 2024; Soleh, 2021; Zulkifli et al., 2023). Educational programs, particularly those focused on Qur'anic studies, often struggle with the issue of continuity and consistent quality over time. However, the Excellent Qur'anic School program at MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul has successfully maintained its sustainability for over a decade. This research addresses the gap in understanding the factors contributing to such programs' successful implementation and sustainability. While previous studies have touched on aspects like leadership and instructional methods, a comprehensive investigation into the role of madrasah leadership in ensuring the continued relevance of Quranic education has yet to be fully explored. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring how the policies and practices of madrasah heads influence the long-term success of Qur'anic education programs.

This paper argues that the leadership of madrasah heads plays a pivotal role in the sustainability and success of Qur'anic education programs. Through effective leadership, strategic planning, and consistent evaluation, madrasah heads can create an environment where Qur'anic learning thrives. By focusing on the Excellent Qur'anic School program at MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul, this study will explore how the leadership strategies of the madrasah head, Mr. Sahroni, have contributed to the program's success. The research will demonstrate that sustainable Qur'anic education programs result from effective teaching methods and are also profoundly influenced by the vision, policies, and organizational practices established by school leaders. Through this examination, the study seeks to provide insights that could inform the development of similar programs in other madrasahs, ensuring their continued success and impact on future generations.

This paper is structured to first provide a detailed analysis of the Excellent Qur'anic School program, focusing on its implementation and sustainability. The following section will examine the role of the madrasah head, Mr. Sahroni, and how his leadership has shaped the program's ongoing success. The methodology used in this research will be outlined, including qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and documentation analysis. The paper will then present the findings, discussing key factors contributing to the program's effectiveness and long-term sustainability. The discussion will explore how leadership, community involvement, and structured learning methods interconnect to create a successful and sustainable educational program. Finally, the paper will conclude by highlighting the implications of this study for other madrasahs seeking to implement similar Qur'anic education programs and offering recommendations for enhancing their sustainability.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research is set in the context of MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul, a madrasah in Summersuko District, Lumajang Regency, Indonesia, which is known for its long-standing Excellent Qur'anic School program. This specific setting was chosen because it offers a rich environment to explore how leadership affects the sustainability of educational programs, particularly those focused on Quranic learning. The theoretical problem centers on understanding the role of leadership in ensuring that religious education programs can thrive over time. The madrasah's success, in both the growth of its student body and the establishment of a robust Qur'anic curriculum, provides a relevant case study. By selecting this context, the research aims to examine how leadership practices, such as curriculum design, teacher management, and community involvement, directly contribute to the continuation and success of religious education programs, offering a real-world example to address the theoretical issue of leadership's impact on educational sustainability (Hendren et al., 2023; Hirose & Creswell, 2023; Mezmir, 2020).

Data collection for this research was done through a combination of primary and secondary sources, explicitly using qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with key informants, including the madrasah head, teachers, and students. This was crucial for gaining detailed insights into leadership practices and program implementation from those directly involved.

Additionally, participant observation allowed the researcher to assess the daily practices in the classroom and overall learning environment. Secondary data, such as program documents and evaluation reports, were analyzed to understand the formal structure and objectives of the Excellent Qur'anic School program. These methods were chosen because they provide in-depth personal perspectives (through interviews) and a contextual understanding of how the program functions in practice (through observations and document analysis), directly informing the research question on leadership and sustainability.

The data were analyzed using a qualitative approach guided by the Miles and Huberman framework, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Borgstede & Scholz, 2021; Miles et al., 2020). Data reduction was first performed by transcribing interview responses, summarizing observations, and organizing relevant documents. This allowed for identifying key themes such as leadership styles, teacher management, and student engagement. The next step, data display, involved using visual tools like matrices and charts to organize the data to allow for easy comparison and pattern recognition across different informants. Finally, conclusion drawing and verification were carried out through constant iteration, where preliminary conclusions were revisited and refined by revisiting the data. A creative step in the analysis involved presenting early findings to local educators for feedback, which provided further insights and helped validate the conclusions. This iterative and participatory approach enriched the analysis by grounding the findings in real-world feedback and ensuring the reliability of the conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Implementation of the Excellent Qur'anic School Program

