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Principal's Policy in Improving School Competitiveness at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan

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Abstract:

The increasingly competitive era of education makes enhancing school competitiveness a strategic priority that requires effective leadership from principals. This research aims to examine the implementation of principal policies to improve the competitiveness of SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach utilizing data collection techniques that include interviews, observations, and documentation. The data evaluation process was conducted through stages of reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing, while data validity was verified using source and technique triangulation. Research findings indicate that policy formulation was implemented through a participatory process by considering government regulations, school stakeholders' aspirations, and the continuity of flagship programs. The main strategies implemented include fostering potential students and improving academic achievement through a team structure with the principal as coordinator and person in charge. Effectiveness evaluation shows substantial improvement in student achievement and the school's competitive position. This research confirms that transformative principal leadership, combined with sustainable strategy development, proves effective in enhancing the competitiveness of educational institutions.

Keywords:

Policy; Principal; Competitiveness

Abstrak:

Era persaingan pendidikan yang semakin ketat menjadikan peningkatan daya saing sekolah sebagai prioritas strategis yang memerlukan kepemimpinan kepala sekolah yang efektif. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji implementasi kebijakan kepala sekolah untuk meningkatkan daya saing SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan. Studi menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Proses evaluasi data dilaksanakan melalui tahapan reduksi, penyajian, dan penarikan kesimpulan, sementara validitas data diverifikasi menggunakan triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa formulasi kebijakan dilaksanakan melalui proses partisipasi dengan mempertimbangkan regulasi pemerintah, aspirasi *stakeholder* sekolah, dan kontinuitas program unggulan. Strategi utama yang diimplementasikan mencakup pembinaan siswa potensial dan peningkatan prestasi akademik melalui struktur tim kerja dengan kepala sekolah sebagai koordinator dan penanggung jawab. Evaluasi efektivitas menunjukkan peningkatan substansial untuk pencapaian prestasi siswa dan posisi kompetitif sekolah. Penelitian ini mengonfirmasi bahwa kepemimpinan transformatif kepala sekolah melalui pengembangan strategi berkelanjutan terbukti efektif untuk meningkatkan daya saing institusi pendidikan.

Kata Kunci:

Kebijakan; Kepala Sekolah; Daya Saing

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary educational institutions face unprecedented challenges as globalization intensifies competition and stakeholder expectations continue to evolve. Schools must navigate complex environments characterized by rapidly changing curricula, diverse student populations, and increasing pressure to demonstrate measurable outcomes. This competitive landscape demands strategic leadership capable of transforming institutional capabilities and sustaining academic excellence. Educational systems worldwide experience disruption from technological advancement, policy reforms, and shifting demographic patterns that require adaptive responses. Schools compete not only for student enrollment but also for resources, recognition, and community support. Market dynamics force educational leaders to differentiate their institutions through innovative programming, quality enhancement, and strategic positioning. Success depends on leadership effectiveness, resource optimization, and stakeholder engagement strategies that create sustainable competitive advantages. These pressures necessitate systematic approaches to policy development and implementation that can respond effectively to environmental challenges while maintaining educational quality and institutional reputation.

Principal leadership emerges as the decisive factor determining school success or failure throughout various educational contexts. Research demonstrates that effective principles mobilize institutional resources, create compelling visions, and implement policies that directly impact educational quality and organizational performance (Ayu, 2022). Educational institutions require leaders who can formulate comprehensive strategies, coordinate diverse stakeholders, and adapt to changing market conditions while maintaining rigorous academic standards. Principals function as strategic architects who design institutional frameworks, establish operational procedures, and cultivate organizational cultures that support excellence (Azis dkk., 2022). Their decision-making processes influence curriculum development, staff performance, resource allocation, and community relationships that collectively determine school effectiveness. Leadership competencies include vision articulation, change management, stakeholder communication, and performance monitoring that enable sustainable improvement initiatives. Successful principals demonstrate ability to balance multiple competing demands while maintaining focus on educational outcomes (Suarsana, 2020). Their policy decisions create ripple effects throughout the organization, influencing teacher motivation, student achievement, parent satisfaction, and community perception that ultimately shape institutional reputation and competitive position.

