

## Implementation of the Smart School Awards (SSA) Program Management in Improving the Quality of Education in Secondary Schools

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### Article info

### Abstract

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*This study aims to analyze school management strategies in enhancing educational quality through participation in the 2023 Smart School Awards (SSA) at SMP Ar Rahman. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis. The data sources included the school principal, teacher representatives, students, and parents. The findings indicate that structured and collaborative school management significantly contributed to the school's success in obtaining the 2023 Smart School Award in the Healthy and Safe School category. These results underscore the importance of effective leadership and collective stakeholder engagement in improving educational quality through performance-based school award programs.*

**Keywords:** Educational Quality, Excellence, Achievement, Smart School Awards (SSA)

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi manajemen sekolah dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan melalui partisipasi dalam Program Smart School Awards (SSA) 2023 di SMP Ar Rahman. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Sumber data diperoleh melalui observasi ke sekolah, melakukan wawancara dengan kepala sekolah, perwakilan tim guru, siswa dan orang tua. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa manajemen sekolah yang terstruktur dan kolaboratif berkontribusi terhadap keberhasilan sekolah meraih penghargaan Program (Smart School Awards) Tahun 2023 dengan Kategori Penghargaan Sekolah Sehat dan Aman. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya kepemimpinan dan partisipasi kolektif dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan melalui program penghargaan berbasis kinerja sekolah.

**Kata Kunci:** Kualitas Pendidikan, Unggul, Prestasi, Smart School Awards (SSA)

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## INTRODUCTION

The globalization era is happening rapidly, and social activities are changing due to the fast development of technology, which is inevitable. This can be seen in the rapid access to information through various media, including print media, electronic media, and particularly the internet. The changes occurring in the globalization era are fundamental and have reshaped communication systems and social structures, making them different from before. Social competition in the 21st century has become a new reality where the world is increasingly open and competitive, pushing individuals to race towards achieving their goals or dreams. Society must be willing and able to compete with current advancements in various ideas and life activities (Ichsan, 2021; Khair, 2021). This competition also affects the world of education, where education is no longer merely a place to teach knowledge but must also produce graduates who meet the needs and desires of society. As human needs and desires change with the times, the goals of education must also evolve accordingly. Education must also be capable of producing graduates whose quality aligns with evolving societal needs and expectations. As human desires and needs continue to shift with the times, the aims of education must likewise adapt in response to these changes (Fahman, 2018; Walbe Ornstein et al., 2009).

Competition in the education sector, when studied, can be attributed to two main factors. First, the advancement of science and technology, which has led to an improved standard of living, and has raised expectations from society for schools as educational institutions. Schools must be able to face and anticipate future challenges, especially in improving the quality of education. Second, government policies on education have shifted from centralization (top-down decision-making) to decentralization (bottom-up decision-making) (Maxwell & Schechtman, 2012; Sholeh, 2023). After the decentralization policy, schools, especially private ones, must manage their policies and decisions independently in order to develop their institutions. This has pushed schools to compete rapidly and intensively to meet the demands and needs of the times (Berson & Oreg, 2016; R. Setyaningsih et al., 2025). As a result, schools with specific advantages have emerged, creating distinctive identities for educational institutions and drawing greater public attention (S. G. Huber & Muijs, 2010). This has led to the emergence of excellent schools across Indonesia, with different types and variations (Jaya, 2019; Rahmi, 2015; Subhan, 2012).

An excellent school is an educational institution established with the goal of achieving national and international achievements in mastering knowledge and technology while adhering to high moral standards (Sheldon et al., 2010). The main goal of developing a high-performing school is to achieve superior educational outcomes, either in a specific field or across several fields (Putra et al., 2023). To achieve excellence, school leaders must pay attention to various aspects of school management, including the education process, teacher roles, educational staff capacity, administrative management, educational services, and supporting facilities (Hayudiyani et al., 2020; Noprika et al., 2020; Printy, 2010).

This phenomenon has been studied in various research efforts on how school leaders work towards creating competitive and excellent schools. Hakim (2016) states that school leaders work to make their schools excellent by implementing school-based management (Aini & Fitria, 2021). The implementation of school-based management in SMP Ar Rohmah Malang has improved school quality, particularly in private schools, which has garnered public attention and allowed them to compete with other similar institutions (Hakim, 2016). Moreover, the headmaster's policy in building school culture also contributes to improving teacher and staff performance, resulting in optimal educational services. This means the headmaster must position themselves as a motivator, leader, educator, supervisor, and set an example for their subordinates (Anjarrini & Rindaningsih, 2022; Goldberg & Cole, 2002). Additionally, to optimize the school as an excellent institution, the headmaster also applies the Total Quality Management (TQM) approach to maximize the quality produced so that the public is satisfied. Other schools also take further steps, such as marketing and branding their schools to increase recognition and attract parents to enroll their children (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Evans et al., 2010; Fauziah & ., 2022; Hidayat & Martina, 2022; Liriwati et al., 2021; Manurung & Siagian, 2021).

