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## **PRINCIPAL MANAGEMENT IN FOSTERING STUDENT INDEPENDENCE AT SMK MA'ARIF NU CILONGOK, BANYUMAS**

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**Abstract**

This study was conducted at SMK Ma'arif NU 1 Cilongok, Banyumas Regency, with the aim of understanding and obtaining an overview of the principal's management practices in fostering student independence. Research data were collected from respondents through observation, interviews, and documentation. To ensure data validity, a triangulation technique was employed, encompassing sources, theory, and time. Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. The results of the study indicate that student independence management at this school aligns with the school's vision and mission, which include: (1) educational management in school administration to support student independence programs, (2) the implementation of student independence programs, and (3) the dissemination of the program through the principal, teachers, and educational staff.

**Keywords:** Management, Principal, and Student Independence**Abstrak**

*Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di SMK Ma'arif NU 1 Cilongok, Kabupaten Banyumas, dengan tujuan untuk mengetahui serta memperoleh gambaran mengenai manajemen kepala sekolah dalam upaya membentuk kemandirian siswa. Data penelitian diperoleh dari responden melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Untuk menjamin keabsahan data, digunakan teknik triangulasi yang mencakup sumber, teori, dan waktu. Analisis data dilakukan dengan tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan kesimpulan atau verifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa manajemen kemandirian siswa di sekolah ini berjalan sejalan dengan visi dan misi sekolah, yang meliputi: (1) manajemen pendidikan dalam pengelolaan sekolah untuk mendukung program kemandirian siswa, (2) implementasi program kemandirian siswa, dan (3) sosialisasi program melalui kepala sekolah, guru, serta tenaga kependidikan.*

**Kata Kunci:** Manajemen, Kepala Sekolah dan Kemandirian Siswa**INTRODUCTION**

Education plays a vital role in national development, as it provides every individual with the opportunity to discover, develop, and apply new knowledge as a foundation for shaping the future. Efforts to improve the quality of human resources are inseparable from the crucial role of education. From a management perspective, Mary Parker Follet, as cited in Handoko (2003), states that management is the art of getting work done through others, meaning that a manager is required to be able to carry out various organizational activities through cooperation. This aligns with Daft's view, which emphasizes that

management is the process of achieving organizational goals effectively and efficiently through planning, organizing, leading, and controlling resources. A similar understanding is expressed by Soebagio (2000), who asserts that management is an individual's skill in achieving results through the utilization of others' activities. Meanwhile, George Terry, as cited in Kencana Syafie (2004), emphasizes that management is a process encompassing planning, organizing, executing, and supervising to achieve organizational objectives by optimizing available resources.

Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System explains that education aims to develop abilities, shape character, and build a dignified national civilization. Education not only serves to enlighten the nation's life but also to develop students' potential so they grow into individuals who are faithful, God-fearing, of noble character, healthy, knowledgeable, competent, creative, independent, and possess a sense of responsibility as democratic citizens. Thus, education is not merely a means of transferring knowledge but also a vital instrument in character formation and personality development. In the context of national development, education plays a central role as a driver of human resource quality improvement and a guide for national progress. As stated in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, education has the primary mission of enlightening the nation's life through a national education system focused on intellectual and technical skill development (Soemarno Soedarsono, 2009).

More broadly, education is understood as a conscious effort undertaken by adults to develop potential and shape an ideal individual in accordance with predefined objectives. Education can also be viewed as a process of individual interaction with the natural, social, cultural, political, and economic environments, thereby serving as a strategic means to produce high-caliber human resources capable of competing at the global level (Rustam Efendi et al., 2022:2). In relation to competence, Charles, as cited by Imam Musbikin (2013), defines competence as rational performance capable of achieving expected goals. The term "independence" derives from the root word "self" with the prefix "ke-" and the suffix "-an," indicating a specific condition. Independence is closely linked to self-development, as articulated by Carl Rogers through the concept of "self," which forms the core of the process of fostering independence (Desmita, 2014).