School competitiveness encompasses multiple dimensions including academic achievement, innovative programming, resource optimization, and stakeholder satisfaction that distinguish high-performing institutions. Competitive schools differentiate themselves through strategic positioning, continuous improvement initiatives, and adaptive capacity that enables superior performance compared to peer institutions (Nurlina dkk, 2023). The ability to sustain competitive advantage depends on systematic policy development and effective implementation mechanisms that align resources with strategic objectives. Educational competitiveness requires excellence across academic, extracurricular, and administrative domains that collectively create value for students, families, and communities. Schools must demonstrate superior outcomes in standardized assessments, university admissions, scholarship attainment, and graduate success rates. Innovation capacity involves curriculum modernization, technology integration, pedagogical advancement, and program diversification that enhances educational delivery. Resource optimization encompasses efficient budget management, facility utilization, staff deployment, and partnership development that maximizes organizational effectiveness. Stakeholder satisfaction reflects community confidence, parent engagement, student motivation, and staff commitment that sustain institutional support and facilitate continuous improvement efforts essential for long-term competitiveness.

SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, despite its established reputation as a preferred institution, confronts intensifying competition from emerging schools that actively pursue quality enhancement initiatives. Recent observations indicate that maintaining market position requires deliberate strategic interventions, particularly as neighboring institutions implement aggressive improvement programs targeting similar student populations. The school's leadership must therefore develop and execute policies that preserve competitive edge while responding to evolving educational demands and community expectations. Local competitors have introduced specialized programs, upgraded facilities, enhanced teacher qualifications, and strengthened community partnerships that challenge the school's traditional advantages. Parents increasingly evaluate schools based on comprehensive criteria including academic performance, extracurricular offerings, facility quality, and future preparation capabilities. Student achievement standards continue rising as universities become more selective and employers demand higher competency levels from graduates. Technology integration, international program availability, and innovative teaching methodologies have become differentiating factors that influence school selection decisions. These competitive pressures require systematic

policy responses that address multiple performance dimensions simultaneously while maintaining institutional identity and educational philosophy.

Current literature reveals limited empirical investigation of principal policy formulation and implementation specifically targeting school competitiveness enhancement at state secondary institutions. Previous studies have explored educational quality improvement at private Islamic schools (Fadilah, 2018), strategic management at public institutions (Zuhriyah, 2023), and competitive strategies at primary Islamic schools (Latif, 2020), yet these investigations primarily focused on general leadership approaches rather than specific policy mechanisms that create competitive advantages. This gap represents a missed opportunity to understand how educational leaders systematically develop, implement, and evaluate policies designed to strengthen institutional competitiveness through evidence-based approaches. Research has examined various aspects of educational leadership including vision development, change management, stakeholder engagement, and performance improvement, but few studies have specifically investigated policy formulation processes that target competitive positioning. Existing literature provides general frameworks for educational improvement but lacks detailed examination of how principals translate competitive pressures into actionable policies. The absence of comprehensive studies examining policy development, implementation strategies, and outcome evaluation at competitive state schools' limits understanding of effective leadership practices. This research prevents educational leaders from accessing evidence-based guidance for developing competitive strategies appropriate for their institutional contexts.