One innovative program aimed at improving school branding and making schools more competitive is the Smart School Awards (SSA) Program. SSA is an initiative designed to stimulate and motivate educational institutions by awarding and branding schools. This program acknowledges and rewards schools that have successfully implemented intelligent, innovative, and results-oriented educational approaches. SSA motivates schools to continuously improve their educational standards. The overall goal of this program is to encourage elementary and secondary schools to build innovative and sustainable school systems in preparation for the 5.0 era. Success indicators are based on innovation approaches, digitalized learning, talent, and a healthy and safe environment. By implementing the SSA Program, schools are expected to create better learning environments, produce competent graduates, and contribute positively to society. The SSA program can also serve as a model that other schools can adopt to enhance education quality nationwide.

Programs focused on education, especially for branding educational institutions or schools to make them more recognized by the public, are still limited (Afriwanti & Pasrizal, 2021). Typically, education-focused programs are initiated by the central government's ministries to assess and improve educational quality, such as school accreditation institutions, the driving school program, and others. However, there are few such programs initiated by local government agencies. Therefore, the Smart School Awards Program initiated by the Kediri City Education Office is an excellent platform and innovative step to stimulate and motivate educational institutions in the region to grow and improve in quality.

SMP Plus Ar Rahman in Kediri is one of the private schools striving to offer the best quality to attract public interest. The school's efforts, led by a visionary principal, have been optimally carried out using school management approaches. From planning,

implementation, and evaluation, the school has carefully structured areas like human resources, curriculum, school facilities, and student affairs. As a result, SMP Plus Ar Rahman participated in the Smart School Awards (SSA) program and secured third place in the healthy and safe school category. This achievement represents a significant accomplishment, demonstrating the school's continuous and sustainable efforts to improve its quality over time. This study examines the school's efforts in managing the SSA program to achieve this award. Research on the SSA program is still limited, as it is a new initiative introduced by the Kediri City Government. The purpose of this study is to understand the efforts made by the school to achieve the Smart School Awards (SSA) from a management perspective.

## **METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method that aims to describe and interpret the research object based on field data obtained. Qualitative research is widely used in social sciences, including educational science, to explore and deeply understand data. The goal of qualitative research is to build knowledge through understanding and discovery by studying social phenomena and human issues comprehensively (Moleong, 2014; Sugiyono, 2021).

The research was conducted at SMP Plus Ar Rahman, located at Jl. Akasia, Komplek Perum YPA No. 09-10, Pesantren, Kediri, East Java. This school was chosen because it is led by a visionary principal who optimally drives the school's organization. Initially, SMP Plus Ar Rahman was not highly favored by the community, especially as it is a private school. However, the principal's hard work eventually led to significant results, such as establishing a good and conducive school culture, well-managed student affairs, increased public interest, and securing third place in the SSA's healthy and safe school category. The SSA program was participated in by 34 schools, including both public and private schools, within Kediri.

Data was collected through interviews with informants and by describing findings using words or sentences grouped into categories. Observations were also made during the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of the SSA program. Observations were conducted on various instruments used for the SSA program, such as cleanliness, the hygiene habits followed by the school community, communication systems, and others. Interviews were held with relevant stakeholders involved in the SSA competition, including the principal, teachers, staff, students, and parents. Documentary data was gathered by taking photos and copying documents used by the school in the SSA program. To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation methods were employed to enhance the accuracy of the research findings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

SSA (Smart School Award) 2023 is a newly launched program by the local government of Kediri, which is mandatory for all educational institutions, ranging from elementary schools (both public and private) to secondary schools (both public and

private). The SSA program was introduced by the Kediri City Government as an effort to improve the quality of schools, particularly in the Kediri area. This improvement is recognized through awards or prizes, aimed at boosting enthusiasm and motivation for schools to become high-achieving and competitively healthy. The SSA program consists of four categories: the Award for Innovative Smart Schools, Digitalization of Smart Schools, Smart School Talent Award, and the Healthy and Safe School Award. SMP Plus Ar Rahman participated in the Healthy and Safe School Award category. The indicators for a Healthy and Safe School include a clean environment, healthy student meals, minimal or no bullying among peers, habitual handwashing before meals, proper waste disposal, and well-controlled social communication among students.

