



Curriculum Management Innovation in Realizing Excellent Elementary Schools

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Abstract

Excellent schools are institutions that provide high-quality education through innovative curriculum management. However, not all primary schools can achieve the title of superior, including in the implementation of an innovative curriculum that is adaptive to the needs of students. This study aims to describe curriculum management innovation in realizing superior schools at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing data collection techniques that included in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Informants were selected purposively, consisting of the principal, deputy head of curriculum, and three teachers. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques that included coding and theme identification using ATLAS.ti software. The results showed that there were six main themes of curriculum management innovation, namely: innovation in evaluation, planning, implementation, curriculum organization, characteristics of excellent schools, and implementation challenges. Innovation is realized through curriculum reflection, collaboration among stakeholders, project-based learning approaches, learning differentiation, and supportive leadership. The main obstacles in implementing curriculum innovation include limited human resources, differences in curriculum between the office and the foundation, and low parental participation. This research contributes to the practice of innovation-based education management.

Keywords: innovation; curriculum management; school excellence; elementary school

INTRODUCTION

Excellent schools in Indonesia are educational institutions that have high standards in various aspects, including curriculum, teaching staff, facilities, and innovative learning systems. Excellent schools are schools that have received A accreditation, implement innovative learning, and have academic and non-academic achievements compared to other schools (Siruwa & Hamid, 2023; Susetyo et al., 2022; Legi et al., 2022). An excellent school is defined as an effective school that can organize processes and produce educational outcomes that exceed existing standards (Kasman, 2021). An excellent school produces results through good inputs, processes, and outputs. It has management and leadership that can direct all school resources toward achieving school goals, job satisfaction among personnel, high-quality graduates, and anticipatory and productive school change (Syafaruddin, 2018; Fattah, 2018).

The reality on the ground shows that not all schools fall into the category of excellent schools. Based on school accreditation, it can be determined that in the Province of D.I. Yogyakarta, there are 1,311 elementary schools accredited with grade A (70.83%), 518

accredited with grade B (27.98%), 6 accredited with grade C (0.32%), and 16 that have not yet been accredited (0.86%) (Dinas Pendidikan Pemuda dan Olahraga DIY, 2025). Central Java Province has 18,758 elementary schools, consisting of 7,409 (39.50%) elementary schools that have been accredited A, 10,942 (58.33%) elementary schools accredited B, 258 (1.38%) elementary schools accredited C, and the rest have not yet been accredited (0.79%) (Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Propinsi Jawa Tengah, 2025). The impact of substandard schools is that students have difficulty reaching their academic potential. This is in line with research findings that show that students' difficulties in innovative learning methods, such as blended learning, are caused by low independent learning skills, lack of family support, and technical obstacles such as poor internet connection (Renica & Irafahmi, 2023). Meanwhile, research by Ningsih & Karlimah (2024) regarding the application of digital technology in the Muhammadiyah curriculum, it was found that although students felt more motivated when technology was used, only about 54% were able to use it optimally without teacher guidance. Another study by Annisa et al. (2016) revealed that strengthening educational management in Muhammadiyah schools greatly influences the effectiveness of innovative learning. Based on this reality, strengthening curriculum management is key to driving transformation toward excellence in schools.

Curriculum management is the management of the implementation of a targeted and efficient curriculum so that the predetermined teaching objectives can be achieved (Ragil Nazar et al., 2024). Curriculum management is the main substance of management in schools. The basic principle of curriculum management is to ensure that the learning process runs smoothly, with student achievement as the benchmark, and to encourage teachers to develop and continuously improve their learning strategies. Curriculum management in schools is carried out in four stages: a) planning; b) organizing; c) implementation; d) control (Maulana et al., 2020; Bahri et al., 2024). Curriculum management is a key element in successful education. It emphasizes the importance of strong leadership, stakeholder participation, and continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure effective curriculum implementation that is relevant to the needs of students and the community through the application of innovative learning (Sholeh et al., 2024).

Innovative learning refers to innovative curriculum management, which plays a crucial role in creating outstanding schools, particularly in addressing various existing challenges. Curriculum management innovation is not merely about replacing or updating lesson materials, but also encompasses how the curriculum is organized, designing creative learning activities, and adapting programs to meet the diverse needs of students. It emphasizes that for learning to be more engaging and conducive, an innovative curriculum must be able to consider students' differing interests, abilities, and backgrounds (Wu et al., 2024; Dewanti & Putra, 2022). With this approach, schools not only emphasize exam scores but also prepare students to have 21st-century skills that will help them face challenges in the real world (Rindiani et al., 2023). Curriculum management innovation is not easy to implement in the field. The success of innovation depends heavily on various supporting elements, such as the dedication of the school principal, full support from the foundation, good collaboration with parents, and the availability of adequate technology-based learning resources (Martinez, 2022). However, on the other hand, various obstacles often arise, ranging from budget constraints, teachers' unwillingness to adapt to change, to the lack of adequate professional development opportunities for educators.