The madrasah head plays a vital role in the sustainability of the educational institution through its actual implementation. According to Lunthas in Hayati, the control of the school head in implementing program sustainability can be observed through their behavior in carrying out their duties (Herlina et al., 2020). The madrasah head's policy in maintaining the madrasah program is a foundation for creating the madrasah's future. Programs that have been planned and established must be carried out by the entrusted responsibilities (Azizah & Witri, 2021). The madrasah head of MI Nurul Islam is one of the madrasah heads who has an excellent program, namely the Excellent Qur'anic School. Thus, the educational institution can have quality eligibility determined by the management system based on the plans that have been established.

Mr. Sahroni is the Head of MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul, serving from 2013 until now. He is a graduate of Strata 1 from IAI Syarifuddin Lumajang and alumni Pondok Pesantren Al Mustaqimiyah alumni. The reason for creating this program stems from the background of Qur'anic learning that lacked a strong foundation. As a result, Mr. Sahroni came up with the idea for a program called the Excellent Qur'anic School, a flagship program that emphasizes strengthening the basics of reading the Qur'an. The program is run using the Tilawati method. Through ups and downs in maintaining this program, the sweet and bitter experiences have been felt, but instead of causing the program to decline, it has only grown because every parent feels the results.

The program has been running for approximately ten years, becoming a hallmark of MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul. Under the leadership of Mr. Sahroni, there has been significant progress, especially in the development of the madrasah, including the acquisition of land, which will be used to expand the madrasah building.

The researcher conducted a thorough observation at MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul, accompanied by the researcher, who was invited to tour the school, passing through several classrooms that, according to the researcher, are already categorized as suitable and comfortable for the continuation of learning. The building corridors could be used as play areas for students, and the environment is clean. However, the researcher has a few notes, namely that the number of students at MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul is very high, with significant yearly increases. Given the large number of students and classrooms, the researcher feels this situation is not optimal for learning. In implementing the Excellent Qur'anic School program, the madrasah head formed a team of several teachers, although there were no specific criteria for its formation. The team is coordinated by Ustadzah I'natul, who organizes all Qur'an reading lessons. In practice, there are six levels in the introductory class that students must go through in order to reach the Qur'an, from level 1 to level 6. Once the level classes are completed, students will enter the Qur'an class. After students can read fluently, with the correct pronunciation of letters and accurate tajwid, they will be directed to the tahfidz class. Similar to this research, to improve the quality of Qur'an reading, strengthening the understanding of Tajwid knowledge is essential to enhance the quality of Qur'anic recitation.

In the Tilawati and Qur'an classes, the selection of teaching staff is done using the tahsin method. The aim is to improve, strengthen, or enrich the ability to read the Qur'an correctly and adequately (Niswa et al., 2022). This activity is used to place prospective teachers who will teach in the Tilawati or Qur'an classes. It can be concluded that each year, teachers may move between classes based on the results of the tahsin they participate in. This is done to ensure that the learning process provided to the students is optimal. Specifically, for the tahfidz class, its implementation will be guided by JAMQUR (Jam'iyyah Qurro' wal Khuffadz), and technically, the madrasah has handed over the responsibility. All MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul students attend this program, with criteria divisions. When students are still in the level classes, they are taught how to read and guided in memorizing Juz Amma. Getting used to memorizing short surahs becomes their foundation for memorization.

Additionally, there are supplementary classes outside the Tilawati learning hours, such as classes for learning to write Arabic or Hijaiyah letters using the Kitabaty book. There are also workshop classes specifically for students struggling to read the Qur'an. In these classes, they can focus more on catching up. In the Qur'an class, students will also be trained to correct their Qur'anic recitation, which may be incorrect, while also strengthening their memorization of Juz Amma to improve their memory. In the tahfidz class, there is no specific target for how many juz they must memorize; as long as they are capable, whatever they can memorize is encouraged.

The Qur'an and tahfidz classes share similarities in learning, but there are differences. One of the results from an interview with a teacher revealed that the tahini and Qur'an classes are usually not conducted only inside the classroom but are often held in the mosque.

