

(Research Article)

Strategies of School Principals in Improving PAI Teachers' Performance Through the Merdeka Mengajar Platform at SMP Negeri 5 Jawai

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Abstract: This research is motivated by the lack of teacher performance in utilizing the Merdeka Mengajar platform application. Therefore, PAI teachers are required to be able to operate the Merdeka Mengajar platform application. This study aims to obtain clear information about: 1) Planning the Merdeka Mengajar platform in improving the performance of PAI teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Jawai. 2) Steps of the Merdeka Mengajar platform in improving the performance of PAI teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Jawai. 3) Evaluation of the Merdeka Mengajar platform in improving the performance of PAI teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Jawai. The subjects of this research are PAI teachers and the principal of SMP Negeri 5 Jawai. To obtain data related to the research focus, researchers conducted interviews, observations, and documentation. The data validity checking techniques used are: 1) Triangulation technique, 2) Member Check technique. The results of the research can be concluded: 1) Planning the Merdeka Mengajar platform in improving the performance of PAI teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Jawai is done by preparing activity programs, scheduling, preparing materials based on the Merdeka Mengajar platform application, and evaluating the program implementation. 2) Steps of the Merdeka Mengajar platform in improving the performance of PAI teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Jawai are done by: forming facilitators, analyzing the level of school readiness, designing dimensions to be used, themes, time allocation, and compiling project modules and reporting strategies, introducing and guiding teachers who have not been able to operate the Merdeka Mengajar platform application. 3) Evaluation of the Merdeka Mengajar platform in improving the performance of PAI teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Jawai includes: increased teacher engagement in using various PMM features, improved pedagogical and professional competence of teachers, increased ability of teachers to adopt innovative learning approaches, and a balance between accurate evaluation and realistic workload for teachers.

Keywords: Merdeka Mengajar Platform, PAI, SMP Negeri 5 Jawai, Strategies, Teacher Performance

1. Introduction

Efforts to improve the quality of human resources are inseparable from the problem of national education. At least, there are three main requirements that must be considered in education development so that it can contribute to improving the quality of human resources (HR), namely: (1) adequate facilities and infrastructure, (2) quality books, and (3) professional teachers and education personnel (Admodiwiro, 2000). Teachers have a significant role in the success of learning in schools, and they play a crucial role in helping students develop their potential to achieve their life goals optimally. According to Law No. 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers, competence is a set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that must be possessed, internalized, and mastered by teachers or lecturers in carrying out their professional duties.

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Education aims to create a learning atmosphere and process for students to develop their potential. The government, as a policy maker, strives to provide equal rights to Indonesian citizens to compulsory education for 9 years. As stated in Law No. 20 of 2003 (concerning the National Education System) article 5 paragraph 1, which reads, "Every citizen has the same right to obtain quality education." Therefore, every Indonesian citizen is given the opportunity to complete compulsory education for 9 years, and the government provides assistance in the form of free education, regardless of social status and place of residence.

Education provides students with general knowledge and religious knowledge, enabling them to obtain provisions for life in society. Islamic education is a part of education that aims to form students to obtain meaningful life and achieve happiness in this world and the hereafter, both in personal and social life. Islamic education teaches children how to worship as a way to get closer to Allah and how to interact with others, to respect, honor, and love each other (Tafsir, 2001).

Islamic education in schools does not require students to perform worship perfectly, but it is expected to foster awareness that they have a religion and rules in life. Islamic education plays a role as a controller and must be instilled from an early age. In the world of education, Islamic education is a basic capital for children to obtain divine values. Islamic education provides knowledge in the form of muamalah, aqidah, ibadah, and sharia as the basis of religious teachings. Thus, elementary school students can place themselves in society well, and the most important goal is that students can live independently.

Classroom management is one of the factors that motivates students to follow lessons well, but some teachers still lack skills in classroom management. The experience of teachers varies, and some teachers do not understand how to use the Merdeka Mengajar platform application. For teachers who do not know how to operate the PMM application, they are guided. Before using the Merdeka Mengajar platform, the teaching method used was less varied and did not pay attention to individual student learning styles. Classical learning was applied, treating students equally in learning, and it was challenging to improve self-capacity due to limited opportunities to attend seminars or training. SMP Negeri 5 Jawai's principal, being a graduate of the Guru Penggerak program, has a deep understanding of the Merdeka Mengajar platform, which is close to the material or application obtained during the program. After implementing the Merdeka Mengajar platform, teaching methods became more varied, and teachers better understood individual student learning styles, treating students according to their abilities. There are many features for independent training, providing many opportunities for self-development.