This study addresses research gaps by examining principal policy dynamics at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, contributing both theoretical understanding and practical insights for educational administrators seeking competitive advantage. The investigation provides systematic analysis of how effective principals formulate, implement, and evaluate policies designed to enhance school competitiveness through strategic leadership approaches. Research findings will advance knowledge of educational leadership while providing actionable guidance for institutional improvement initiatives that strengthen competitive positioning. The study examines three research questions: How does the principal formulate policies to enhance school competitiveness through strategic planning and stakeholder engagement? What implementation strategies are employed to execute these policies effectively across organizational levels and functional areas? What outcomes result from policy implementation efforts in terms of competitive advantage, institutional performance, and stakeholder satisfaction? These questions will generate

comprehensive understanding of policy processes that create sustainable competitive advantages. Investigation results will benefit educational leaders, policymakers, and researchers interested in understanding effective approaches to institutional competitiveness enhancement through strategic leadership and systematic policy development approaches.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine principal policies for improving school competitiveness at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan. The qualitative approach enabled holistic understanding of policy phenomena occurring naturally without variable manipulation. This method allowed researchers to explore policy formulation, implementation, and outcomes comprehensively through direct field investigation. Descriptive nature facilitated detailed examination of existing conditions and relationships based on empirical evidence. Research functioned as primary instruments for data collection and interpretation, ensuring contextual understanding of competitive strategies. This approach proved appropriate for investigating complex organizational processes that require nuanced interpretation rather than numerical measurement. The methodology supported exploration of multiple perspectives from various stakeholders involved directly with policy development and execution.

Data collection utilized three complementary techniques: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation review. Semi-structured interviews provided in-depth information from key stakeholders regarding policy formulation and implementation strategies. Non-participant observation enabled direct examination of policy execution and school activities related to competitiveness improvement. Documentation review collected secondary data from official reports, archives, and institutional records. Informants included the school principal as primary source, vice principals for curriculum and student affairs, providing comprehensive perspectives on policy processes. Informant selection considered knowledge relevance, experience levels, and direct involvement with competitive improvement initiatives. Data triangulation through multiple techniques ensured comprehensive coverage of research phenomena and enhanced information reliability.

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's three-stage model: reduction, display, and verification. Data reduction involved sorting, focusing, and simplifying field information for enhanced understanding and interpretation. Data displays organized information systematically through tables, charts, and narratives to identify patterns and

relationships. Verification drew conclusions from reduced and displayed data through systematic interpretation. Source triangulation validated information accuracy across multiple informants, while technique triangulation confirmed findings through various collection methods. This analytical framework ensured rigorous examination of policy processes while maintaining qualitative research standards. The combination of systematic analysis and validation techniques strengthened research credibility and transferability of findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Policy Formulation by the Principal of SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan in Enhancing School Competitiveness

The principle of making policies goes through several stages. One of the stages of the principal's policy is formulation. Policy formulation is the formulation or creation of policies. Thus, policy formulation is the creation/formulation of a policy in education. Educational policies and principal policies are interconnected and mutually influential. Educational policies provide a general framework, while principal policies play a role in implementing and adapting these policies to the context of each school. Both are equally important in efforts to improve the quality of education. Broader educational policies provide a general framework for principals in making decisions. However, principals have autonomy to translate these policies into the context of their respective schools. Principals are responsible for implementing educational policies at the school level. They must ensure that all established policies are implemented properly and effectively (smart, 2022).

There are three policy stages: formulation, implementation, and evaluation. The principal as a professional officer is required to formulate, implement, and evaluate educational policies. Policy formulation is the formulation or creation. Thus, policy formulation is the creation/formulation of a policy in education. The following are the stages in the educational policy-making process (Hidayati & Rustyawati, 2019): First, agenda setting, which involves placing problems on the education agenda. Based on research results, the policy formulation process of the principal of SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, is conducted by holding meetings/conferences. In the process, the principal conducts meetings and discussions, then collects opinions, ideas, and input from all parties involved, which are then deliberated together, and the results that are most suitable to the needs and conditions of the school are established as school policy.