Existing research provides insights but also reveals a gap. Junaidi et al. (2025), emphasizes the importance of an effective and efficient managerial framework, as well as the role of a positive organizational culture in strengthening management effectiveness to encourage sustainable innovation. Ramadina (2024) states that curriculum management innovation focuses on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum through the use of digital media to create more effective and enjoyable learning. Achdyat et al. (2025) state that the strategic role of the principal is to adapt the curriculum to the changing times and student needs to improve the quality of education. Maor et al. (2024) state that learning innovation involves flexibility in methods, the use of project-based approaches, and freedom for teachers to choose teaching models that enhance creativity. Latifah & Suryantari (2025) state that the application of the joyful learning approach supports teacher innovation and creativity through a pleasant learning atmosphere. The research gap from previous studies is the lack of empirical evidence on specific managerial strategies, the managerial role of schools, and indicators of innovative curriculum success. Research is still limited to aspects of teacher behavior, the use of digital media, and participatory activities without a systematic approach.

Research on curriculum management innovation in creating excellent schools is of high urgency because it plays a role in improving the quality of learning, optimizing educational resources, and ensuring that students acquire competencies that are in line with industry and society needs. This research contributes to educational management theory and practice, particularly in the context of high-performing schools focused on quality and global competitiveness. Through sustained innovation, schools can continue to evolve and provide better education for future generations (Rejeki et al., 2024). The novelty of this study lies in its innovative approach to curriculum management, which integrates visionary leadership values, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and adaptation to the dynamic needs of students in the digital age. It offers new insights into how innovative practices in curriculum development can create quality differentiation that characterizes outstanding schools, particularly through the integration of the national curriculum with character-building and 21st-century skills, and the use of learning technology.

Based on these concepts and findings, the research question is how curriculum management innovation can be used to create an excellent school at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school. In addition, the researcher also seeks to identify the curriculum management strategies implemented at the school and examine the challenges faced by the school in implementing them, so that this can serve as a guide for policymakers at the school level.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to comprehensively understand curriculum management innovation (Rukajat, 2020). This method was chosen based on its suitability in exploring the meanings, understandings, and experiences of educators. The research was conducted at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school because this school has an innovative approach to curriculum management that contributes to its achievement as an outstanding school. The characteristics of the research subjects were determined through purposive sampling, which involved selecting informants who were considered to have the best understanding of the context of curriculum management innovation. The research subjects consisted of the principal, who had managerial authority; the vice principal, who focused on the

curriculum and three classroom teachers who were directly involved in planning and implementing learning (Bungin, 2020). The measurement instruments used included in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation (Arikunto, 2019). Interviews were conducted with the principal, vice principal in charge of curriculum, and three teachers to explore their experiences, strategies, and challenges in managing innovative curriculum. Observations were applied to classroom learning activities and school activities, particularly to see the implementation of models such as project-based learning and blended learning. Documentation in the form of curriculum, work programs, activity reports, and visual evidence such as photos and videos was also analyzed to reinforce the findings (Riadi, 2019).

The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques according to Braun & Clarke (2023). The data analysis process consists of: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data, which involves transferring the data to Atlas Ti to facilitate coding, (2) creating initial codes, which involves assigning specific codes or labels to each important part of the data, which is then collected for further analysis, (3) identifying themes, which involves grouping the codes into several groups to form sub-themes and main themes, (4) reviewing themes, which involves re-examining themes to ensure they align with the data, (5) determining and naming themes, which involves finalizing themes by the research statement, (6) creating a report, which involves providing examples of quotations and analyses that support the themes (Heriyanto, 2018).