2. Literature Review

Furhatul Fitri, "The Influence of Using the Merdeka Mengajar Platform on the Activeness of Islamic Education Learning in Terms of Student Confidence at SDIT Hidayatullah Sragen": This study aims to determine (1) the difference in activeness of

learning Islamic education between students who use the Merdeka Mengajar platform and those who do not, (2) the difference in activeness of learning Islamic education between students with high and low confidence, (3) the influence of the Merdeka Mengajar platform on students with high confidence, (4) the influence of the Merdeka Mengajar platform on students with low confidence, and (5) the interaction between the use of the Merdeka Mengajar platform and student confidence on the activeness of learning Islamic education. The results show that (1) there is no significant difference in activeness of learning Islamic education between students who use the Merdeka Mengajar platform and those who do not, (2) there is a significant difference in activeness of learning Islamic education between students with high and low confidence, (3) there is a significant difference in activeness of learning Islamic education between students with high confidence who use the Merdeka Mengajar platform and those who do not, (4) there is a significant difference in activeness of learning Islamic education between students with low confidence who use the Merdeka Mengajar platform and those who do not, and (5) there is a significant interaction between the use of the Merdeka Mengajar platform and student confidence on the activeness of learning Islamic education.

Elok Kuneta Faradila, "Development of Islamic Education Curriculum at SMP Negeri 1 Jetis Ponorogo": The development of Islamic education curriculum is still not optimal, resulting in decreased student achievement. To overcome this problem, it is necessary to develop content standards as stated in the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 21 of 2016, process standards as stated in the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 22 of 2016, and assessment standards as stated in the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 23 of 2016. The results show that the development of content standards at SMP Negeri 1 Jetis includes the development of extracurricular activities. The development of process standards includes the development of hidden curriculum, namely the role model of teachers. The development of assessment standards includes the integration of three aspects of assessment, namely social, knowledge, and skills, involving parental assistance.

Based on observations and analysis of previous studies on the use of the Merdeka Mengajar platform, it shows the importance of this platform in the learning process of Islamic education. Although there are some similarities with previous studies, there are also some aspects that have not been explored. Therefore, the researcher attempts to investigate the strategy of improving the performance of Islamic education teachers through the Merdeka Mengajar platform at SMP Negeri 5 Jawai.

3. Research Method

This research uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a naturalistic method used to examine objects in their natural settings, where the researcher is the key instrument. Qualitative research emphasizes meaning over generalization. The type of research used is

descriptive qualitative research, which closely examines individual explanations and understandings of phenomena or experiences in human life.

4. Results and Discussion

Planning the Merdeka Mengajar Platform to Improve PAI Teacher Performance at SMP Negeri 5 Jawai

Planning to understand Islamic education theoretically and practically by PAI teachers is adjusted to their professional knowledge and abilities. This includes:

1. Ability to formulate learning objectives
2. Ability to develop teaching plans and programs
3. Ability to apply learning programs
4. Ability to integrate approaches, methods, and teaching techniques
5. Ability to encourage students to learn actively, creatively, and independently

Steps of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform to Improve PAI Teacher Performance at SMP Negeri 5 Jawai

Teachers should have a plan for teaching in the upcoming academic year. The Merdeka Mengajar platform can help teachers improve their performance through its performance management feature. The steps include:

1. Preparation for observation
2. Discussion of preparation
3. Classroom observation
4. Follow-up discussion
5. Reflection on follow-up

The platform provides benefits for teachers, including:

1. Getting references to become professional educators
2. Improving performance and efficiency in administrative tasks
3. Helping teachers achieve learning objectives
4. Helping teachers assess student understanding through assessments

To access the Merdeka Mengajar platform, teachers can:

1. Use the Android application
2. Access the website
3. Log in using their learning account
4. Activate their account

The use of the Merdeka Mengajar platform as a medium to deepen understanding of the independent curriculum has been felt by teachers. From this platform, teachers can get new innovations regarding the creation of learning media, which certainly helps students understand learning materials more optimally.

