



The Role of the Principal in Developing Students' Interests and Talents at SMP Negeri 1 Pagaran

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the role of the principal in fostering students' interests and talents at SMP Negeri 1 Pagaran. The principal plays a crucial role in developing students' interests and talents within the school. This research employed a descriptive approach with a qualitative method. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis techniques applied in this study included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, while the validity of the data was tested using methodological and source triangulation. The findings of this study reveal that the principal's role in developing students' interests and talents includes: (1) classifying students' interests and talents, (2) developing a curriculum that supports the enhancement of students' interests and talents, (3) establishing both internal and external collaborations, (4) motivating and appreciating students, and (5) ensuring accessibility and equity for all students. Based on the conducted research, the principal's role in fostering students' interests and talents has been well implemented, resulting in the positive development of students' interests and talents at SMP Negeri 1 Pagaran.

Keywords: *Principal's role, students' interests, students' talents*

INTRODUCTION

Students play a highly significant and active role in the learning process. They are not merely passive recipients of knowledge; rather, they function as active agents who directly influence the success of the learning experience. Active engagement enables students to develop critical thinking, foster creativity, and cultivate collaboration skills, all of which are essential competencies in contemporary education. Learning, therefore, should not be perceived solely as the transfer of information from teacher to student, but as a dynamic interaction in which students actively construct knowledge and skills. The principal holds a crucial role in developing students' interests and talents by designing and implementing well-structured programs. The responsibility of a principal extends far beyond administrative duties; it encompasses the task of ensuring that the educational environment nurtures and accommodates the diverse potentials of students. Through

planned programs, principals can integrate strategies that not only address academic requirements but also respond to students' personal inclinations, creativity, and innate abilities. Junior high schools, as institutions of lower secondary education, carry an essential responsibility to facilitate the holistic development of students. This stage of education is formative, as students transition from childhood into adolescence. It is a critical period during which they begin to discover their identities, interests, and unique talents. Hence, the role of the school, particularly the principal, becomes vital in providing the appropriate resources, opportunities, and support systems that can guide students in realizing and nurturing their potential. The development of students' interests and talents must be seen as a central aspect of educational practice rather than an additional or optional endeavor. The principal's role in this development is highly significant because principals are expected to provide leadership that not only maintains the daily operation of the school but also establishes long-term strategies for student growth. By creating a supportive and inclusive environment, principals can ensure that every student is given the opportunity to explore and cultivate their capabilities.

One of the ways principals contribute to this process is through the design of learning programs that are aligned with students' interests and talents. These programs may involve enrichment activities, extracurricular engagements, and specialized learning opportunities that go beyond the standard curriculum. For instance, schools may offer music classes, art workshops, sports teams, science clubs, or language programs tailored to students' preferences. By offering a variety of avenues, principals enable students to identify their strengths and passions, and in doing so, they promote personal growth alongside academic achievement. Principals play a role in providing appropriate guidance to both students and teachers. For students, this guidance may include mentorship, counseling, and opportunities for self-expression. For teachers, principals can facilitate professional development that equips educators with the skills to recognize and foster individual student potential. In this way, principals act as mediators between institutional goals and the personal needs of students, ensuring that both are addressed in a balanced manner. A key component of this leadership involves the creation of an environment that supports skill development. A nurturing environment is one in which students feel safe, respected, and encouraged to take risks in learning. Principals can foster such an environment by emphasizing positive school culture, encouraging collaboration among students, and establishing policies that promote equity and inclusivity. When students feel that their efforts are valued and their abilities recognized, they are more likely to take initiative in exploring their interests and pursuing their talents.