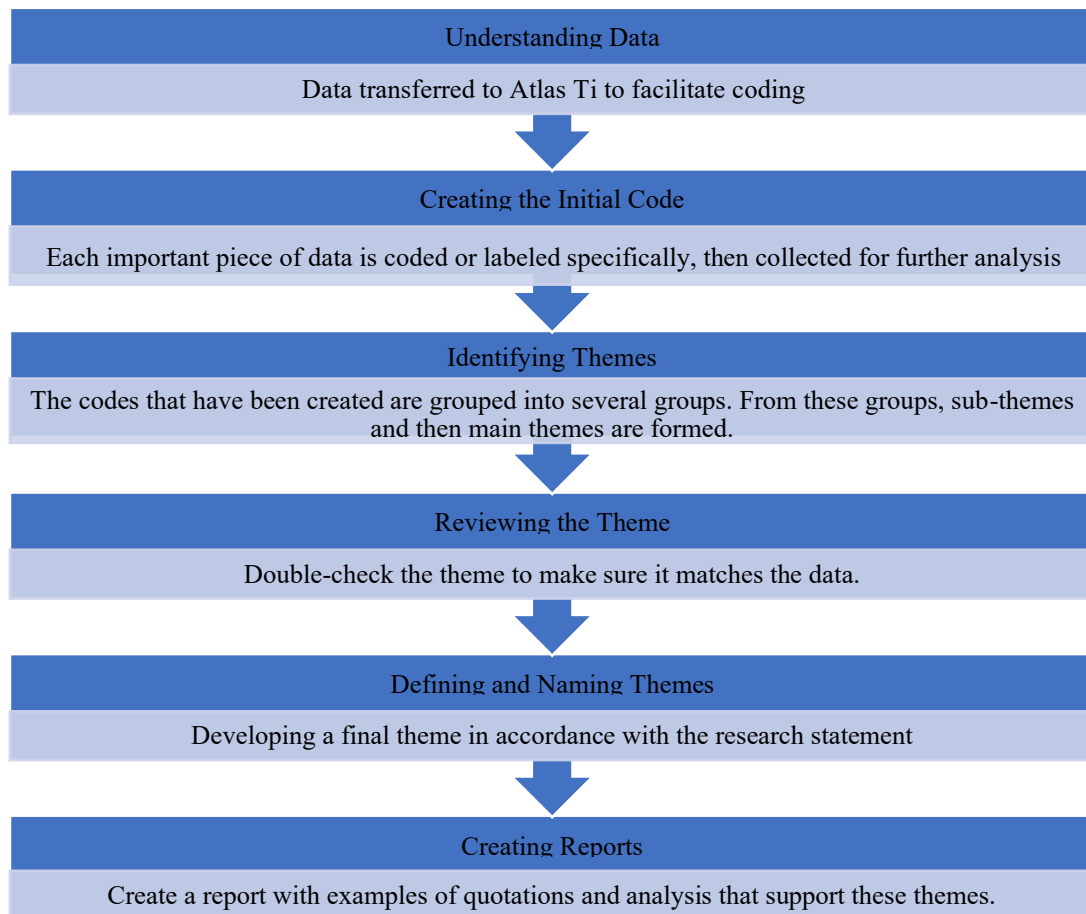


Figure 1. Data Analysis Flow

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The field research results show that six important themes were identified that explain curriculum management innovation in creating excellent schools, namely characteristics of excellent schools, curriculum planning innovation, organizational innovation, implementation innovation, evaluation innovation, and challenges. Each important theme is supported by relevant sub-theme coding as shown in Figure 2.

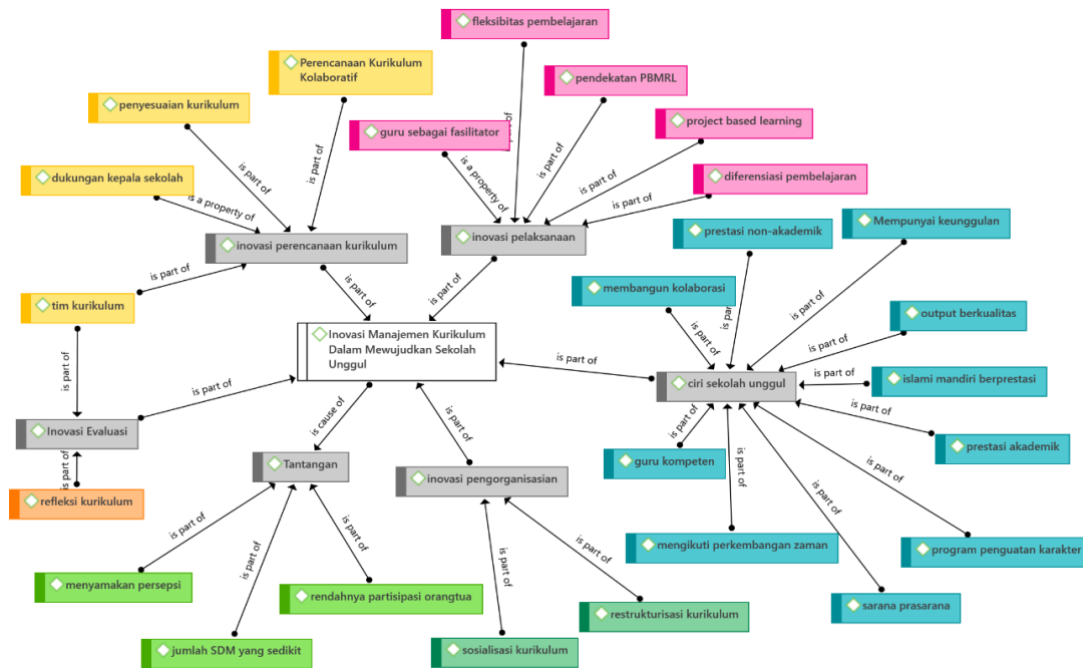


Figure 2. ATLAS.TI 9 Research Data Analysis

Characteristics of An Excellent School

The theme of an excellent school consists of ten sub-themes, namely building collaboration, non-academic achievements, having excellence, quality output, independent Islamic achievements, academic achievements, character building programs, infrastructure, keeping up with the times, and competent teachers. The first characteristic of an excellent school is building collaboration, which has already been implemented at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school, according to the results of interviews with P5 sources.

“Because we are a private school. This means that we can organize our curriculum. It is not the same as others. However, because we are under the education department, we have no choice but to follow the education department. So, our obstacle is there. The council and the department must build collaboration. Meanwhile, to combine the Muhammadiyah curriculum and the department's curriculum, there needs to be a certain space. So the council's curriculum has its structure, which is then combined with the department's curriculum. As a result, when evaluating the report cards, we have to consider both aspects [P5].”

Non-academic achievements are also one of the defining characteristics of an excellent school because they reflect the holistic development of students beyond classroom learning. These achievements include success in arts, sports, religious activities, leadership, and community service, which nurture creativity, confidence, and teamwork. Schools that emphasize non-academic achievements provide opportunities for students to explore their talents, build character, and strengthen soft skills essential for real-life challenges, as mentioned by the P4 source.