The Madrasah Head's Policy in Maintaining the Sustainability of the Excellent Qur'anic School Program

The first finding scheme starts with how children can read the Qur'an. MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul implements the Tilawati method to teach the basics of reading the Qur'an. The Tilawati method has resulted in a significant improvement. The results can be felt and have become a reference in mosques and institutions, both formal and non-formal, in the Summersuko sub-district for Qur'an reading lessons. Significant development has also been felt regarding the increase in the number of enrolled students, totaling sixty-three children. Before the Islamic Qur'anic School program, the school was anxious because finding students was still tricky. With the existence of this program, the community has become more aware of the need to read the Qur'an, and they have flocked to enroll their children at MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul.

The second scheme targets completing the Qur'an by the time they graduate from the madrasah. Completing the Qur'an is a goal for the madrasah because, for six years, students continuously read the Qur'an until they can finish it. In the 2016/2017 academic year, the graduation ceremony for the sixth-grade class also included the Khotmil Qur'an (Qur'an completion) ceremony. In this case, the students will be continuously guided to improve their recitation and knowledge of tajwid so that when they memorize, there will be no mistakes in their reading. The third scheme is that students who graduate from the madrasah already have a foundation of memorizing at least Juz Amma or Juz 30. After the students have mastered reading the Qur'an, they will be gradually guided in memorizing the Qur'an, starting with Juz Amma. Regular practice improves their memorization ability through daily recitations, Khataman gatherings, weekly muraaja'ah (review sessions), and muhafadhoh exams (Roy, 2022). This continuous practice must be maintained so that students can get used to pressure, and thus, their goals can be achieved.

The fourth scheme prepares students in grades 1-2 to memorize the Qur'an. Implementing this fourth scheme requires a strict process because they still need to focus on becoming fluent in reading the Qur'an at that age. Reading the Qur'an correctly and fluently can be achieved through this process, which involves reading smoothly and accurately. This is part of the madrasah's effort to nurture Qur'anic generations from an early age.

However, it ultimately depends on the student's abilities and whether they can do so or not. If they are incapable, there is no pressure to continue; the process should proceed naturally. The fifth scheme is for students to memorize more than one juz. This scheme receives special attention because it is a remarkable achievement for the students, as they are able to face the challenging process of memorization alongside participating in numerous academic lessons. Positive thinking and motivation must be maintained to strengthen their memorization efforts.

Parents have high hopes for their children to become Qur'anic generations. Kertamuda also stated in Maharani that memorizing and constantly reciting the Qur'an will eliminate fear and bring tranquility to the soul of the students. The sixth scheme is to make MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul a prestigious and blessed school. Strengthening the vision and mission of the institution must always ensure continuity to achieve the desired goals. The Excellent Qur'anic School program has become a sustainable program that is now felt by all segments of the surrounding community. Becoming an outstanding institution is not just about having many students but must also be built with personal awareness.

Whatever efforts are made by the institution must always be supported collectively so that their benefits can be felt together. The sustainability of a program is indeed an inevitability that we must all understand when developing the quality of educational institutions. The head of MI, Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul, proves that among many good madrasah programs, the one that lasts is the most valuable. The Excellent Qur'anic School program has been running for almost eleven years and remains strong among other programs. This has become a source of pride for the madrasah, as the program has been running successfully and continuously year after year. The efforts made by the head of the madrasah to maintain the sustainability of the program are shown in Figure 1.