One of the benefits of learning media is that it makes learning more interesting, thus fostering students' motivation to learn. The innovation obtained by teachers from this

platform indirectly benefits students. The learning project, a hallmark of the independent curriculum, is also a key aspect felt by students through the benefits of the Merdeka Mengajar platform.

The creation of projects in learning has indeed been encouraged since the introduction of the independent curriculum (Sari et al., 2022). This mindset provides a foundation for teachers to continually develop their competencies in accordance with the times. Teacher competence is a crucial aspect in improving performance (Rahman et al., 2022). It is also explained that in the current era, teacher competence is the capacity and skill required to address 21st-century challenges.

Evaluation of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform in Improving PAI Teacher Performance at SMP Negeri 5 Jawai

Evaluation originates from the English word "Evaluation," derived from the root word "value," which means worth or price. In Arabic, value is referred to as "al-Qimah" or "al-Taqdir." Thus, educational evaluation, or "al-Taqdir al-tarbawiy," can be literally defined as assessment in the field of education or evaluation of matters related to educational activities (Sudijono, 2005).

The term "value" was initially popularized by philosophers, including Plato, who first introduced it. The concept of "value" is particularly examined in philosophical discussions, especially in its axiological aspect. Philosophers define value as the "idea of the world." The term value later became popular and was even adopted in the economic sphere, where it is often associated with price (Ramayulis, 2002).

Experts define evaluation in various ways. For instance, Edwind Wandt describes evaluation as an action or process of determining the value of something. M. Chabib Thoha states that evaluation is a planned activity to determine the state of an object using instruments, and the results are compared with benchmarks to draw conclusions (Thoha, 1990). Therefore, evaluation is not just about assessing an activity spontaneously or incidentally but is a planned, systematic activity based on clear objectives (Ramayulis, 2008).

The explanation from experts about evaluation can be concluded that evaluation is an activity carried out in learning, both at the beginning and end of learning, with the aim of knowing how much students absorb the material taught by the teacher. The evaluation model used in this research is the Goal-Oriented Evaluation Model. The approach used is a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data is collected from informants, namely teachers who are part of a learning community team and evaluators in PMM activities. Data analysis techniques include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

The results of the research are: (1) Based on the evaluation of PMM utilization, it is known that the obstacles include the need for a considerable amount of time to study the features in PMM, the difficulty in implementing real actions, the lengthy validation process, inaccessible learning accounts, inauthentic real actions, and teachers attending webinars without clear direction; (2) Follow-up on the results of PMM utilization evaluation includes the formation of a Learning Community Team (Tim Kombel) with the concept of "Peer

Tutor", implementation of "Friday Freedom" activities, good practice activities, seminars, and webinars held through PMM on a national scale.

The Islamic education evaluation aligns with local government regulations, which require schools and educators to read holy books for 5-10 minutes daily before classes begin. For non-Muslims, they are also required to read their holy books before classes start.

Islamic Education teachers have leveraged the Merdeka Mengajar Platform to accelerate the implementation of the independent curriculum. The benefits experienced by teachers include:

1. Inspiration and Insights: Access to high-quality, validated videos showcasing effective teaching practices
2. Independent Training: Opportunities for self-paced professional development
3. Flexible Access: Easy access to the platform
4. Innovative Teaching: Training to create innovative teaching and learning processes
5. Documentation: Ability to document teacher and student work on the platform
6. Sharing and Feedback: Sharing work with colleagues nationwide and receiving feedback
7. Community Engagement: Interaction with various teacher communities for collective learning
8. Assessment Support: Assistance with student assessments
9. Teaching Resources: Access to current references and diverse teaching tools

The platform features tools to enhance teacher performance, including student assessments, teaching devices, independent training, and evidence of work. It also provides explanations on the principles and implementation of the independent curriculum.

5. Conclusion

The planning of the Merdeka Mengajar platform in improving the performance of Islamic Education teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Jawai involves forming facilitators, analyzing school readiness, designing project dimensions, themes, and time allocation, and guiding teachers who are not yet proficient in operating the platform.² The steps taken to improve teacher performance through the Merdeka Mengajar platform include developing activity programs, scheduling, preparing materials based on the platform, and evaluating program implementation. The evaluation of the Merdeka Mengajar platform shows positive outcomes, including increased teacher engagement with the platform's features, improved pedagogical and professional competence, enhanced ability to adopt innovative learning approaches, and a balance between accurate evaluation and realistic workload for teachers.

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