“Continue to improve the learning media and continue to produce high-achieving and high-quality output. Branding is also important. In addition to being good academically, children should also excel in non-academic areas. Both are important. This means that both must be balanced [P4].”

A similar sentiment was expressed by P5 as follows.

“Okay, there are many indicators of an excellent school. There are academic and non-academic aspects. Globally, we divide them into academic and non-academic aspects. Academic aspects can be broken down into several parts, starting from exact and non-exact sciences. Similarly, Muhammadiyah adds religious aspects. Non-academic aspects are the same. They can also be broken down into arts, religious education, and others. It depends on the type of intelligence that will be emphasized [P5].”

Another characteristic of an excellent school is that it has clear advantages over other schools, making it stand out in the community. These advantages may include innovative programs, superior teaching quality, advanced facilities, or unique character-building initiatives. Such strengths create a distinct identity that attracts students and parents, while also fostering pride within the school. By offering benefits that go beyond the standard, an excellent school establishes itself as a leading institution with lasting impact and recognition. This was stated by source P2.

“In my opinion, the concept of an excellent school is a school that has good achievements and is accepted by the surrounding community, which is the first step, and then it can be accepted by the wider community, and it has certain advantages over other schools, and it has certain advantages over other schools in the surrounding area [P2].”

This is reinforced by the statement from source P5.

“Well, if we define an excellent school, excellence is something that needs to be highlighted. So, every school has different areas of excellence. That means we can't generalize and take everything. There must be one in Kadisoka, Muhammadiyah Kadisoka, whose area of excellence is academic achievement in ASPDBK. But excellence is a brand, right? So, what is highlighted is one of the fields among all the fields in the school. In my opinion, an excellent school excels in one field, not all of them. If it excels in one field, that means it is excellent in that particular area [P5].”

High-quality output is also a characteristic of Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school, which demonstrates its status as an excellent school. This quality is reflected in students who achieve strong academic results, show good character, and are well-prepared for future challenges. The combination of academic excellence, moral values, and practical skills ensures

graduates contribute positively to society, strengthening the school's reputation as a model of educational success. This is reinforced by the results of interviews with P3 sources.

"Yes, in my opinion, if the students' characters are well-formed and their final grades are good, then I think that is one of the reasons [P3]."

Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school prepares independent, high-achieving Islamic generations by integrating academic excellence with strong religious values. Through a balanced curriculum and supportive programs, students are encouraged to excel in learning while developing discipline, faith, and independence. This holistic approach equips them to compete globally while upholding Islamic principles as stated by source P1.

"First, we prepare children to become a generation that is skilled in Islamic teachings, geography, and able to keep up with the times [P1]."

This is in line with the statement made by P5, who said that.

"Our branding is Islamic, independent, and high-achieving. So we start with high achievement first. Because our competitors are not only public schools, but also private schools, Muslim and non-Muslim. So if we start with Islamic first, it will be a bit difficult. So we start with achievement first. The achievement that we can teach in a tangible way is academic achievement. For independence, we use a full-day school program [P5]."

Academic achievement is also another characteristic of an excellent school because it reflects students' ability to reach high standards of learning. Excellence in academics shows effective teaching, strong curriculum management, and dedicated student effort. These achievements enhance the school's credibility and ensure graduates are competent, competitive, and prepared for future success. This is supported by the results of interviews with P4 sources.

"Furthermore, the output produced is always high-achieving and of high quality. The branding is also good. In addition, the children are good at academics [P4]."

The same thing was also conveyed by the P5 source.

"So let's start with the high achievers first. Because our competitors are not only public institutions, but also private, Muslim, and non-Muslim institutions. So if we start with Islamic institutions first, it will be rather difficult. Therefore, let's start with the high achievers first. The achievements that we can teach in a tangible way are academic achievements [P5]."

The character building program at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school is already underway, emphasizing the development of students' morals, discipline, and responsibility alongside academic growth. The school integrates religious teachings, local content, and daily practices to strengthen values such as honesty, respect, and independence. By prioritizing character education, the program nurtures well-rounded individuals who are not only intelligent but also ethically grounded. This initiative ensures that students grow into responsible citizens with strong identities, reflecting the school's vision of holistic excellence, according to the results of an interview with source P2.

"Well, there we will provide a curriculum that is in line with the character we want to emphasize in this school. For example, the curriculum here should be like this in Indonesia, for example, how many hours it should be, and because we have a religious brand, we prioritize more religious

subjects, perhaps from the curriculum, mathematics is 8 hours, maybe only 6 hours. So, the two hours are used for religious subjects, such as Arabic and Muhammadiyah, so that the curriculum can still run smoothly, whether it's the local content or the additional curriculum [P2]."

The next characteristic of an excellent school is adequate infrastructure, which supports effective learning and teaching. Facilities such as modern classrooms, technology-based tools, libraries, and extracurricular spaces create a conducive environment for students. At Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school, collaborations with partners provide resources like tablets, enhancing digital learning and ensuring students gain access to innovative, high-quality education, as confirmed by the results of interviews with P4 sources.

"At that time, we collaborated with Edutab. We were provided with tablets. So, they were used as learning tools, and we were given the tablets. As for state universities, we also collaborated with UAD and UNY [P4]."

Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school continues to strive to keep up with the times in order to maintain its status as an excellent school by adapting its curriculum and teaching methods. The school integrates technology, innovative learning models, and relevant programs to ensure students remain competitive, skilled, and prepared for future challenges. As stated in the interview conducted by P1.

"First, we prepare children to become a generation that is skilled in Islamic teachings, geography, and able to keep up with the times [P1]."

The final characteristic of an excellent school is competent teachers who play a vital role in implementing the curriculum effectively. At Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school, many teachers hold advanced degrees and continuously improve their skills. Their professionalism, dedication, and mastery of teaching methods ensure students receive quality education, fostering both academic excellence and strong character development. This statement is supported by the results of interviews with P3 sources.

"Currently, the final results are very good in Kapanewon, and the facilities have also been improved. The teachers are also competent in their fields, and most of them have master's degrees [P3]."

This is in line with the results of interviews with P5 sources.

"Improving teacher competence should be related to curriculum implementation. Teachers are the ones who implement the curriculum. If teachers don't understand it, they can't do it. How can they convey it to their students? [P5]."

Curriculum Planning Innovation

Curriculum planning innovation consists of three sub-themes, namely principal support, curriculum adjustment, and collaborative curriculum planning. Principal support in curriculum planning innovation is supported by the results of interviews conducted by P3.

"The principal is very supportive and motivates us, as well as rewarding teachers who have been successful in learning innovation [P3]."

A similar sentiment was expressed by source P4.

“The first thing is to provide facilities, of course, to accommodate, encourage, and motivate, and the principal only supervises, of course, like quality assurance, something like that. So he doesn't directly intervene in the learning process. Supervision is usually handled by the supervision team, which is managed by the Vice Principal and teachers appointed by the principal. Additionally, if a teacher achieves success or receives an award, the principal will provide rewards or gifts [P4].”

The interview results shared by P2 support the statements from sources P3 and P4 as follows.

“The support is full support, especially if, for example, as a teacher, we've been successful, we'll be given extraordinary appreciation. For example, Class A yesterday was successful because one of the students ranked first in Sleman, and we maintained that position. Alhamdulillah, we have been number one in Kalasan for more than 10 years, so the principal will definitely give appreciation in the form of gifts or rewards, but the principal always supports what we do if it is good for the school [P2].”

The curriculum adjustment was carried out by Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school to suit the needs and characteristics of students so that the learning process could be innovative and meaningful. Teachers adapt lesson plans by considering students' interests, abilities, and learning styles, applying methods such as project-based learning and differentiation. These adjustments make lessons more engaging, relevant, and effective, ensuring that students remain motivated, active, and able to achieve optimal learning outcomes. As stated in the interview results presented by P2

“The adjustments we make, for example, as a teacher, we must prioritize the material first, right? We plan according to the lesson plan (RPP), and within the RPP, we already know what material will be presented and the appropriate steps to take. However, we also need to adapt to the students. For instance, if the students are active, can we use PJBL [P2].”

The same thing was also found in the interview results presented by P3.

“The adjustments are communicated with the children, perhaps, ma'am, communicated with the children and parents regarding where this learning is going, like that [P3].”

In line with the statements from P2 and P3, source P4 also stated that:

“The approach, ma'am, and also applying differentiation during learning. We can't treat all students the same. So there must be differentiation [P4].”

Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school also implements an innovative curriculum to achieve excellence in education by integrating modern approaches with students' needs and current developments. The school uses engaging strategies such as technology-based learning, project-based activities, and differentiation to enhance creativity and motivation. This innovation ensures learning remains relevant, enjoyable, and effective, preparing students with the competencies and skills needed to excel in academic and non-academic areas. This is reinforced by the interview results shared by P2.

“Yes, we innovate according to the students' characteristics so that they can accept it because times have changed. If we only use the same old methods, the students will get bored. Our challenge is to keep up with the times and the children of today who are gadget-oriented. We have to keep up with gadgets, perhaps with Quizzy or other tools, so that the children can accept them. We can't just keep lecturing them; they will get bored [P2].”

P3 also expressed a similar view in the interview, as follows.

“The adjustments must be communicated with the children, perhaps, ma’am, and also with the parents regarding where this learning is heading, like that [P3].”

Organizational Innovation

The theme of organizational innovation consists of two sub-themes, namely curriculum restructuring and curriculum socialization. Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school has carried out curriculum restructuring as a form of curriculum management innovation in realizing an excellent school. As stated in the interview with P1.

“For the curriculum development process, we have a team, a team to develop the curriculum. Once we have the team, we proceed with program development, which will then be incorporated into our curriculum [P1].”

The same point was also raised by source P4.

“We already have a team formed for curriculum development. Maybe if we’re developing it, yes, but if we’re thinking about it, oh yes, now we, oh yes, the process, I mean. Well, it seems like no, there’s already a separate section for that. So, you know, we’re in fourth grade, right, ABC, so usually, each class selects one person to discuss the curriculum [P4].”

The interview with source P5 also reinforces the opinions of sources P1 and P4 as follows.