Second, is policy formulation, which involves formulating policy alternatives to address problems. Based on research results, the principal's policy formulation is carried out by involving all parties in the planning and decision-making process. This is intended to encourage the principal to listen, observe, and consider urgent problems to examine the actual situation (Adawiah, 2024). In this case, the principal of SMPN 1 Pamekasan involves all school members ranging from teachers, stakeholders, school committees, parent representatives, and all affairs (vice principals in student affairs, curriculum, facilities and infrastructure, and others). By conducting policy formulation that involves all these parties, the principal can consider various aspirations, opinions, suggestions, and input from all parties so as to produce appropriate policies that suit the needs and conditions of the school.

Third, policy adoption, involves adopting/taking the policy alternatives as solutions to solve the problem. Based on research conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, policy adoption becomes the main consideration in policy-making, which includes existing government regulations, all aspirations from school members, and also previous programs that can still be continued with adjustments based on current conditions. Thus, in policy formulation, the principal adapts to government regulations because the principal's policies must align with national education policies but must be adjusted to school conditions. Educational policies provide a general and more comprehensive picture of what should be implemented in conducting education, while the principal's policies adapt from existing government rules. In addition, aspirations from school members also influence decision-making in formulating policies by considering aspirations can produce appropriate policies that suit needs. Also, previous programs that have been implemented and provided positive impacts on the school also influence decision-making in policy formulation.

Fourth, is policy implementation, which involves systematically implementing adopted policies in education to achieve the goal of improving school competitiveness. Based on research conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, policy implementation is carried out in the form of concrete programs that involve all school stakeholders, ranging from principals, teachers, and students, to parents. These programs are designed by considering the needs and characteristics of the school. Fifth, is policy evaluation, which is a comprehensive evaluation stage in policy-making and measurement of goal achievement in established educational policies. Based on research results, policy evaluation is conducted through periodic evaluations that include monitoring program

implementation, assessment of achievement results, and reflection for future policy improvements to ensure the effectiveness of school enhancement.

Implementation of Principal Policies at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan in Enhancing School Competitiveness

After conducting policy formulation, the policy is then established. Policy establishment by the principal is a step that must be followed up with implementation. At SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, after going through the policy formulation stage, the next step is policy establishment. Policy establishment is a form of principal policy chosen based on the results of joint decisions that have been formulated previously. Based on research results at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, the form of principal policy in efforts to improve school competitiveness is to make improvements to school achievements, student achievements in academic and non-academic fields, and improve teacher quality. The achievements obtained serve as concrete evidence that the quality of SMPN 1 Pamekasan is already good, so by continuously making improvements, these efforts can enhance its quality even better.

The efforts made at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan to improve student achievement are by conducting comprehensive and structured potential student development. Academic development includes mathematics, science, social studies, English, and Islamic Religious Education subjects that are specifically designed to prepare students for various academic competitions at regional and national levels. In addition to academic fields, the school also develops non-academic development such as traditional and modern dance, football, athletics, futsal, and basketball aimed at honing students' talents and interests. All students are given full freedom to participate in development according to their interests and potential. This development program is a school strategy in optimizing student potential, so as to improve achievements at local, regional, and national levels to strengthen school competitiveness.

After the policy formulation and policy establishment stages, the next step is policy implementation which becomes the main focus to ensure the realization of sustainable school competitiveness enhancement. Policy implementation is the second stage after policy creation/development. The benchmark for the success of educational policies lies in the implementation of the policies themselves. The term implementation can be interpreted as "application, execution until realization." Thus, policy implementation is the execution/application of a policy. A principal has the authority to create and implement policies obtained from higher leadership in accordance with the school's vision, mission,

and objectives by referring to resources available inside and outside the school. A school policy is very important for students and teachers because it is closely related to learning in order to improve school effectiveness. Policy implementation in principle is the way carried out so that a policy can achieve its objectives. Policy implementation is a series of activities and decisions that facilitate policy statements in policy-making to be realized into practice/realization (Hidayati & Rustyawati, 2020).

