

Phenomenological study on enhancing education quality of madrasa: effective strategies from school principals perspectives

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Submission date: 16-May-2024 12:50PM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 2380790856

File name: resubmit_of_phenomelological_study.docx (52.36K)

Word count: 6627

Character count: 39080

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Introduction. The quality of education, both academic and non-academic, has always received serious attention from all education stakeholders. Because of that, they always focus on seriously improving the quality of these two aspects, especially the school principal. As the person in charge of education in Madrasas, principals are responsible for and play an essential role in improving the quality of education in the schools they lead.

Aim. This study aims to explain the strategies used by madrasa principles to improve the quality of academic and non-academic education in their school environment.

Methods. This research used a qualitative approach by interviewing ten madrasa principles in Samarinda, East Kalimantan. The results of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively to find essential themes related to the research context.

Results. This study found six strategies school principals use to improve madrasa's academic and non-academic quality, starting from developing strong academic curriculum, implementing innovative teaching methods and technologies, creating a supportive learning environment, building a solid work team, a precise educational evaluation and monitoring system, and making a collaboration and good communication with parents of students.

Practical significants. This research has implications for the importance of school principals having effective strategies to improve the quality of academic and non-academic education in the madrasa environment. Therefore, it is hoped that school principals will implement these six strategic steps in improving the quality of madrasas in the management they apply. It is also hoped that the head of the Islamic education office will educate school principals in the madrasa environment to equip them with managerial skills to improve the quality of madrasah education, both in the academic and non-academic fields.

Keywords: Madrasa, educational quality, academic, non-academic, collaboration, school principal, effective strategy

Introduction

The quality of education is an essential aspect of concern to all countries in the world because it significantly influences the quality of a nation. In determining the quality of education, educational institutions cannot be separated from UNESCO standards because it is an international organization that operates in education, science, and culture. The UNESCO framework regarding educational

quality variables has five dimensions: student characteristics, context, enabling inputs, teaching and learning, and learning outcomes [1].

To enable inputs, educational institutions must subscribe to teaching and learning materials, physical infrastructure and facilities, and human resources. Educational institutions must point to learning time, teaching methods, assessment, and class size in learning. Meanwhile, in the outcome aspect, educational institutions must pay attention to several skills to be achieved, such as literacy skills and life skills [2]. As educational institutions, Madrasahs have a big responsibility in meeting the education quality standards set by UNESCO.

Madrasahs are educational institutions that are classified as old education in Indonesia. Even so, the quality of madrasah education is still relatively low and considered a "second class" educational institution. The problem of low quality of madrasahs in Indonesia is a serious issue that needs to be addressed [3]. At the same time, madrasahs, as Islamic educational institutions, have an essential role in building character and improving the quality of education for Muslims [4]. However, many madrasahs are currently facing various challenges resulting in low-quality education.

The government's attention to the quality of education in Indonesia is enormous [5]. The Indonesian government has shown great concern for the quality of madrasah education through various policies and programs, such as increasing teacher competence, improving madrasah facilities, using technology, and paying attention to the curriculum [6]. The quality of madrasahs will continue to improve and produce quality graduates. The government needs to continue supporting and strengthening these programs to achieve the expected goals.

The role of the school principal is vital in overseeing and encouraging the improvement of the quality of Madrasah education [7]. As the prominent leader, the principal is responsible for ensuring that all aspects of education, both academic and non-academic programs, run well. One of the primary roles of a school principal is to develop and implement excellent programs that can improve the quality of education [8]. School principals can design programs that suit their learning environment by paying attention to the needs and potential of students and teacher participation. A solid academic program will help students achieve better learning outcomes [9], while non-academic programs such as extracurricular activities and character development can help students develop holistically [10].

Previous research has revealed school principals' dominant role in improving education quality. According to research conducted by Amelia et al. [11], school principals have an essential role in carrying out systematic efforts to achieve better school goals and professionalism. Bafadal and Arifin also highlights the importance of school principals in ensuring the implementation of an effective and organized quality improvement strategy [12]. Warisno &

Hidayah [13] emphasized that school principals play a crucial role in creating a supportive learning environment. While Özdemir [14] shows that academic activities led by school principals can positively impact improving the quality of education.

However, the research on strategic management for improving the quality of academic and non-academic carried out by school principals needs more research because this field still needs to be available. Even though a study of this issue is crucial, it is believed that with good strategic management, madrasas' academic and non-academic quality can be improved. Therefore, there is a need to conduct gap analysis and more research on these strategies to improve the overall quality of education. By understanding the school principal's dominant role and complementing previous research results, we can develop effective strategies to improve the quality of education in the future. The main problem in this research is the principal's strategy for improving the quality of education in academic and non-academic programs in Islamic senior high schools.