“Oh, everyone is involved. Because it’s called a curriculum. It’s done for the whole school. Everyone is involved. Usually, we are divided into teams. For example, the team that discusses the vision and mission is finished, then moves on to the subjects. From the subjects, it moves on to the schedule team. From the schedule, we move on to extracurricular activities and so on. We are then divided into several teams. Then, there is input from If it’s a team like that, it means that not all teachers are involved. They are not yet involved. They are involved because of the input. I mean, if they are not involved, how can we develop it? So, the team is responsible for collecting and coordinating [P5].”

Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school has also conducted curriculum socialization to ensure transparency and collaboration in its implementation. The process involves presenting the curriculum to teachers, parents, and the community, allowing them to provide input and feedback. This approach strengthens shared understanding and support, ensuring that all stakeholders are aligned with the school’s vision and goals, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of learning and curriculum innovation. As stated in the interview with P1.

“After the curriculum program, we will certainly socialize it to teachers, the community, and parents. That will serve as a platform to provide input for the perfection of our curriculum [P1].”

This is reinforced by the interview results shared by source P2.

“The planning and development involve teachers as the primary facilitators for students in the classroom. After we create the curriculum to be implemented at the school, we will socialize it to the teachers. Then, the teachers will plan what will be taught at the school with the teachers involved in the learning process [P2].”

The same point was also made by informant P5.

“So far, what we’ve always done is hold an initial meeting. For example, if we’re going to start in July, we’ll socialize the plan for the following year. Because it’s not possible for us to socialize what will be done that year [P5].”

Implementation Innovation

The implementation innovation theme consists of five sub-themes, namely teachers as facilitators, learning flexibility, PBMRL approach, project-based learning, and learning differentiation. Teachers as facilitators of curriculum management innovation have been implemented at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school in realizing an excellent school. This is reinforced by the results of interviews with P2 as follows.

“The planning and development involve teachers as the primary facilitators for students in the classroom after we create the curriculum to be implemented at the school. We then socialize it to the teachers, after which the teachers will plan what will be taught at the school with the teachers involved in the learning process [P2].”

Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school, as an excellent school, always implements flexible learning to meet the diverse needs of its students. Learning takes place not only in classrooms but also through outdoor activities, online platforms, and creative methods. By providing varied learning opportunities, the school encourages independence, adaptability, and critical thinking, ensuring students remain engaged, motivated, and prepared for challenges in both academic and real-life contexts. This was revealed in the interview results with source P2.

“Learning isn’t just in the classroom; it can be outside the classroom, through Googling, or other innovations, such as online learning or other methods, which can also be used as a tool or medium for the children, so that in their lesson plans, they will also mention the media used [P2].”

A similar point was made by source P4, who stated that:

“Because we are part of Muhammadiyah, the curriculum must align with the department’s guidelines. We are under the department’s jurisdiction. Sometimes we have to align during exams. That has to be the same, right? The objectives are different. The department and Muhammadiyah are not always in sync. So we get overwhelmed. Maybe it’s not a separate curriculum. Our learning, for example, is in line with the department. But during exams, we use PDM materials. That’s where the challenge lies. So, the curriculum used is the same, but the ultimate goal to be achieved is different [P4].”

The PBMRL learning approach is also applied at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school as part of its innovative strategies to enhance education quality. PBMRL, which combines project-based learning, problem-solving, deep learning, and realistic features, allows students to connect lessons with real-life contexts. This approach encourages creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking while accommodating diverse learning needs. By applying PBMRL, the school ensures students gain meaningful experiences that strengthen both academic skills and life competencies. This is reinforced by the results of an interview with source P4.

“Regarding that approach, we collaborated with Muhammadiyah Condongcatur elementary school, where one of the teachers happened to be pursuing a doctoral degree. We were involved in developing the PBMRL approach. It’s essentially PBL but with realistic features. The realistic features vary, returning to differentiation. It’s a combination of PBL, PM, deep learning, and

differentiation. Combined, it's called PBMRL. We also use STEAM. Maybe I'll share the evidence later if needed. Because there's a guidebook [P4]."

As an outstanding school, Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school also implements project-based learning to make lessons more engaging and practical. Through this approach, students actively explore real-world problems, collaborate in groups, and create meaningful projects. This method strengthens critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, ensuring learning outcomes are deeper and long-lasting. As stated in the interview with P1.

"Of course, we start with the PJBL learning model approach, which is adapted to the material. So, when the material is released, we use the self-directed learning model outside the classroom so that the children can have new experiences in the teaching and learning process [P1]."

Source P2 also expressed a similar view to source P1 as follows.

"Usually, we do have innovations like PBL and PJBL. Now, we will also have deep learning, so we use an approach that aligns with the material to be presented to the children, for example, in visual arts, there must be a project, so we use PJBL [P2]."

The innovation in learning implementation at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school is through differentiated learning, which tailors teaching to students' varying abilities, interests, and learning styles. By applying this approach, the school ensures every student receives appropriate support and challenges. This method promotes inclusivity, maximizes potential, and creates a more engaging and effective learning environment. This can be found in the interview results with source P2.

"The first innovation, which was mentioned earlier, is home visits. Not all schools have home visits for students. The second is completing the Iqro program, which not all schools have. Then there is tahfizd, which is now widely adopted by schools that prioritize the tahfizd program in their curriculum. However, we also have tablet-based learning [P2]."

