

Enhancing Teacher Pedagogical Competence through the Sister School Program: An Implementation Study

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Abstract: Teacher pedagogical competence is paramount for elevating educational standards. Despite its importance, many educators still require significant development in this area. The Sister School Program, involving inter-school collaboration, offers an innovative and potentially effective strategy to address this gap. This study investigates the implementation of the Sister School program at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember with the primary goal of examining its effectiveness in enhancing the pedagogical competencies of the participating teachers. Employing a qualitative, phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers who participated in the program. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover the core experiences of the instructors. The findings indicate that the Sister School program significantly enhanced the teachers' pedagogical competencies, particularly fostering the adoption of more creative and engaging teaching techniques. Furthermore, participation resulted in increased teacher motivation and professional confidence in instructional delivery. Beyond individual development, the program also notably improved inter-school collaboration and knowledge sharing. In conclusion, the Sister School program at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember has proven to be an effective model for enhancing teacher pedagogical proficiency. This successful implementation provides a valuable blueprint for other educational institutions seeking to improve teacher competence in similar developing contexts.

Keywords: Pedagogical Competence; Inter-school Collaboration; Qualitative Research; Sister School Program.

INTRODUCTION

The continuous development of Indonesia's national education system is strategically aimed at preparing its citizens for global competitiveness. The current long-term plan, outlined in the 2005-2025 Long-Term National Education Development Plan (RPPNJP) (Badan Pembinaan Hukum Nasional 2023), explicitly mandates that teachers, as a crucial educational component, must be ready to possess international quality. This focus is reinforced by regulations like Permendiknas No. 18 of 2009 and PP No. 17 of 2010, which require educational institutions to enhance the caliber of their instructors to ensure students can compete globally.

The commitment to international competitiveness is supported by the decentralization of education as stipulated in Law No. 32 of 2004. This

decentralization grants regions (including education and culture) the management authority to build locally competitive education systems, thereby contributing to national and global quality (Atmojo, Ardiansyah, and Saputri 2020; Nur et al. 2025; Qadrianty, Dollah, and A. Muliati 2024; Turlybekov et al. 2024). This framework creates an opportune environment for educational institutions to proactively innovate and seek strategies for improving teacher capacity in preparation for international challenges.

The quality of education is fundamentally dependent on the competence of its teachers. Among the various essential skills, teacher pedagogical competence the ability to plan, manage, and execute effective learning activities is paramount. However, evidence suggests that a substantial number of educators still require significant professional development in this core area (Fairman et al. 2022; Thoyib et al. 2024; Turlybekov et al. 2024; Wilcoxon, Newman, and Wulff 2025). Consequently, enhancing teacher pedagogical competence is central to improving the overall quality and competitiveness of the Indonesian education system.

Addressing this crucial need, this study investigates an innovative collaborative intervention: the Sister School Program. This program is designed to enhance teacher pedagogical ability through structured collaboration and inter-school knowledge sharing. The research is specifically situated at Muhammadiyah 3 Jember Senior High School, a private institution actively working to align its resources, particularly its faculty, with the objective of achieving global competitiveness and obtaining international certifications like ISO 9001:2015, in line with the goals set by the Regional Leadership of Muhammadiyah East Java.

Preliminary observations and reviews of the school's internal data confirmed the relevance of the Sister School Program intervention by highlighting specific pedagogical weaknesses among the teaching staff. These included a prevalent reliance on conventional, teacher-centered instructional methods, challenges in effectively integrating learning technology, and gaps in implementing diverse and authentic assessment strategies (Atmojo et al. 2020; Lotfi et al. 2025; Nur et al. 2025; Qadrianty et al. 2024; Turlybekov et al. 2024). These initial findings underscore the necessity of a structured professional development model like the Sister School Program at this particular institution.

Thus, the objective of this study is to thoroughly examine the implementation and effectiveness of the Sister School Program at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember as a strategic effort to enhance the pedagogical competencies of its teachers. By providing an in-depth analysis of this program's

execution, the research aims to establish an empirically supported model for advancing teacher professional development in the broader Indonesian context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to deeply explore the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers and the school principal concerning the implementation and outcomes of the Sister School Program at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember (Khawaja, Muhammad, and Siddiqui 2022). Specifically, we adopted Interpretive Phenomenology (Heideggerian), which allowed us to move beyond mere description to interpret how participants made meaning of the collaboration and how this experience subsequently transformed their pedagogical practices. This approach provides rich, contextualized data suitable for understanding the professional development process (Atmojo et al. 2020; Jedličková et al. 2022; Rahmawati et al. 2024; Utami et al. 2025; Winaryati et al. 2025).