Essentially, independence describes an individual's confidence in their ability to face and resolve problems without relying on others. An independent individual is characterized by the courage to face challenges, the ability to make decisions independently, initiative, creativity, and concern for the surrounding environment. Experts also emphasize that independence is a psychosocial ability encompassing freedom of action, non-dependence on others, resilience against environmental influences, and the skill to manage one's life needs independently (Eti Nurhayati, 2011). Thus, education, management, competence, and independence are interrelated elements in shaping individuals who are competitive, responsible, and capable of making tangible contributions to national development.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a process evaluation approach. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, documentation, and data triangulation applied to each component of the study. Data validity in qualitative research requires examination based on four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this context, data triangulation serves as a technique to compare and verify the reliability of information by leveraging differences in sources, timing, and research instruments. According to Moloeng (2005), triangulation can be applied through several methods, including comparing observational data with interview data, comparing data from primary informants with information from secondary informants, comparing interview results with documentation obtained during the research process, and comparing interview results with the content of relevant documents. Through the application of this technique, researchers can ensure that the data obtained is more comprehensive, objective, and has a high level of validity.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Management is essentially the ability or skill to achieve objectives through the involvement of others. Therefore, management can be viewed as the core of administration because it serves as the primary instrument in the implementation of administration itself (S.P. Siagian, 2000). More specifically, management is the process of coordinating various work activities so that they can be completed effectively and efficiently with the help of others. In other words, management can be defined as the effort to work with others to establish, interpret, and realize organizational goals through the execution of key functions, namely planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and controlling (T. Hani Handoko, 2003).

In the field of education, management plays a crucial role in fostering students' independence so they can face future challenges. Educational management is viewed as an approach focused on developing students' potential, particularly in cultivating an independent mindset through the learning process. This can be observed, for example, at SMK Ma'arif NU 1 Cilongok, where the application of educational management concepts is directed toward building student independence. Independence itself is understood as an attitude acquired by an individual gradually over time, where a person learns to be self-reliant in facing various environmental situations, until they are ultimately able to think and act without dependence on others. According to Robert Havighurst, as cited by Desmita (2014), there are four forms of independence that need to be developed. First, emotional independence, which is an individual's ability to control their own emotions without relying on others. Second, economic independence, which is the skill to meet and manage economic needs independently. Third, intellectual independence, which is the ability to face and resolve various problems that arise. Fourth, social independence, which is the ability to interact with others in a healthy manner without dependence on others.

Efforts to foster student independence cannot be achieved merely by granting freedom; rather, they must actively involve students in all aspects of learning. This includes participation in learning strategies, school project development, the application of various

learning approaches, and formative assessment and learning evaluation. Through such involvement, students are expected to develop critical thinking skills, particularly when facing problems, so that they can find solutions while simultaneously building their independence. The factors that drive student independence in learning are crucial aspects to consider, as they reveal students' thought patterns and their ability to act independently.

Based on observations and interviews, the factors contributing to student independence include:

### 1. Motivation

Motivation is a crucial factor in students' learning processes at school, particularly within the context of educational management. Motivation significantly influences the extent to which students participate in learning activities and determines their level of understanding and ability to absorb the material presented (Suprihatin, 2015: 73). James O. Whittar, as cited in Wasti Soemanto (2006: 205), explains that motivation is essentially a condition that drives living beings to behave in order to achieve specific goals. In line with this, Abdul Mujib (2002: 243) emphasizes that motivation comprises the totality of drives, needs, desires, and similar factors that direct behavior. Thus, motivation can be understood as an intermediary variable that arouses, regulates, sustains, and channels individual behavior toward the desired goals.

In the school context, the principal's role is crucial in motivating students to enhance their independence. Based on interview findings, the principal stated that they strive to build a cohesive team with a shared commitment to achieving common goals. A strong team enables educational programs to run more effectively through thorough planning, while fostering open communication and collaboration among all school community members. As a leader, the principal not only directs but also provides motivation, inspiration, and encouragement to all members of the school community, including students, to help them develop their learning independence.