Evaluation Innovation

The theme of evaluation innovation consists of two sub-themes, namely curriculum reflection and curriculum team. Innovation in curriculum management in realizing excellent schools can be done through evaluation innovation or curriculum reflection, and the existence of a curriculum team. As stated in the interview results presented by P5.

"So, the curriculum design is made for next year. From those years, we have reflections. From those reflections, we break down what we can continue, what needs to be improved, and what needs to be abandoned. It's like that; I think the management is more about the positions [P5]."

In line with P5's statement, P4 also stated that:

"So, actually, it is the reflection or evaluation that builds our school to be excellent [P4]."

Curriculum reflection at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school is carried out by the curriculum team to evaluate and improve the learning process. The team reviews past implementations, identifies strengths, and addresses weaknesses to refine future programs. This reflective practice ensures the curriculum remains relevant, effective, and aligned with students'

needs, fostering continuous improvement and maintaining the school's excellence, as confirmed by the interview results presented by P1.

"For the curriculum development process, we have a team. After forming the team, we create the program, which will be included in our curriculum. After the curriculum program is finalized, we will socialize it to teachers, the community, and parents as a platform for feedback to improve our curriculum [P1]."

This is further supported by the interview results shared by P4.

"At the school itself, the curriculum already has its responsibilities, like the curriculum coordinator. However, on the other hand, we are involved in the curriculum aspect, especially when it comes to classroom teachers and their lesson materials. Regarding teacher involvement, we already have a team formed for curriculum development [P4]."

The interview results with P5 also support the statements from P1 and P4 as follows.

"Oh, everyone is involved. Because it's called a curriculum, right? It's done for the entire school. So everyone is involved. Usually, we are divided into teams. For example, the team responsible for discussing the vision and mission has finished, then we move on to the subjects. From the subjects, we move on to the schedule team. From the schedule, we move on to extracurricular activities and so on. We are then divided into several teams. So, the team is responsible for accommodating and coordinating. We then discuss it together, hold a plenary session, and once everything is okay and finalized, we wrap it up [P5]."

Challenges

The challenge theme consists of three sub-themes, namely aligning perceptions, limited human resources, and low parental participation. The first challenge faced by Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school concerning curriculum management innovation in realizing an excellent school is aligning perceptions. As stated by the P3 source in the interview.

"The main challenge for teachers is probably aligning or harmonizing teaching methods among teachers, and we are still learning and continuously innovating with what is in the curriculum to implement it well [P3]."

The second challenge is the limited number of human resources, which affects the implementation of innovative programs at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school. With many students and relatively few teachers, the workload becomes heavier, and learning activities may not be fully optimized. This limitation highlights the need for additional staff or professional development to maintain quality education and school excellence, as stated in the interview with source P5.

"We have limited human resources, but many students [P5]."

The same point was also raised by source P1 as follows.

"Of course, the human resources are not all the same, or there is a shortage of competent human resources [P1]."

The third challenge is the low participation of parents, which hinders collaboration in supporting students' education at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school. Many parents

are too busy to attend meetings, consultations, or school programs, limiting their involvement. This lack of engagement reduces opportunities for synergy between school and family, making it harder to maximize students' potential and learning outcomes, as revealed in the interview with source P1.

“For the challenges in the teaching and learning process to be successful, there must be cooperation between parents, the school, the community, and the government. However, sometimes it is difficult because parents are busy, so to ensure that children can truly reach their full potential, we communicate, but sometimes it is difficult for parents to attend because every semester there are at least religious lectures and class consultations, and usually busy parents find it difficult to attend the consultations [P1].”

Discussion

The characteristics of an excellent school, as revealed in the research results at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school, are that an excellent school is an educational institution that excels in various aspects, from the learning process to the learning outcomes. In field findings, outstanding schools are characterized by ten key indicators, such as collaboration among stakeholders, academic and non-academic achievements, unique strengths that define the school's brand, high-quality student outcomes, and a vision emphasizing Islamic values, independence, and achievement (Legi et al., 2022). Other notable characteristics include character-building programs, comprehensive facilities and infrastructure, the ability to keep pace with the times, and highly competent teachers. These ten characteristics indicate that an excellent school is not only about academic achievement, but also encompasses managerial processes, learning innovation, and the involvement of all elements of the school. This emphasizes the importance of visionary leadership, collaboration, and optimal utilization of resources to produce high-quality graduates. Thus, these findings confirm that outstanding schools are formed through the synergy between innovative curriculum management and an adaptive educational system that responds to the challenges of the times (Pozas & Letzel, 2023). (Edyawaty et al., 2025)

Curriculum planning innovation at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school is a key strategy in creating an excellent school, as described in the research results section. This is in line with the introduction, which emphasizes the importance of adaptive, collaborative, and responsive curriculum management to meet the needs of 21st-century students. In practice, curriculum planning innovation involves three main aspects: school principal support, adaptation to student characteristics, and teacher collaboration in developing programs. The school principal not only provides resources but also motivates and recognizes teachers' innovative efforts, fostering a positive work environment. Curriculum adaptation is based on students' interests and learning styles, incorporating project-based approaches and technology integration. The planning process is also carried out collaboratively through a curriculum team composed of teacher representatives, ensuring that ideas and input from various stakeholders are accommodated. This practice demonstrates that innovative curriculum planning is not merely an administrative document but the result of a reflective and participatory process. These findings strengthen the argument that innovation in curriculum planning is a crucial foundation for educational transformation toward schools that are excellent, relevant, and adaptable to the challenges of the times (Syafaruddin, 2018; Fattah, 2018). (Musa & Kamal, 2024)