The research was conducted at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember, selected for its proactive engagement in the Sister School Program as part of its drive for international standards. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling to ensure they possessed relevant, firsthand experience with the program. The total of 3 key informants included the School Principal, one Core Sister School Team Teachers (active participants), and two Non-Participating Teachers, the latter providing a necessary comparative viewpoint on institutional impact.

Data collection utilized two primary techniques for triangulation: in-depth interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all informants to thoroughly examine the process, perceived benefits, challenges, and specific changes in pedagogical techniques resulting from the program (Meydan and Akkaş 2024). Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. Document analysis complemented this by examining relevant materials, such as cooperation agreements, implementation reports, and teacher self-assessments or lesson plans developed post-program, which served to corroborate the narrative accounts (Bradbury and Fitzgerald 2025; Traxler 2025; Utami et al. 2025; Wilcoxon et al. 2025; Suryana et al. 2024).

The collected data were subjected to Thematic Analysis (following the six-phase process by Braun and Clarke), focusing on interpreting the essence of the pedagogical transformation experienced by the participants. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, credibility was established through the triangulation of data sources and member checking (validation of transcripts and initial findings by participants) (Byrne 2021; Kosim et al. 2024; Muslih et al. 2024; Wasehudin et al. 2023). Furthermore, transferability was ensured by

providing a rich, detailed description of the research context and procedures, adhering to rigorous qualitative standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The study's findings, derived from the thematic analysis of interviews with key informants, confirmed the strategic effectiveness of the Sister School Program (PSS) in driving pedagogical change at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember. The program was founded on a clear institutional drive toward global standards, as articulated by the principal (KS-ADM-001), who stated that the motivation was to "Implementing global standards" and rapid knowledge transfer through benchmarking to ensure that ISO 9001:2015 certification is reflected in teaching quality. The institution fully supports this initiative, not only through financial support, but also by requiring internal knowledge-sharing sessions and strict monitoring of post-program lesson plans to ensure practical implementation. The most direct and measurable impact is the change in the pedagogical practices of core teachers. (GR-AKT-001), an active participant, testified to his transformation from a lecture-based method to an active model: "It used to be 80% lectures. Now my lesson plans always include at least one session using interactive technology, whether it's Quizizz or a virtual field trip, and there is always an element of problem-based group work." He added that the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL), such as asking students to create history podcasts, made students much more engaged, which is a strong indication of increased teaching effectiveness.

This transformation successfully spread beyond the core team. (GR-NON-002), a non-participating teacher who was initially skeptical, acknowledged that PSS brought a "new virus" to the school: "I became interested when I saw the children in Ms. Rina's class using AR (Augmented Reality) for chemistry lessons. It made me think that my old methods were outdated." This indicates the successful transfer of advanced pedagogical techniques, especially technology integration, to the entire faculty. Beyond technical skills, the program also sparked a change in the institutional climate and increased motivation. The principal noted that the core team returned with "much higher confidence." (GR-NON-003), another non-participating teacher, confirmed this positive impact on the work environment: "There is a feeling that the quality of the school is a shared responsibility, not just the principal's job." This confirms its effectiveness as a comprehensive model for teacher professional development (Ainissyifa, Nasrullah, and Fatonah 2024; Hijriyah et al. 2024; Pamungkas et al. 2025; Safkolam et al. 2023; Winaryati et al. 2025).

Discussion

The study confirms that the Sister School Program at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember significantly enhanced teachers' pedagogical competence by promoting innovation and technological integration. This success aligns robustly with established theories of learning and professional development and resonates with global educational frameworks.

The observation that teachers successfully adapted instructional strategies learned from partner schools, resulting in an increase in inventive and creative teaching methods, is highly consistent with the principles of Social Constructivism. This theory emphasizes the critical value of social interaction and collaboration, positing that knowledge is actively constructed through shared experiences (Azizah et al. 2024; Latuapo 2023; Saleem, Kausar, and Deeba 2021). In this context, the program effectively functioned as a Community of Practice (CoP), accelerating pedagogical change. Furthermore, this result corroborates established literature on effective Teacher Professional Development (TPD), which highlights that deep professional learning communities characterized by interaction and shared practice are the key drivers of sustained educational change.