Some of the activities in the program that are similar to the national Adiwiyata program include the healthy eating program, where students are required to bring meals from home, and the clean school program, which encourages students to dispose of waste in its proper place. The concept of "safe" refers to ensuring that students feel comfortable and free from fear. Some examples of activities in this category include a bullying-free school and a drug-free school. To support the "safe" aspect, the school conducts socialization about bullying-what it is, the dangers of bullying-and organizes poster competitions with a bullying theme. In addition, the school works to maintain a drug-free environment by collaborating with an anti-drug task force to educate students about the dangers of drugs and regularly monitor and check students for any signs of involvement with drugs. To achieve the Healthy and Safe School program category, SMP Plus Ar Rahman Kediri implements effective management to reach the desired achievements. The management system applied includes the following:

## **Planning**

The planning carried out by SMP Plus Ar Rahman involves preparing programs related to the category they are participating in, namely the Healthy and Safe Smart School award. The programs prepared by the school include the Adiwiyata program, a healthy school program that requires students to bring meals from home, and a clean-living program that encourages students to dispose of waste properly. The teaching staff involved in completing the SSA Program documents must prepare and meet the necessary documentation for school program planning. The documents to be prepared include data or documents outlining the school's planning mechanisms, the school's Quality Culture Strategic Plan (Renstra Budaya Mutu Sekolah), the school's vision and mission, the school organizational structure, job descriptions, guidelines for teacher development or human resource capacity building, disciplinary policies, certificates of expertise, certificates of achievements, guidelines for new student admissions, student development plans, school financial planning documents, sources of financing, school accountability reports, educational infrastructure management documents, and guidelines for creating a conducive environment. Given the extensive data and documents required, the school has allocated a special budget to meet the requirements for participating in the SSA Program competition. The budget needed to prepare the

programs, cover the transportation costs of teachers and staff, and other associated expenses amounts to approximately 5-6 million IDR. The funds are sourced from the school's BOS (School Operational Assistance) funds and contributions from parents in the form of material assistance for the Adiwiyata program.

Next, after the data and documents have been collected, they are submitted to the SSA Program organizing committee. The school and the team then fill out the Self-Evaluation Instrument provided by the committee. In filling out the Self-Evaluation Instrument, all forms must be completed according to the criteria and category requirements set by the SSA competition committee. However, before this is carried out, the school must double-check and ensure that the data aligns with the implementation at the school. Therefore, in this planning phase, the school needs to prepare well in advance to instill a culture of a healthy and safe school, such as clean living programs and promoting healthy eating habits. This cannot be done instantly; it requires consistent practice, which takes time, both from the perspective of the students as the subjects and from the teachers as the managers of the school. Another preparation carried out by SMP Plus Ar Rahman is the creation of a portfolio in the form of documents related to the school's programs in the relevant category, which include: 1) Operational Curriculum of Educational Units (KOSP); 2) School Activity Programs; 3) P5 Program; 4) Teaching Modules and Assessment; 5) Infrastructure Data; 6) Library Data; 7) Healthy School Program; 8) UKS (School Health Unit) Data; 9) MOU with the Health Center; 10) Safe School Program; 11) SK (Decree) of Anti-Corruption, Anti-Drug, and Anti-Bullying Task Force.

## **Implementation**

Next, after all the required documents are ready for evaluation and the Self-Evaluation instrument is filled out by the school, the assessment is carried out by the SSA 2023 program committee. The implementation of the SSA 2023 program consists of four stages as follows:

First, the portfolio collection stage, which includes data or documents related to the programs at SMP Ar Rahman. The portfolio required for participating in this SSA program is divided into two components: general and specific. The general components include school leadership and management, school curriculum and teaching, and school libraries. The specific components include the healthy and safe school program, as well as the school's commitment to a healthy and safe school environment.

Second, the presentation and interview stage, which aims to explain the programs listed in the portfolio that was submitted.

Third, the showcase stage, which is a exhibition or bazaar event carried out by all school parties to demonstrate the programs and the results achieved.

Fourth, the visitation stage, which is conducted online. This final stage aims to ensure the accuracy of the contents of the portfolio, which will be verified by the local government of Kediri city.