Literature Review

Leadership in the Context of Madrasa Education

In the context of madrasa education, the role of the principal is vital [13]. The leadership of madrasa has a significant impact on improving the quality of education in the institution. The importance of leadership in education cannot be ignored because the principal plays the leading role in creating an effective learning environment and empowers all members of the madrasa [15]. A practical madrasa principle can inspire teachers and administrative staff to work collaboratively, increase motivation, and facilitate quality learning. With strong leadership, teachers will feel supported and motivated to develop their skills to provide the best teaching to students [16]. A good madrasa principle can formulate a clear vision and mission of education and its implementation strategy. By having a solid vision, the principal can direct all members of the madrasa to work towards a common goal with a focus on improving the quality of education [17].

The importance of leadership in the educational context can also be seen in the ability of a school principal to build good relationships with student's parents and the surrounding community. Inclusive leadership will create a harmonious climate between all parties involved in the student learning process [18]. A practical madrasa principle can inspire and motivate all members to work together to achieve common goals. With strong leadership, educational institutions can provide quality learning experiences for students and contribute positively to the development of the surrounding community [19].

Responsibilities of School Principals to Improve the Quality of Madrasa Education

Madrasah principal responsible for improving the quality of madrasa education [20]. One of the principal's primary duties at madrasa is to develop and implement educational policies to improve education quality, including improving academic standards, developing curricula relevant to student needs [21], and ensuring effective learning methods are in place [22].

The madrasa principal is also responsible for creating a conducive and inspiring learning environment for teachers and students [23]. The leadership of the madrasa principal is critical in creating a harmonious, mutually supportive work culture and encourages innovation and collaboration among all members of the educational community [24]. School principals must be actively involved in evaluating and monitoring teacher performance [25] and student learning progress to improve the quality of education; by conducting periodic evaluations, the madrasa principle can identify existing weaknesses and provide guidance and training to teachers to improve the quality of teaching [26].

A visionary school principal can bring positive changes sustainably in the quality of madrasa education [27]. By taking strategic steps and involving all stakeholders, school principals can create a quality learning environment and provide better opportunities for students to achieve academic success and personal development [28].

Finally, the duties and responsibilities of the principal are essential in improving the quality of madrasa education. With effective leadership, good education management, and active involvement in evaluation and monitoring processes, madrasa principals can make positive changes in the quality of education and create an optimal learning environment for students.

Research methods

The research uses a qualitative approach with a type of phenomenology [29], in which researchers seek to explore phenomena about the experiences of madrasa principles in developing the quality of education in the schools they lead, both in the academic and non-academic fields. The research was conducted in the city of Samarinda involving ten heads of madrasas, both public and private, in the city of Samarinda. The researcher coded the participants with the letter P, starting from P1 to P10, to facilitate identification. An overview of the participants in this study can be seen in the following table:

Table 1.

Descriptive of participant demographic

No	Participant	Gender	Age	Tenure/ Year	Experience
1	P1	Male	55	25	He has been a teacher for 25 years in MAN 1 Samarinda and be a principal for four years.

2	P2	Male	55	27	He has worked as a teacher in MAN 2 Samarinda for 27 years and now serves as a principal in his third year.
3	P3	Male	56	20	He has been a teacher for 20 years in MAN Bontang and a principal for four years.
4	P4	Female	42	20	She has been a teacher for 20 years. Due to her accomplishments, she was appointed school principal at a young age. At this time, she has been the school's principal for three years and has made many innovations so that his students have achieved many achievements in both academic and non-academic fields.
5	P5	Female	55	31	She has been a teacher for 31 years in MAN Balikpapan. As a woman, she is a strict and disciplined woman. During his four years of leadership, he has made curriculum changes and collaborated with outside stakeholders to advance school educational activities.
6	P6	Male	56	28	He has been a teacher for 28 years in MA Al Mujahidin Samarinda. As principal for four years, he has made several breakthroughs in curriculum development and extracurricular activities. One of them is the development of an integrative curriculum of religion and science so that students have a balanced perspective between science and religion.
7	P7	Female	56	35	She had been a teacher for 35 years and was then appointed as principal. At this time he has been assigned as a school principal for three years and has done many things to develop the quality of education in his school.
8	P8	Male	46	20	He has been a teacher for 20 years in MTsN Balikpapan. His experience as a teacher has made him a wise and innovative headmaster. Many new extracurricular activities are included in school activities, increasing student non-academic achievements.
9	P9	Female	56	27	She has been a teacher for 27 years in MTs Al Mujahidin Samarinda. Even though she is a woman, this does not make her feel inferior in leading the school. His ability to collaborate with teachers and student guardians makes school activities more vibrant.
10	P10	Male	56	28	He as been a teacher for 28 years in MTs Darussalam Samarinda. He became headmaster entering his third year. His achievements while being a school principal include incorporating the IT program into extracurricular activities that emphasize the importance of students mastering information technology. All students are introduced to coding programs so that in the future, they can become programmers, IT managers, and so on.

Data was collected through open and semi-structured interview techniques [30], in which the researcher only brought a grid of questions as a guide and would develop the questions according to the needs to get the appropriate answers. Each school principal was interviewed for approximately 20-30 minutes about their experiences in developing the quality of education in the madrasa they lead. From their answers to the questions asked, the researcher analyzed them and constructed them into a strategy for developing academic and non-academic education quality in the madrasa environment.