Understanding the concepts of "talent" and "interest" is central to this discussion. Talent refers to the natural abilities or aptitudes that distinguish one individual from another. These abilities may manifest in diverse domains, such as the arts, music, sports, mathematics, language, or other specialized areas. While some talents can be identified at an early age, others may emerge or develop gradually through experience and educational opportunities. Identifying and nurturing these talents requires careful observation and intentional support from educators and school leaders. Interest is closely linked to motivation. Interest is the psychological inclination that drives individuals to engage in specific activities. It is a key factor that influences persistence, enthusiasm, and goal achievement. A student with a strong interest in a particular subject or activity will naturally strive to excel in that area, dedicating time and effort toward the attainment of

personal goals. Interest thus serves as an internal motivator, guiding students' choices and sustaining their commitment to learning. Both talent and interest are interconnected in the educational process. While talent provides the foundation of ability, interest fuels the motivation to develop and refine that ability. Without interest, even a naturally gifted student may not fully realize their potential. Conversely, a strong interest can drive students to overcome challenges and acquire new skills, even in areas where they may not initially display outstanding talent. Therefore, the principal's role in balancing the recognition of talent with the encouragement of interest becomes essential for fostering holistic student development. The responsibility of the principal in this context is to create opportunities that allow students to recognize their unique potentials and to pursue success in their chosen domains. These domains may include academic pursuits, artistic expressions, athletic achievements, or social contributions. By designing comprehensive programs, offering meaningful guidance, and cultivating supportive environments, principals not only assist students in identifying their individual strengths but also empower them to apply those strengths in meaningful ways. This process contributes not only to students' academic progress but also to their personal development, preparing them to face the complexities of life beyond school.

METHODS

The method employed in this study is the descriptive method with a qualitative approach. This approach is considered one of the most fundamental forms of research and is particularly useful when the aim is to understand a specific phenomenon in depth. Rather than relying on numerical data or statistical analysis, qualitative research seeks to capture the complexity of human experiences, social interactions, and contextual factors that shape the phenomenon under investigation. Through this method, researchers attempt to interpret and present findings in the form of words, narratives, and descriptions that accurately reflect the reality being studied. Qualitative research is especially relevant when the goal is to explore aspects of life that cannot be easily quantified, such as emotions, attitudes, values, motivations, and patterns of behavior. By employing a descriptive design, researchers focus on portraying the condition of the subject as it truly exists without manipulation or intervention. This type of research is not primarily concerned with hypothesis testing or prediction, but rather with gaining a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The phenomenon under study may encompass various aspects experienced by the research subjects, such as cases, behaviors, motivations, or actions. For instance, in an educational context, qualitative descriptive research might involve examining the ways students interact with their teachers, how motivation influences their learning processes, or how specific behaviors emerge within the classroom setting. Each of these elements provides valuable insights into the dynamics of teaching and learning, which may not be fully captured through quantitative approaches. The strength of this method lies in its flexibility and depth. Because qualitative research emphasizes natural settings, the researcher observes, documents, and interprets the phenomenon as it occurs, without attempting to impose external frameworks that might distort its meaning. This enables the researcher to uncover subtle patterns and themes that may otherwise remain hidden. For example, when studying student motivation, the descriptive qualitative approach allows the researcher to capture students' personal stories, expressions, and reflections that provide a deeper

understanding of why they are motivated or demotivated in specific contexts. Another critical aspect of qualitative descriptive research is its reliance on language as the primary means of representation. Instead of statistical figures, the data are expressed through detailed descriptions that aim to convey the richness and uniqueness of the subject matter. Words, phrases, and narratives are carefully analyzed and presented to reveal the essence of the phenomenon. This makes qualitative research particularly valuable in disciplines such as education, psychology, sociology, and anthropology, where human experiences are central to the study. Qualitative descriptive research places significant emphasis on the perspective of the participants. The researcher aims to understand how participants themselves perceive and interpret the phenomenon. This participant-centered orientation ensures that the findings are grounded in actual lived experiences rather than abstract theoretical constructs. Consequently, the results of such research are often more relatable, context-specific, and applicable to real-world situations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Classifying Students' Interests and Talents