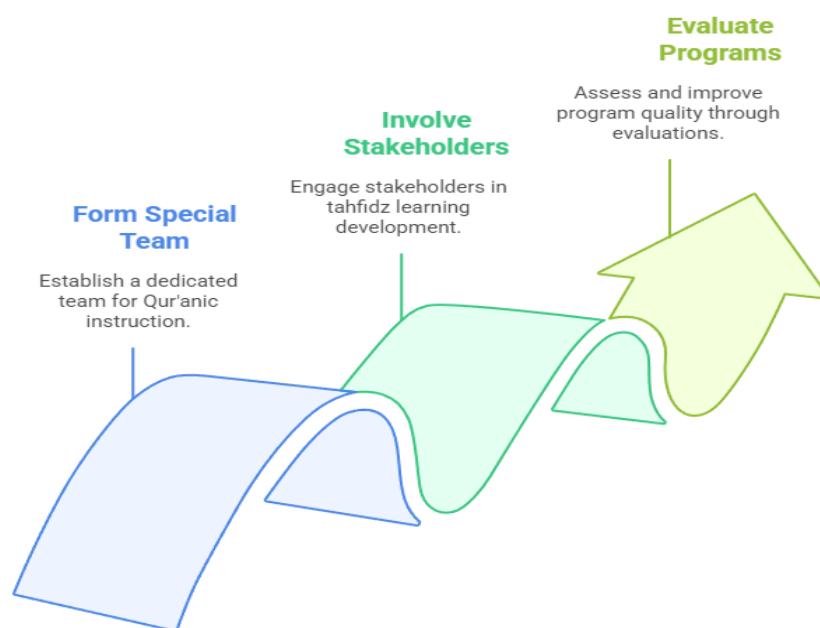


Figure 1. Maintaining the Sustainability of the Program

From the image, it can be explained that, first, to maintain the program's sustainability, the madrasah head forms a unique team for Qur'an reading instruction, selecting and placing qualified teachers in their field. Placing teachers according to their expertise will maximize their responsibilities in its implementation. The unique team will be responsible for designing a curriculum for Qur'anic learning using the Tilawati method to strengthen the students' foundational skills.

Second, involving stakeholders in developing tahfidz learning at MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul. Once students are considered fluent, they will be guided to become hafidz. In this regard, MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul collaborates with JAMQUR (Jamiyyah Qurro' wal Khuffadz), which handles the tahfidz learning. All technical aspects of teaching, instruction, and guidance are entrusted to JAMQUR. As stated above, it will be maximized if all activities are entrusted to the experts. Third, quality improvement can be achieved by evaluating every program or activity that has been carried out. Evaluation is the assessment process conducted to obtain an overview of the success of an action. Basrowi (2009) stated that the purpose of evaluation is classified into four categories: a) Providing feedback on the teaching and learning process and making improvements for students. b) Determining each student's progress, which is then used to provide reports to parents. c) Determining the promotion to the next level or status and whether the student passes.

This evaluation aims to measure how well the program is progressing in line with its goals. Therefore, the Head of MI, Nurul Islam Madrasah, consistently conducts continuous evaluations to improve the quality of the educational institution. Evaluations are conducted comprehensively and measurably to determine the next steps. The researcher hopes that the results of this study can be used as a reference for formulating policies for the Head of Madrasah in managing sustainable educational programs. The researcher also believes this study's findings will have a small scope and a wider reach for creating sustainable programs.

Discussion

The study analyzes the policies the head of MI, Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul, implemented to sustain the Excellent Qur'anic School program. The research was motivated by the need to examine the effectiveness of leadership in sustaining educational programs in Islamic institutions, particularly in the context of Qur'anic learning. Previous research has often highlighted the role of leadership in educational settings. However, limited attention has been given to the long-term sustainability of religious educational programs, such as those centered around the Qur'an. This study aimed to fill that gap by assessing the leadership strategies employed to maintain and enhance the success of the Qur'anic education program at the madrasah. The study's primary objectives were to explore the implementation of the Excellent Qur'anic School program, focusing on the leadership practices that contribute to its sustainability, and to investigate the outcomes and challenges faced during its execution. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform other educational institutions about effective leadership strategies that foster the longevity and success of religious education programs.

The study results indicate that the head of MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul, Mr. Sahroni, has played a crucial role in the success and sustainability of the Excellent Qur'anic School program. Several key practices have marked his leadership: forming a specialized team for Qur'anic instruction, collaborating with external stakeholders for the Tahfidz program, and continuously evaluating program outcomes to ensure quality improvement.

The use of the Tilawati method has significantly enhanced the students' ability to read the Qur'an fluently, which, in turn, has led to an increase in student enrollment and community engagement. The program has become a hallmark of the institution and is seen as a model for other madrasahs in the region (Bulut Ates & Aktamis, 2024; Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020; Zawawi et al., 2023). The study also found that the madrasah head's efforts in maintaining a supportive learning environment despite the increasing number of students have created a sense of community. It improved the students' Qur'anic reading skills. However, a notable weakness highlighted by the study was the challenge of accommodating the growing number of students, which has led to concerns about optimal learning conditions.