Edward III in Subarsono views that policy implementation is influenced by four variables (Sururi dkk, 2023): 1) Communication, which means the success of policy implementation requires implementers to know what must be done, where the goals and targets of the policy must be transmitted to the target group, so as to reduce implementation distortion. 2) Resources, even though the policy content has been communicated clearly and consistently if implementers lack resources to execute, then implementation will not run effectively. These resources can take the form of human resources, such as implementer competence and financial resources (Sumarni dkk, 2023). 3) Disposition, which is the character and characteristics possessed by implementers, such as commitment, honesty, and democratic nature. If implementers have a good disposition, then implementers can execute policies as well as desired by policymakers. When implementers have different attitudes or perspectives from policymakers, then the policy implementation process also becomes ineffective. 4) Bureaucratic Structure, the organizational structure tasked with implementing policy has a significant influence on policy implementation. Aspects of organizational structure are Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and fragmentation. Organizational structures that are too lengthy will tend to weaken supervision and create red tape, which is complex and complicated bureaucratic procedures, making organizational activities inflexible.

Based on research conducted at SMPN 1 Pamekasan, the principal implements policies based on Edward's perspective, with the four variables being: a) communication is conducted to all school elements, b) utilizing existing resources from the policy formulation process and also in policy implementation that always involves various parties, c) selecting good disposition from implementers so they can carry out tasks well according to agreements from policy results, d) placing bureaucratic structure according to the respective fields of affairs needed. This is done to create an effective implementation that is in accordance with the desired goals and expectations.

In policy implementation at SMPN 1 Pamekasan, the principal assigns responsibilities to each affairs office (vice principals such as curriculum vice principal, student affairs vice principal, and others) to run their programs according to their

respective duties. After that, each affairs office reports the results of their work programs to the principal. Then the principal provides direction and input through the results of these work program reports. The principal's involvement in policy implementation is only as the person responsible, with the implementers being through their teams called affairs offices according to their respective fields.

Results of Principal Policies at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan in Enhancing School Competitiveness

The results of principal policies in enhancing school competitiveness are a series of concrete achievements that become visible after policies are established and implemented through strategies and programs that have been systematically determined. In other words, policy results reflect the extent to which adopted policies are able to provide a significant impact on school development and progress in various aspects, ranging from improving learning quality, and student achievements, to school reputation. These results demonstrate the effectiveness of a policy in achieving goals that can be seen from various quantitative and qualitative indicators. Based on research results at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, to measure the extent of policy effectiveness in enhancing school competitiveness by conducting a comprehensive evaluation that includes continuous monitoring, target achievement assessment, and long-term impact analysis.

After policy implementation, an evaluation is conducted of the educational policy. This is because it can determine the extent to which the implementation has been achieved. According to Putt and Springer, evaluation is the main step in receiving feedback from the policy process. Policy evaluation will provide information that allows stakeholders (community needs) to know what happens from the policy's intention. The evaluation referred to here is to identify the level of implementation success achieved according to targets. The purpose of policy evaluation is to study target achievement from past experiences (Sumarni dkk, 2023).

Through evaluation, the level of success in implementing something that is being carried out can be determined, whether it is effective or not. If it is less effective, improvement efforts can be made for better implementation in the future, and if it is already effective, it can be further maximized. The results of policies implemented at SMPN 1 Pamekasan have had a positive impact on improving the school's competitiveness. Various improvement efforts from the school, teachers, and students have yielded results with increasingly improved achievements attained by students at the national level, thereby enhancing the school's reputation and providing evidence that

SMPN 1 Pamekasan is indeed of high quality. The achievements that have been attained include national student sports Olympiads, madrasah science competitions, as well as frequent championship wins at district and provincial levels in other events, all of which are documented and recorded in a comprehensive student achievement data document.

