Learning Management and Leadership Skills of Madrasah Principals in Implementing Freedom to Learn Policy

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Abstract. The freedom to learn policy is interpreted as an innovative program for the world of education in Indonesia, although at the beginning of the policy discourse it was blown up to the public experiencing many pros and cons, but at this time the policy needs to be pursued for its success in its implementation in schools or madrasah. Seeing the vital role of madrasah principals in striving for the successful implementation of these policies, it is necessary to carry out training activities to improve the skills of madrasah principals. The purpose of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of training to improve learning management and leadership skills for madrasah principals in facilitating learning freedom in schools. This study used a quantitative approach with a comparative descriptive research design. There were 51 respondents who were training participants. The results showed that there was an increase in the learning management and leadership skills of madrasah principals in facilitating learning freedom oriented to local wisdom and the digital era.

Keywords: Freedom to Learn Policy · Training · Principals · Madrasah

1 Introduction

Practically all educational institutions at various levels are trying to successfully implement the freedom to learn policy issued by the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia [1, 2]. Although at the beginning of the policy discourse, there were many pros and cons, at this time the policy needs to be pursued for its success in its implementation in schools. The freedom to learn policy is interpreted as an innovative program for the world of education in Indonesia which is based on two things, namely, first, giving freedom to teachers, students, and schools to innovate and carry out independent and creative learning activities, second, education reform is not only in the curriculum aspect, but also initiates a movement in each school through schools and teacher activists [3, 4].

The issuance of the freedom to learn policy by the Indonesian government aims to explore the potential that exists in students, teachers, and schools in order to achieve superior quality school output. In addition, this policy also seeks to create a broad innovation space for all elements of education in order to improve the quality of education comprehensively and progressively [5, 6]. The enactment of the policy makes the leaders of educational institutions must be able to change the pattern of school work, so as to be able to seek the success of the policy in schools [2, 7]. The existence of school principals who are able to take an effective role is recognized as a key component in realizing excellent schools [8, 9].

The freedom to learn policy that must be followed and implemented has implications for the pattern of learning activities from a conservative approach towards a more flexible direction and towards experiential learning to accommodate students' needs in learning [10, 11]. The use of varied methods and approaches is needed by teachers in learning activities to accommodate the diversity of student interests and abilities, in this regard teachers are required to be more innovative and creative in learning activities [12, 13]. Of course, an excellent school principal is an asset for the realization of skilled and professional teachers.

The implications of the freedom to learn policy are not only in the aspects of teachers and learning, from the principal's side, the implications of the policy are much greater as a form of the principal's responsibility as a leader and manager at school [7, 14]. The successful implementation of the freedom to learn policy at school is the full responsibility of the principal, so it is not enough if the principal only relies on his/her skills so far. Principals must constantly improve their skills, especially in the context of implementing freedom to learn policies amidst the pressure of the Covid 19 pandemic and the digital era [15, 16].

It is recognized that the duties and roles of school principals are getting harder during this pandemic. Especially in trying to solve problems that arise as a result of the pandemic, coupled with the need to implement new policies in their schools [7, 17, 18]. Understanding the important role of a school principal, it is appropriate that school principals must be equipped with qualified skills in carrying out their duties. Various trainings were followed to be one of the solutions to improve the skills of school principals [19, 20]. However, there have not been many trainings specifically related to improving the skills of school principals in the context of facilitating learning independence in schools, where the problem is also felt by Madrasah Principals in Bondowoso Regency, East Java, Indonesia.

It is known that training is one of the efforts to improve the knowledge and skills of individuals or groups [21–23]. Training is organized with participants who are school principals, because there is a match between the problems faced and the skills model to be trained. Not only that, these skills will be an added value for the Madrasah Principals in Bondowoso Regency. The existence of a learning management and leadership skills model for school principals in facilitating local wisdom-oriented learning independence and the digital era is expected to later provide innovation in school management and learning so that learning success can be optimized. Based on the analysis of the situation and a glimpse of the problems being faced, the purpose of this study is to analyze

the effectiveness of training to improve management skills and learning leadership for madrasah principals in the Bondowoso Regency area in facilitating freedom of learning.

2 Methods

In line with the research objectives, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of learning management and leadership skills training for madrasah principals in Bondowoso regency in facilitating learning freedom, which was held face-to-face on Wednesday, 6 October 2022, at the Madrasah At-Taqwa Hall in Bondowoso regency. Resource persons in the study included the Bondowoso Regency Ministry of Religious Affairs and lecturers from the Universitas Negeri Malang. A quantitative approach with a comparative descriptive research design was used to achieve the research objectives. The pre-test and post-test instruments were specifically designed to measure the success of the training implementation. The instruments were filled out by 51 training participants, who then analyzed the data using two techniques, namely descriptive analysis and Wilcoxon analysis with the help of the SPSS version 24 program [24, 25]. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the skills of the participants before and after the training. While the Wilcoxon test was conducted to see whether or not there was a difference in the skills of madrasah principals before and after the training program, for the difference test the Wilcoxon test was chosen because the research sample was relatively small.

3 Results and Discussion

The description of the research results described was obtained through pre-test and post-test instruments filled out by 51 training participants. There are several training materials presented, namely (1) independent learning policy in madrasah, (2) independent learning: its essence and implementation, and (3) learning management and leadership in the context of freedom to learn policy.