In addition to motivational aspects, the principal also emphasized the importance of adequate facilities and infrastructure as supporting factors in enhancing student independence. He explained that the school must have comprehensive learning facilities relevant to students' needs, such as well-equipped classrooms, a library with an adequate collection, laboratories, an automotive workshop, office spaces, sports facilities, and other resources that support the learning process. Given that the school offers automotive and office administration programs, the principal feels a duty to advocate for the fulfillment of these facility and infrastructure needs. Thus, the availability of adequate facilities is expected to encourage students to be more active, creative, and independent in the learning process.

### 2. Leadership Factors

Leadership, at its core, is the process by which a leader sets direction, policies, and strategies to achieve organizational goals. In the educational context, leadership holds a

vital position because a school's success is largely determined by the principal's ability to manage resources, provide guidance, and create a conducive school environment. Leadership is not merely about authority but rather about how a leader can serve as an inspiration, motivator, and role model for the entire school community. A leader's success in guiding the organization significantly influences the success of both individuals and groups, particularly in fostering student independence—a crucial component of educational goals aimed at shaping students' character and identity.

Minister of National Education Regulation No. 13 of 2007 on Standards for School/Madrasah Principals stipulates that a principal must possess five core competencies: personal, managerial, supervisory, social, and entrepreneurial. These five competencies form the foundation of a principal's professionalism in carrying out their duties. A school principal is not only required to understand educational dynamics but must also possess practical skills to guide, influence, and mobilize all school components to achieve educational goals optimally. As explained by Jejen Musfah (2015), a leader has the ability to influence others' behavior through authority or by setting an example. Plungkett and Attner, as cited in Jejen (2015: 301), also emphasize that a school principal plays a dual role as an educator, advisor, evaluator, and spokesperson. To fulfill these roles effectively, a school principal must master competencies aligned with the needs of their environment. Therefore, a school principal's leadership can be viewed as a strategic factor in determining educational success within the school.

The principal's responsibilities are not limited to achieving academic targets but also include fostering a school culture that is conducive, healthy, and supportive of effective, efficient, and productive learning processes. Hasan Basri and Tatang (2015) emphasize that principals are required to exercise leadership capable of integrating all educational components into a mutually supportive system to ensure educational quality. Furthermore, the principal's leadership plays a crucial role in fostering student independence. Effective leadership can create a school environment that encourages students to be more confident, responsible, and capable of making decisions independently. A principal who can connect with students not only provides motivation but also ensures the availability of adequate facilities to support the development of their potential. Thus, a positive synergy will be established between the principal, teachers, and students in fostering student independence.

In line with this, Dricker, as cited in Made Pidarta (2004), emphasizes that a principal's duties encompass several strategic aspects, such as: managing the organization based on clear objectives, daring to take long-term risks while considering the best solutions, making strategic decisions, developing an integrated management theory, communicating information quickly and accurately, coordinating all organizational functions, and linking work outcomes to subsequent decision-making. This perspective indicates that a principal's leadership extends beyond administrative duties to a strategic role in guiding the school toward achieving educational goals while fostering student autonomy.

### 3. Student Autonomy

According to Ali Imron (1996), self-directed learning reflects a strong internal motivational drive within students. Students who possess learning autonomy tend to actively seek solutions and learning methods to achieve success without relying on external intervention. This underscores that autonomy focuses not only on achieving learning outcomes but also on the process of discovering strategies aligned with personal needs. Through autonomy, students can independently address learning challenges while enhancing competencies and fostering creative and innovative behaviors. The essence of learning autonomy is an activity self-regulated and self-directed, arising from personal awareness, and carried out consistently without excessive dependence on others.

In line with this, Tirtahardja and Sulo (2008) explain that learning autonomy is an activity grounded in personal will, judgment, and responsibility. This independence is necessary so that students become accustomed to managing and disciplining themselves in learning, and serves as an important means of fostering maturity in attitude and ability. In educational practice, independent students mature more quickly in facing various challenges because they are accustomed to taking the initiative, directing themselves, and taking responsibility for their learning decisions. Wahyuningsih (2020) adds that indicators of independent learning include initiative in designing strategies, self-management skills, independence from others, and full responsibility for the learning process.