Based on the findings of the study and interview results, it can be concluded that at SMP Negeri 1 Pagaran, the principal carries out the classification of students' interests and talents in order to map their potential and facilitate its optimal development without creating barriers for students. The principal, together with teachers, homeroom teachers, guidance and counseling (BK) staff, and the student council (OSIS), plays an active role in this process. The classification process is conducted through several methods: students are asked to complete interest questionnaires or forms, teachers and staff observe students' daily activities, and OSIS collects relevant data. The information obtained is then discussed in teacher meetings to determine the categories of students' interests and talents. Students' interests and talents are grouped into several main categories: arts (singing, choir, music, painting, traditional dance *manortor*, stand-up comedy), sports (various branches of athletics and other sports), academics (science, literacy, public speaking in English and Indonesian), and social domains (leadership and organizational skills). This classification aims to accommodate and showcase the diverse interests and talents of students through structured school programs and activities, such as extracurricular programs and daily literacy activities.

Developing a Curriculum for the Enhancement of Students' Interests and Talents

Based on interviews conducted with several informants, it can be concluded that the principal plays an active role in integrating programs for the development of students' interests and talents into the school curriculum and organizational structure. This integration extends beyond extracurricular activities, becoming an essential component of classroom instruction, school governance, and routine activities. By embedding such initiatives into the formal curriculum, the principal ensures that the development of students' potentials is not treated as a peripheral activity but rather as an integral aspect of holistic education. From the perspective of classroom learning, the principal provides direction to teachers to carry out the teaching and learning process in ways that are closely linked to the enhancement of students' abilities and interests. Teachers are encouraged to identify the unique potential of each student and to incorporate these into

classroom activities. This pedagogical approach allows for more meaningful learning experiences where academic objectives are complemented by opportunities for self-expression and skill development. Face-to-face learning, therefore, is not solely focused on academic achievement but also provides ample space for students to showcase and nurture their talents in areas such as the arts, sports, and literacy. This approach reflects a balanced vision of education that emphasizes both intellectual growth and personal development.

Establishing Internal and External Collaboration

Based on the results of interviews conducted by the researcher, it can be concluded that the principal plays a central role in building strong collaboration, both internally and externally, to support the development of students' interests and talents. Such collaboration is not limited to the implementation of programs but begins from the early stages of identification and planning, ensuring that the initiatives are comprehensive, well-structured, and sustainable. Within the internal school environment, collaboration involves teachers, homeroom teachers, guidance and counseling staff, as well as the student council (OSIS). These stakeholders work together to identify students' interests and talents, design appropriate programs, and oversee their implementation. Through this collective effort, the school creates a supportive ecosystem where students' potentials are recognized, nurtured, and directed toward constructive activities. Internal collaboration also ensures consistency across various aspects of school life, from classroom instruction to extracurricular engagement, thereby fostering a holistic educational experience. Externally, the principal establishes partnerships with diverse stakeholders such as art communities, sports coaches, cultural studios, educational institutions, and relevant government agencies. These partnerships provide additional resources, training opportunities, and platforms for students to further develop their skills beyond the school setting. For instance, collaborations with art studios or sports clubs enable students to gain professional mentorship, while linkages with local education offices ensure institutional support and recognition of student achievements. Moreover, the principal demonstrates openness to students' suggestions and actively seeks to accommodate their aspirations by creating new activities aligned with their interests. This participatory approach not only empowers students but also fosters a sense of ownership and motivation. Ultimately, both internal and external collaborations contribute to the successful, structured, and well-documented implementation of programs that facilitate the development of students' interests and talents.