Innovation in curriculum management at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school is one of the key pillars in achieving excellence in education, as explained in the research findings. This process is realized through curriculum restructuring and socialization involving all elements of the school. A curriculum development team was formed in a representative manner from teachers of various grades, tasked with collecting, designing, and formulating a curriculum structure aligned with the school's vision and mission as well as student needs. These activities demonstrate synergy among educational stakeholders, reflecting collaborative leadership. The entire process does not stop at development but continues with socialization to teachers, parents, and the community as a form of transparency and a platform for feedback to refine the curriculum. These innovative steps emphasize the importance of curriculum management as the key to transforming into an excellent school. In this context, participatory curriculum organization reflects the implementation of adaptive, democratic, and responsive educational management principles in addressing contemporary challenges. Thus, curriculum innovation is not merely an administrative procedure but a visionary managerial strategy focused on sustainable improvements in educational quality (Harris et al., 2020)(Achdyat et al., 2025)

The innovation in curriculum implementation at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school has made a real contribution to the creation of an excellent school, as explained in the introduction. As previously stated, an excellent school requires innovative learning that is relevant to the needs of 21st-century students, and the findings in the curriculum implementation stage show direct compliance with these requirements. Curriculum implementation is no longer conventional but adopts principles of flexibility, project-based learning (PBL), differentiated instruction, and teachers acting as facilitators. The school has also developed the PBMRL approach, which integrates contextual learning with technology, reflecting an adaptive response to the dynamics of the times. These innovations not only enhance the appeal of learning but also cultivate students' skills aligned with future needs. With active teacher involvement and strong school leadership support, these implementation innovations serve as concrete evidence of the realization of innovative curriculum management (Dewanti & Putra, 2022). Therefore, implementation innovation is a crucial point in the transformation towards an adaptive, participatory, and transformative school of excellence.

Innovation in curriculum management and evaluation is an important element in creating excellent schools. This innovation is carried out through periodic curriculum reflection and the formation of a curriculum team that involves various elements of the school. The evaluation process is not only administrative, but also provides a space for reflection to review the effectiveness of learning and the relevance of curriculum content to student needs. The involvement of teachers, school principals, and managerial teams in evaluation demonstrates collective synergy that supports educational quality. This aligns with the assertion that outstanding schools require adaptive, anticipatory curriculum management capable of adapting to the dynamic needs of students in the digital age. In other words, evaluation innovation is not merely the final stage but the foundation for continuous renewal, ensuring that educational processes and outcomes remain relevant, effective, and competitive. This systematic evaluation strengthens the school's position as an institution responsive to change, aligning with the spirit of educational transformation toward schools that excel both academically and in character (Syafaruddin, 2018; Fattah, 2018).

The challenges in implementing curriculum management innovations at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school reflect the realities described in the introduction. Excellent schools require the implementation of an adaptive, collaborative, and visionary curriculum. However, in practice, it has been found that aligning perceptions among teachers remains the main obstacle to achieving learning harmony. This challenge is exacerbated by the limited human resources that are not commensurate with the number of students, so that the implementation of innovations is often burdened by the shortage of competent teachers. Additionally, the low participation of parents in school activities hinders the realization of synergy between school and family, even though parental support is the key to the success of innovative learning. These three challenges underscore the importance of curriculum management that not only emphasizes planning and implementation but also comprehensive organization and evaluation. This aligns with the assertion that innovative curriculum management is the solution to the low-quality outcomes in schools that have not yet achieved excellence (Martinez, 2022)(Pozas & Letzel, 2023). Therefore, systematic and structured efforts to overcome these challenges are strategic steps in accelerating the transformation towards competitive, high-quality schools.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Based on the results of research at Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school, it can be concluded that curriculum management innovation plays a strategic role in creating an excellent school. Innovation is carried out through reflective curriculum evaluation, collaborative planning, and adaptive learning implementation using the Project-Based Learning (PJBL) approach, differentiation, and PBMRL. The curriculum management strategies implemented include the active involvement of the school principal, teachers, and the curriculum team in developing and implementing the curriculum according to students' needs and the demands of the times. Learning implementation is supported by flexible media, contextual learning approaches, and the integration of character values and technology. However, schools face significant challenges such as limited human resources, low parental involvement in the educational process, and the need for alignment among teachers in understanding the direction of curriculum innovation. Continuous collaborative and reflective efforts are key to maintaining the quality of these outstanding schools.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that Muhammadiyah Kadisoka elementary school continue to strengthen collaboration among teachers, school principals, and the curriculum team in designing and evaluating curriculum implementation. The school needs to enhance ongoing teacher training to enable them to implement innovative, adaptive learning methods that align with contemporary developments and student characteristics. Additionally, it is important to establish more intensive communication with parents to increase their involvement in the educational process. Strengthening human resources through recruitment or training is also necessary to address existing human resource limitations in order to maintain the school's excellence.

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