The principal plays a crucial role in fostering student independence. They serve not only as an administrative manager but also as a leader capable of creating a conducive learning environment. Through collaboration with teachers, staff, and all school stakeholders, the principal designs various programs that encourage independence, such as conducting flag ceremonies, commemorating national holidays, holding regular religious study sessions, organizing extracurricular activities, and implementing additional programs like *madrasah diniyah* (*madin*). These activities serve as training tools that accustom students to being independent, responsible, and active in both social and academic life.

In addition, more targeted strategies are also used to strengthen independence, such as awarding recognition for achievements, group discussions, and fostering emotional closeness between teachers, students, and the principal. Yamin and Sanan (2010:105) emphasize that key efforts in fostering student independence include teachers' skills in selecting instructional strategies, creating a conducive learning environment, integrating independence-building learning both in and out of the classroom, and the tangible example set by teachers and the principal. Thus, fostering independence is not merely a theory but must be realized through repeated and consistent practical application.

Independent habits can also be cultivated through concrete activities, such as completing individual assignments, problem-based projects, involvement in school organizations, social activities, and the development of practical skills relevant to their respective fields of study. Through these activities, students learn to take responsibility for their own

decisions and actions, as well as face the consequences of the choices they make. This fosters intrinsic motivation to continuously develop their personal qualities without relying on others.

At SMK Ma'arif NU Cilongok, the development of independence is implemented through students' active involvement in various activities. They are encouraged to participate in organizations such as the Student Council (OSIS) and the Student Parliament (MPK), with responsibilities including designing school programs, managing budgets, and supporting school policies. Extracurricular activities are also mandatory based on students' interests and talents, such as robotics, journalism, arts, or accounting clubs. In the social sphere, students are involved in humanitarian activities, such as fundraising for disaster victims, visits to orphanages, "Clean Friday" initiatives, and assisting with traffic management.

Furthermore, the school equips students with real-world work experience through internship programs at various companies or institutions, spanning sectors such as tourism, culinary arts, education, and major industries like Astra. This program trains students to face the realities of the workplace while fostering independence in managing tasks and responsibilities. Additionally, industrial visits are conducted to help students understand modern work systems and the technologies used in the business world. All these activities aim not only to develop academic skills but also to cultivate independence, responsibility, and a more mature readiness to face the future.

#### 4. The Factor of Cooperation

Cooperation is a fundamental aspect of both social life and organizational life, as through cooperation various goals can be achieved more effectively and efficiently. Abdulsyani (1996) explains that cooperation is a form of behavior carried out collectively without regard to the backgrounds of others involved, with the aim of achieving a predetermined common outcome. In this context, cooperation is not merely understood as a collective activity but also reflects the spirit of mutual assistance that is a hallmark of Indonesian culture. Meanwhile, Wibowo (2011) emphasizes that in team-based organizations, performance outcomes are significantly influenced by the ability of team members—who possess diverse cultural backgrounds and varying competencies—to collaborate effectively. This implies that an organization's success is largely determined by its ability to integrate these differences through the synergy fostered. The benefits of cooperation can be seen in terms of both efficiency and effectiveness. Abuddin Nata (1994) explains that cooperation can save time, effort, and costs, particularly regarding information dissemination and the delivery of education. Additionally, cooperation can have a positive impact in the form of enhanced institutional image (image building), as institutions capable of fostering good collaboration will be better known and trusted by the public. Thus, collaboration not only provides internal benefits but also strengthens the institution's legitimacy in the public eye.

In the business realm, collaboration is often referred to as a business partnership. Hafsah (1999) explains that a business partnership is a strategy undertaken by two or more parties over a specific period to achieve mutual benefits. The core principle of this partnership is mutual benefit, ensuring that all involved parties reap the rewards of the collaboration. This demonstrates that collaboration is not merely about working together but is a strategic, planned approach to enhancing productivity and competitiveness. In the educational setting, such as at SMK Ma'arif NU Cilongok Banyumas, collaboration plays a crucial role in improving educational quality while preparing students to compete in the workforce. The partnerships the school establishes with various stakeholders—including government agencies, private entities, and the community—aim to expand access, enhance the quality of learning, and provide students with real-world experiences. One example is collaboration with the industrial sector for internship programs, which allow students to gain hands-on experience in the field aligned with their specialized skills. Additionally, the school can collaborate with universities through visits or technical guidance, enabling students to better understand advancements in science and technology.