Motivating and Appreciating Students

Based on the results of interviews conducted by the researcher, it can be concluded that the principal plays a vital role in motivating and appreciating students by providing both opportunities and recognition for their achievements. Students are given space to express and develop their talents through various activities such as extracurricular programs, competitions, and art performances. These platforms allow them not only to showcase their abilities but also to gain confidence in pursuing their personal interests and aspirations. Motivation provided by the principal is expressed in multiple forms. It is not limited to verbal encouragement or moral support but is also demonstrated through

tangible rewards. These include certificates, trophies, monetary awards, and public recognition during school ceremonies or through school media channels. Such recognition enhances the students' sense of accomplishment and fosters a culture of appreciation within the school community. Importantly, the public acknowledgment of achievements instills pride in the students and serves as inspiration for their peers to strive for excellence. The principal actively involves parents in celebrating the success of their children. Inviting parents to participate in recognition events strengthens the bond between the school and families, while also reinforcing the value of students' accomplishments. This collaborative approach creates a supportive environment where achievements are shared and celebrated collectively. Another significant aspect of the principal's efforts lies in ensuring fairness and inclusivity. Appreciation is extended to students across diverse fields of achievement, whether academic, artistic, athletic, or organizational. By valuing excellence in multiple domains, the principal creates an equitable environment where all students feel encouraged to develop according to their unique interests and talents. This inclusive recognition fosters a positive school climate that motivates students to engage actively in their growth and development.

Ensuring Accessibility and Equity for Students

The findings from interviews conducted with several informants reveal that the principal demonstrates a strong commitment to ensuring accessibility and equity for all students in the development of their interests and talents. This commitment reflects the principal's dedication to creating an inclusive school environment where opportunities for growth are not restricted by students' socioeconomic background, prior abilities, or individual characteristics. By prioritizing equality of opportunity, the principal ensures that every student has the right to participate meaningfully in programs designed to foster personal and academic growth. A central aspect of this commitment is the enforcement of the principle of inclusivity. The principal emphasizes that all students should have the same opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities and self-development programs, regardless of their differences. This inclusive approach ensures that talent development is not reserved for high-achieving students alone but is extended to every learner who demonstrates interest and willingness to participate. Such an approach encourages students to explore new experiences, build confidence, and develop their potential in a supportive and non-discriminatory environment. Importantly, the school does not impose rigid selection processes based solely on existing abilities. Instead, greater emphasis is placed on students' motivation, enthusiasm, and desire to learn. This perspective highlights the belief that talent can be nurtured through opportunity and practice, rather than being determined solely by initial capability. By lowering barriers to participation, the school enables a broader range of students to engage in activities such as arts, sports, academics, and leadership programs. The principal's efforts to guarantee accessibility and equity foster a school culture that values inclusiveness, fairness, and holistic development. Such practices not only enhance individual growth but also strengthen the collective spirit of the school community, ensuring that all students are empowered to pursue their interests and talents without limitation.

Conclusion

Based on the theoretical explanations and research findings presented in the previous chapters, the author concludes that the role of the principal in developing students' interests and talents at SMP Negeri 1 Pagaran has been effectively implemented and has made a positive contribution to efforts in nurturing students' potential. This implementation is reflected in five key indicators of the principal's role in fostering students' interests and talents: classifying students' interests and talents, developing a curriculum that supports their growth, establishing internal and external collaborations, motivating and appreciating students, and ensuring accessibility and equity for all learners. The principal of SMP Negeri 1 Pagaran holds a crucial position in this developmental process. As a leader, the principal is responsible for creating a conducive learning environment, designing appropriate educational programs, and providing proper guidance to support students' potential. This process involves the systematic classification of interests and talents, the integration of talent development into the curriculum, and the establishment of collaborative partnerships both within and outside the school. The principal is also committed to motivating and recognizing students' achievements while ensuring that accessibility and equality are maintained, regardless of students' social background or initial abilities. Despite the implementation of various programs, the development of students' interests and talents still faces challenges, including limited resources and insufficient coordination. Therefore, more structured and systematic efforts are needed to enhance the effectiveness of existing initiatives. This study underscores the critical importance of the principal's role in advancing students' interests and talents while also highlighting the need for broader support from multiple stakeholders to achieve optimal educational outcomes. Thus, although the principal has carried out these responsibilities effectively, there remains room for improvement to ensure that all students are able to fully realize and develop their potential.

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