Figure 1 shows the documentation of the training activities. Based on the results of the analysis, it is known that there is an increase in the learning management and

Fig. 1. Training implementation

Table 1. Description of participants' skills before and after training

Value	Interval	Category	Freq	Mean	Description
Pre-Test	0–25	Not good	0	41.77	Fair
	26–50	Fair	46		
	51–75	Good	5		
	76–100	Very good	0		
Post-Test	0–25	Not good	0	69.22	Good
	26–50	Fair	3		
	51–75	Good	31		
	76–100	Very good	17		
N: 51					

Table 2. Wilcoxon test results

Negative Ranks	Positive Ranks	Ties	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
0	51	0	0.00

leadership skills of madrasah principals in facilitating freedom of learning oriented to local wisdom and the digital era, as the material trained.

In more detail, based on Table 1, before the training activities were carried out, the level of skills of madrasah principals related to the management and leadership of madrasah principals in facilitating freedom of learning in madrasah obtained a mean of 41.77 which was in the fair criteria, this is understandable because the freedom to learn policy is new to them, so it requires insight and improvement of skills for madrasah principals, but there are training participants who are already at good criteria related to the skills trained. Furthermore, based on Table 1, it can be seen that after the training activities are carried out, the mean is 69.22, which is in the good criteria, this indicates an increase in the skills of madrasah principals before and after training.

The results of the Wilcoxon test can be seen in Table 2, based on the analysis conducted, there is a difference in the skills of participants before and after training, because the sign value is 0.00 (<0.05). Further explained, a value of 51 was obtained for positive ranks, which can be interpreted that all training participants experienced an increase in skills, and there were no participants who experienced no change or decrease after the training was carried out, as evidenced by the value of 0 for negative ranks and ties.

The existence of independence, innovation, freedom, and autonomy given is the essence of learning activities that lead to independent learning [26, 27]. However, the meaning of independent learning is not that simple, but independent learning also needs to pay attention to the norms and rules that have been made [2, 7, 28]. The essence of independent learning needs to start from the principal's skills in interpreting the concept

of an freedom to learn policy, therefore through the skills possessed by the principal, it is hoped that it can facilitate learning independence in schools.

The principal is the most important element in striving for the successful implementation of the freedom to learn policy in schools [29, 30]. The freedom to learn policy can provide opportunities for principals to optimize the implementation of school education, with flexibility in managing school resources and establishing partnerships with the community to realize school excellence [31, 32]. School principals who are skilled in realizing freedom of learning in schools are needed to improve the skills of school principals regularly. Efforts to improve the skills of school principals can be obtained through formal and non-formal education activities. One of the non-formal education activities that is recognized to improve one's skills is training [23, 33]. Through the training activities that are followed, it is expected that the principal's skills will increase, and can become a driving force for school progress.

Based on the results of the analysis, there was an increase in the learning management and leadership skills of madrasah principals in facilitating learning independence, it can be said that the training carried out was effective and appropriate, as an effort to improve the skills of madrasah principals. The success of the training is also supported by the active involvement of the participants as seen from the activeness when asking questions, discussions, and practices [19, 34]. In addition, efforts to build closeness from the resource person to the participants also support the success of the training implementation.

The principal as a manager needs to have the ability to manage existing resources through the process of planning, organizing, mobilizing, and supervising to strive for the achievement of freedom of learning in schools [35, 36]. Principals need to have skills that can support the needs of teachers and students in learning, and in order to mobilize school resources to be more effective [37, 38]. Principal skills should be developed at a more specific level to support independent learning in schools.

In the digital era, school principals need to understand that freedom to learn is a new paradigm in education that needs to be applied, with existing technological advances, students need to be given the freedom to develop their potential and talents [16, 39]. So this brings new consequences and challenges to schools to present a learning process that is very different from the previous one. Principals need to encourage and provide flexibility to teachers to explore information and develop their creativity in teaching [14, 40]. Teachers need to be encouraged to be able to use a variety of strategies and a variety of learning models so that they bring pleasure to the learning process with students.

Freedom to learn in the context of digital era learning, according to the principal's view, is closely related to ICT devices and existing technology needs to be utilized in the learning process [41, 42]. The principal basically supports the implementation of independent learning at school, with the assumption that school is a place with a diversity of interests, talents, and potentials that need to be developed. No longer generalizing these potentials, but by giving freedom to which potentials want to be developed and facilitated by the school through the learning process.

4 Conclusion

The implications of the freedom to learn policy are not only on the aspect of teachers and learning, from the principal's side, the implications of the policy are much greater as a form of the principal's responsibility as a leader and manager at school. Improving the skills of school principals needs to be pursued through a training process either organized independently by the school, or through training activities organized by the government or universities. Based on the results of the analysis, it is known that there is an increase in the learning management and leadership skills of madrasah principals in facilitating learning independence oriented to local wisdom and the digital era. Professional development for school principals is something that must be pursued. Additional skills obtained through the training process, it is hoped that the principals can implement it at school, it is not enough to stop there, it is hoped that the principal can spread the insights he has just gained to all elements of the school, thus increasing the chances of success of the freedom to learn policy can be implemented at school.

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