Collaboration with the local community is equally important, for instance in social activities, environmental service, and community service. Activities such as “Clean Friday” or student involvement in traffic management ahead of major religious holidays not only foster independence but also strengthen students’ emotional bonds with the community. Thus, collaboration at SMK Ma'arif NU Cilongok is not only focused on improving academic and technical skills but also on fostering students’ social character to cultivate care and sensitivity toward the environment.

a. Collaboration with industry.

Collaboration between the school and the industrial sector is realized through the *Field Work Practice* (PKL) or *Industrial Work Practice* (PKI) program, where students are placed in companies relevant to their specialized competencies or fields of study. Through this program, students not only gain hands-on experience applying theories learned in school but are also trained to understand work ethic, discipline, and the practical skills required by the workforce. Additionally, students have the opportunity to visit industrial sites to observe production processes and a company’s operational systems. From these activities, they gain new insights into technology, production management, and the latest industrial developments. Furthermore, some companies provide additional training and certifications to students participating in the program, thereby enhancing graduates’ competitiveness in the job market. Through this collaboration, students not only learn theoretically but also hone practical competencies aligned with labor market needs.

b. Collaboration with the government.

Students receive support for vocational education programs and improved access to job opportunities. According to the school principal, the collaboration involves sending internship participants to serve as partners in developing students’ abilities to perform individual tasks through academic knowledge and to carry out fieldwork in accordance

with their respective skills and majors, serving as preparation for after they graduate from school. The collaboration carried out by Ma'arif NU Cilongok Vocational High School includes, among other things, the exchange of experiences and knowledge with institutions within Banyumas Regency, such as sub-district and regency offices, as well as with universities, where students serve as administrative staff at each respective institution. To improve the quality of learning for students at SMK Ma'arif NU Cilongok, the school organizes seminars and discussions with other institutions to enhance the quality of the school and its students.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research findings, data analysis, and interviews with teachers and the school principal, it can be concluded that the development of student independence at SMK Ma'arif NU Cilongok is achieved through various strategic and sustained measures. These efforts to foster independence are realized through teachers' ability to employ a variety of innovative teaching strategies, create a conducive learning environment, and provide friendly service that supports students' needs. Teachers are also expected to integrate the values of independence into the learning process, both inside and outside the classroom, so that students not only gain knowledge but also develop an independent character that will be beneficial in their daily lives. Additionally, teachers play a crucial role as role models by demonstrating concrete examples of independence, discipline, and responsibility that students can emulate.

Steps taken by the school to foster student independence include instilling confidence in students that every individual has the ability to perform good deeds, learn independently, and practice responsibility. Intensive communication between students, teachers, and the principal serves as a vital bridge in strengthening students' self-confidence and independence. Discipline is also enforced through the consistent application of rules, so that students become accustomed to valuing time, responsibility, and the norms that apply both at school and in society. Thus, student independence develops not only in the academic realm but also in terms of attitude, behavior, and social relationships. Factors influencing the development of student independence at SMK Ma'arif NU Cilongok include the family environment, parenting styles, social interactions, education, as well as students' emotional maturity and intelligence. Family support through appropriate parenting styles can strengthen students' sense of responsibility, while the school environment provides opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and independent problem-solving. Students' emotional maturity and intelligence are also crucial aspects, as their ability to think maturely and manage their emotions determines how effectively they can act independently when facing challenges.

Overall, the independence of students at SMK Ma'arif NU Cilongok has been well-established. They are able to learn and carry out tasks without relying on others, demonstrating initiative, a sense of responsibility, and self-confidence in managing their own maturation process. This serves as an indicator that the school has successfully instilled a spirit of independence that not only supports academic success but also

prepares students to face real-life challenges. With this independence, students can build lifelong learning skills, develop critical thinking abilities to solve problems, and foster a self-confident attitude oriented toward responsibility. The skills they acquire at school serve as a vital foundation for navigating the future with full preparedness, whether in the workplace or in community life.

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