Based on the overall research results at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, shows that the policies chosen by the principal in improving the school's competitiveness have had a positive impact on the school's development. The form of policy chosen is to make improvements toward achievements. This policy is what differentiates it from other schools. With the many increasingly improved achievements, this becomes an added value and advantage for the school. This is consistent with what Sumihardjo stated, defining competitiveness as originating from the word "daya" (power) in the phrase "daya saying" (competitiveness), which means "strength," and the word "saying" (compete) means to achieve more than others, or to be different from others in terms of quality, or to possess certain advantages. In other words, competitiveness can mean the strength to strive to excel in certain matters carried out by a person, group, or particular institution (Sumihardjo, 2008).

Furthermore, the strategies implemented at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan in improving school competitiveness are in line with the theory proposed by Reski Mei in her book titled "Strategic Management in Improving Competitiveness." It is stated that several strategies for improving school competitiveness include: First, enhancing the active role of school community members. One strategy that must be developed and implemented in the school environment to improve school competitiveness is increasing the active role of school community members in every activity organized at school. This is consistent with the research results at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, as demonstrated by the principal who always involves all school community members in policymaking, from formulation to implementation. Second, enhancing the active role of students' parents. Students' parents are our colleagues in organizing the educational and learning process at school. Parents are the parties who fully entrust the education and learning process of their children to the school with the hope of obtaining the development of abilities, including cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities. This is consistent with the research results at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, which involves student parents in the socialization of school programs.

Third, enhancing the role of the community. The community is a community and environment that supports the process of organizing education and learning. The community becomes a key colleague for schools in striving to achieve school goals. The

community serves as a field for self-actualization and self-implementation with all programs developed together with school community members. With the existence of the community, schools can organize educational and learning processes optimally. This is consistent with the research results at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, which involves the community through the public relations team. Fourth, enhancing the participation of the business world and industrial world. One of the stakeholders related to the educational process and its results is the business world and industrial world. Both are stakeholders who serve as partners in empowering school graduates. The business world and industrial world provide venues for graduates to apply the knowledge and skills acquired from participating in educational and learning processes at school. This is consistent with the research results at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, which always involves stakeholders from formulation to policy implementation.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that participatory policy formulation at SMP Negeri 1 Pamekasan, while achieving measurable competitive success, reveals complex tensions between democratic consultation and hierarchical decision-making structures. The principal's approach of involving multiple stakeholders in policy formulation creates an appearance of distributed leadership yet maintains centralized authority that contradicts authentic participatory governance models. The implementation of Edward III's framework within Indonesia's educational context proves effective for achieving quantifiable outcomes, particularly in competitive achievements across academic and non-academic domains, but exposes inherent limitations when applied to collectivist educational cultures that prioritize consensus-building over efficiency.

The competitiveness enhancement strategy demonstrates both remarkable success and concerning sustainability challenges that warrant strategic reconsideration for long-term institutional effectiveness. While the school achieved significant improvements in national rankings across multiple competition categories, the concentration of resources on elite student development programs creates educational inequity that may undermine broader institutional goals of inclusive excellence. The findings suggest that sustainable competitiveness requires balancing measurable achievements with holistic development approaches that align with Indonesia's evolving educational paradigms, particularly the Merdeka Belajar curriculum emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and character development rather than purely competitive outcomes.

Based on the research findings, the following practical recommendations are proposed: First, implement inclusive talent development programs that expand participation beyond the current 15% elite cohort while maintaining competitive excellence through tiered development strategies that accommodate diverse student abilities and interests. Second, establish systematic succession planning mechanisms that reduce dependency on individual leadership continuity by documenting institutional knowledge, creating leadership development programs for middle management, and establishing clear governance protocols for policy transitions. Third, develop strategic partnerships with higher education institutions and industry stakeholders to create sustainable pathways for student development that extend beyond competition-focused achievements toward career readiness and lifelong learning capabilities. Fourth, integrate holistic assessment frameworks that balance quantitative achievement metrics with qualitative indicators of student well-being, creativity development, and character formation to ensure alignment with national educational transformation initiatives while maintaining competitive positioning in regional and national contexts.

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