Crucially, the program's focus on technology has significantly improved the teachers' skills, leading to a more engaging and dynamic teaching process. This outcome strongly supports Cognitive Learning Theory, which recognizes that technology can fundamentally enhance and restructure cognitive processes in education. In a broader context, this technological advancement directly addresses the global imperative for developing Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK), meeting the demands for personalized and skill-based learning advocated by major international education bodies. By equipping teachers to use interactive and digital tools, the program helps align educational practice with 21st-century digital competencies (Pan et al. 2024). The successful implementation of new methods and technology contrasts with general challenges sometimes faced in curriculum changes, such as the *Kurikulum Merdeka* implementation, where minor obstacles (around 5%) in applying real learning activities from teaching modules are still present. This suggests that direct, collaborative exchange via the Sister School model may offer a more effective mechanism for practical application compared to general curriculum rollout (Ainissyifa et al. 2024; Nugraha, Abdel Rahim, and Lukman 2024; Rahmawati et al. 2024; Rohmah, Maimun, and Aziz 2024; Rosanawati et al. 2025; Zaqiah, Hasanah, and Heryati 2024)

Finally, the positive impact on teacher motivation and job satisfaction is a vital non-cognitive success factor. This finding is consistent with models of

teacher change which argue that changes in successful practice and perceived positive student outcomes often precede, and thus reinforce, changes in teacher attitudes and beliefs (motivation and satisfaction) (Bradbury and Fitzgerald 2025; Nwoko et al. 2023; Rosanawati et al. 2025). This cyclical reinforcement ensures the sustainability of new practices. Ultimately, by fostering collaborative learning and enhancing motivation, the Sister School Program functions as an effective holistic TPD model that supports all four mandatory competencies Pedagogical, Professional, Personal, and Social required of professional educators (Elihami and Melbourne 2023; Fuentes-Cancell et al. 2022; Qadrianty et al. 2024; Sasere and Daniel Makhasane 2023).

The Sister School Program at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember, established through extensive collaborations with international educational institutions including Madrasah Al Juned-Al Islamiyah School of Singapore and ADNI Islamic International School of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia as well as national partners like Surabaya State University and Airlangga University, yielded comprehensive positive impacts on teacher pedagogical competence. The scope of this partnership was broad, extending beyond academic exchange to include specialized areas such as health education through collaboration with Purvis Medical Consultant Netherlands and targeted language training via organizations like Edi's English. The findings indicate that this collaboration successfully impacted several core pedagogical domains. Firstly, teachers demonstrated an enhanced ability to comprehend the physical, moral, spiritual, social, cultural, emotional, and intellectual traits of students, which was reflected in their application of differentiated instruction strategies. Secondly, the program significantly strengthened and deepened the teachers' mastery of educational learning principles and learning theories. This was notably evident in their successful implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the effective use of foreign languages in bilingual class activities. Furthermore, the collaboration directly contributed to improvements in curriculum development relevant to the subjects taught, allowing teachers to integrate global and comparative perspectives. Most critically, the program realized the teachers' capacity to execute the full cycle of the teaching process, covering the ability to oversee instructional and dialogical learning, create engaging educational activities, comprehend the principles and rules of education, and proficiently organize and assess learning, ultimately encompassing the capacity to help students reach their full potential.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully examined the implementation of the Sister School Program at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember and confirmed its strategic

effectiveness in enhancing the pedagogical competencies of the instructors, thereby fulfilling the primary research objective. The program, carried out through comprehensive collaborations with various educational partners at local, national, and international levels, resulted in a significant and measurable increase in teacher skills. Specifically, teachers demonstrated enhanced capacity in comprehending diverse student characteristics, mastering and applying contemporary learning theories and principles including the effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and foreign languages in bilingual settings and improving their proficiency in curriculum development, instructional execution, and learning assessment. These tangible outcomes confirm that the collaborative nature of the Sister School Program functions as an effective Social Constructivist model for sustained professional development, providing strong empirical evidence for its utility in similar developing contexts. Therefore, the program not only directly improves individual teacher skills but also strengthens the overall educational quality and learning environment at SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember. Future research should explore the longitudinal impact of this program on student learning outcomes and the replicability of this model across diverse school types in Indonesia.■

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