The study's findings largely align with the expectations set at the outset, particularly regarding the impact of strong leadership on program sustainability. The significant increase in student enrollment and the development of a successful Qur'anic education program support the argument that effective leadership can drive the long-term success of educational initiatives. However, the challenge posed by the increasing student population was an unexpected outcome. Despite the program's success in attracting more students, the lack of adequate resources to accommodate the growing number has created potential barriers to the program's continued success. This discrepancy suggests that while growth is a positive outcome, it requires careful planning to ensure sustainability.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that emphasizes the centrality of leadership in educational settings. For instance, studies by Rathee (2020) and Wahid et al. (2022) have shown that strong leadership in madrasahs is critical for achieving educational goals and ensuring program sustainability. These studies support that effective leadership practices, such as regular evaluation and community involvement, are essential in sustaining educational programs. However, the current study extends these findings by focusing on Qur'anic education programs and providing empirical evidence from an Islamic educational context, which had been underexplored in the literature.

The success of the Excellent Qur'anic School program can be attributed to several factors, including the consistent leadership of Mr. Sahroni, the implementation of the Tilawati method, and the engagement of external stakeholders like JAMQUR for the Tahfidz program. These factors contribute to creating a robust system that supports students' spiritual and academic development. The program's ability to improve Qur'anic recitation and memorization among students reflects the effectiveness of these strategies. For example, the practice of using specialized teams for Qur'anic instruction could be adopted by other madrasahs to ensure that teachers with the right qualifications are placed in appropriate roles. This strategy ensures that students receive high-quality education in Qur'anic reading and memorization. Additionally, the collaboration with JAMQUR for the Tahfidz program is a model for other institutions seeking to develop specialized learning tracks for students interested in memorizing the Qur'an.

The main contribution of this study is shedding light on how the leadership of the madrasah head plays a key role in keeping the Qur'anic education program running smoothly. Specifically, it highlights the use of the Tilawati method and the formation of a unique teaching team. This study stands out because it provides real-world evidence supporting earlier theories on the importance of effective leadership in Islamic educational institutions. However, this research is unique because it focuses on Qur'anic education, which has received less attention in academic discussions. This research fills a gap by showing that the madrasah head's role goes beyond academic management. It also involves collaboration with external stakeholders and regular evaluations to ensure the program's quality. This study enriches existing leadership theories in Islamic education and offers fresh insights on how to sustain Qur'anic education programs, especially in madrasahs that focus on teaching the Qur'an.

CONCLUSION

The head of the madrasa plays an important role in the sustainability and development of the educational institution, as demonstrated by Mr. Sahroni, S.Pd from MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul. Since 2013, he has implemented the flagship program, Excellent Qur'anic School, to strengthen the foundation of Qur'an reading through the Tilawati method, which has proven to improve the quality of education at the madrasa. Despite facing challenges, this program has shown positive results and received support from the community. Observations show that the school environment is adequate, although a reorganization is needed to accommodate the increasing number of students. The program involves a team of teachers using the tahsin method to ensure the quality of learning and utilizes both classrooms and the mosque to boost student motivation. The success of this program reflects the importance of the head of the madrasa in creating and maintaining sustainable educational programs that meet the needs of the students.

MI Nurul Islam Labruk Kidul has implemented the Tilawati method for basic Qur'an reading instruction, which has proven to improve the quality of learning significantly and has become a reference for other institutions in the Sumbersuko district. The Excellent Qur'anic School program has successfully attracted community interest, leading to a drastic increase in student enrollment. The main target is for students to complete the Qur'an (khatam) and have at least memorized Juz Amma. The learning scheme includes tahini guidance with the tahini method to correct and strengthen recitations and memorization carried out through daily recitations, khaman assemblies, and muhafadhoh exams. The madrasa also collaborates with JAMQUR for tahfidz guidance to ensure the quality of teaching. Periodic evaluations are conducted to ensure the program is progressing according to its objectives, with results reflecting the improvement in quality and program sustainability, making MI Nurul Islam a distinguished and blessed madrasa.

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