The SSA implementation itself lasted for about three days after the submission of the portfolio. However, preparing the programs that align with the categories being followed took a long time, such as the national Adiwiyata program, which required about two years to reach the national level, and other programs that needed time to adjust and maintain consistency in their implementation. The assessment of the SSA 2023 program was carried out by a committee team formed by the Kediri City Education Office. This was done to support the development of education towards the 5.0 education era, where educational institutions compete by innovating and growing rapidly by utilizing technological advancements. Additionally, it aims to motivate educational institution managers to provide excellent educational services and serve as a benchmark for other schools (Asmani, n.d.; Yumnah et al., 2023).

The assessment was conducted at 12 schools that passed the first stage (portfolio document study). In the second stage, presentations and interviews were conducted with the 12 schools that passed for further evaluation and verification of factual alignment. This was done on October 10 and 11, 2023, which consisted of several sessions and categories followed by both elementary and secondary schools. Presentations were made by teams representing each school, and the interviews were conducted with the school principal, representatives of teachers, students, and parents. The presentation materials included descriptions, photos, and videos that depicted the school's environment and activities reflecting the Smart School criteria. This activity was held at the IV Campus of Universitas Nusantara PGRI (UNP) Kediri. Following this, the third stage, the Showcase, took place. The Showcase was an exhibition activity at a stand provided by the committee for visitors to observe and assess. Lastly, a visitation was conducted by the committee to the school to directly observe and ensure that the school matched the portfolio documents.

All these stages were followed well by the team from SMP Ar Rahman and all members of the school community. When the visitation team arrived to conduct the assessment, the school principal, teacher representatives, students, and parents participated actively. This allowed the visitation team to observe and ensure that the evaluation accurately reflected the alignment between the documents and the actual conditions on the ground. All stages were conducted fairly and transparently, resulting in an objective evaluation. The SSA program helped the community highlight outstanding schools and provided a clear picture of the school's quality. Additionally, it helped to brand the school's quality, making it more widely known and attracting more people to enroll their children at SMP Ar Rahman.

## **Evaluation**

The evaluation conducted by SMP Ar Rahman focused on improving programs that were deemed less optimal, while maintaining programs that were already successful, with the hope that the school would achieve even better results in the next year's SSA program. The achievement attained by SMP Ar Rahman was securing 3rd

place in the Smart School Award (SSA) 2023 in the category of School Health and Safety Award.

Further, the purpose of participating in the SSA 2023 program for SMP Ar Rahman was to improve the school's performance, enhance school programs, and also boost the school's brand image, as the school earned 3rd place at the city level in Kediri.

The specific objectives of the SSA 2023 program are: 1) To become a secondary school with a well-established smart school system and utilize its strengths to serve as a good practice model for other schools (Hendra & Turrahmi, 2022). Collecting a wealth of inspirational experiences from elementary and secondary schools that have successfully implemented a smart school system, in accordance with standards, and have a high-quality digital learning ecosystem (Suarsana, n.d.). 2) Documenting and disseminating inspirational experiences related to the development of the smart school system. Documentation and socialization will help facilitate knowledge exchange and best practices, thereby enhancing collaboration and synergy among schools to achieve better educational outcomes. 3) Mobilizing primary and secondary education units along with local governments and other stakeholders to collectively commit to building smart schools (Bisri, 2020; K. Setyaningsih, 2019).

## **CONCLUSION**

An excellent school is an educational institution established with the goal of achieving widespread achievements both nationally and internationally in mastering science and technology, while maintaining high moral standards. One of the programs that can create an excellent school and attract many enthusiasts is the Smart School Awards (SSA) Program. The SSA program consists of four categories, namely: the Smart School Innovation Award, Smart School Digitalization, Smart School Talent Award, and the Healthy and Safe Smart School Award. SMP Ar Rahman participated in the Healthy and Safe Smart School category. In participating in this program, SMP Ar Rahman made thorough preparations with a school management system. Several stages of management have been followed, from planning, implementation, to evaluation. All school members contributed to this activity, including the principal, teachers, students, and parents. The purpose of SMP Ar Rahman's participation in the SSA program is to improve school performance and enhance school programs. In addition, it also helps to improve the school's brand image. Ultimately, SMP Ar Rahman's efforts were rewarded with 3rd place in the 2023 Smart School Awards (SSA) program. Further research on the Smart School Awards (SSA) program should be conducted by other researchers to determine whether the program's impact continues to be effective over time.

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