Analysis of research data was carried out in stages. In the early stages, the researcher transcribed the interview data into text to understand the content and meaning. After that, the researcher read the transcript repeatedly to understand each statement's core meaning, explicit meaning, and implied meaning. Statements containing a specific meaning are given a unique code to sign that the statement is essential in the research context. At this coding stage, researchers will do it in several stages: open coding, axial coding, and selected coding [31].

At the open coding stage, the researcher carries out the process of detailing, testing, separating data, and labeling. Researchers enumerate the qualitative data collected through interviews to open up the possibility of finding new meanings and understanding of the data collected. Another goal of researchers breaking down data and labeling them with codes is to compare and contrast similar events in the data. Researchers try to get out of prejudice and bias about their research. In this process, researchers produce hundreds of open codes, which are separate and independent from each other [32].

In the second stage, the researcher did axial coding by connecting several codes with the same characteristics in one category. In contrast to open coding, where the researcher breaks the data into discrete parts, the researcher starts to draw the relationships between the codes in axial coding. At this stage, the researcher identifies which open coding codes are most important and central to the theory formulation and refines and elevates them to category status [33].

In the third stage, the researcher conducted a selective coding process, namely choosing a core category representing other categories. Afterward, the researcher connects the selected categories with other categories or codes that fall into the core category. Several core categories are then linked to one another into a theme appropriate to the research context [34]. These selected themes will later be displayed in the data presentation and used as research findings.

Findings

This research seeks to reveal the principal's strategy for improving the academic and non-academic quality of the principal in the madrasah environment. Researchers asked various questions related to related topics to school principals in the madrasah environment. Interviews were recorded, then transcribed and analyzed with a predetermined qualitative analysis. After conducting data

analysis, the researcher arrived at several thematic findings as described in the following table:

Table 2.

Selective themes and categories result from data analysis

Themes	Categories	Participants
Theme 1: Developing a Strong Academic Curriculum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Academic curriculum development, curriculum improvement, curriculum planning</i> 2. <i>Setting clear learning goals and objectives</i> 3. <i>Aligning curriculum with national standards</i> 4. <i>Collaborating with stakeholders to ensure effective implementation of the curriculum</i> 	P1, P2, P4, P6, P8, P10
Theme 2. Implementing Innovative Teaching Methods and Technologies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Innovative teaching methods</i> 2. <i>Technology integration in education</i> 3. <i>Promoting active learning and student engagement</i> 4. <i>Providing professional development opportunities for teachers on new teaching approaches and technologies</i> 	P2, P3, P5, P6, P8, P9
Theme 3. Creating a Supportive Learning Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Socio-emotional learning programs</i> 2. <i>Character development initiatives</i> 	P1, P2, P3, P6, P8, P9, P10
Theme 4. Building a Solid Working Team	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Work team management</i> 2. <i>Teamwork in madrasas</i> 3. <i>Motivation of teachers and educational staff</i> 	P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P9
Theme 5. Implementation of Education Evaluation and Monitoring System	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Educational evaluation system,</i> 2. <i>Monitoring the quality of madrasa education</i> 3. <i>Measuring the performance of teachers and students</i> 	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9
Theme 6. Communication and collaboration with parents of students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Collaboration with parents of students</i> 2. <i>Effective communication with parents of madrasa students</i> 	P2, P4, P5, P6, P8, P10

Table 2 describes the principal's strategy for improving the quality of academic and non-academic education in the Madrasa environment. According to the principals who participated in this study, they have various strategies for improving the quality of academic and non-academic education in madrasa environments, which are organized into the following themes:

Theme 1: Developing a Strong Academic Curriculum

The first theme that emerged from the analysis of the interview data with the respondents was developing a strong academic curriculum. At least six

respondents emphasized the importance of developing a solid academic curriculum to improve academic quality in madrasas. According to them, a solid academic curriculum is essential in building academic quality. One of them said,

"Developing a strong academic curriculum is crucial for ensuring that students receive a high-quality education" (P1)

According to them, several strategic steps are needed to build a solid academic curriculum: careful planning, collaboration with stakeholders, and continuous development. According to them, these three elements are essential to meet the needs of students and the educational standards set by the local government. In this case, they say.

"Yes, it involves careful planning to achieve a good academic curriculum" (P4)

In preparing a solid curriculum, there must also be clear educational goals because clear goals make it easier for teachers to prepare lessons supporting student growth and maximizing their performance. In this case, one respondent said,

"By clearly defining these expectations, educators can design instructions that support student growth and achievement..." (P8)

Some respondents also stressed the importance of collaboration in developing a superior curriculum. For them, collaboration with teachers is essential throughout the curriculum development process. Teachers bring valuable insights and expertise as they work directly with students daily. By involving teachers in decision-making processes, such as selecting instructional materials or designing assessments, administrators can ensure that the curriculum reflects the needs of both teachers and students.

"For me collaboration and continuous improvement is important to meet the needs of both students and educational standards..." (P2)

In conclusion, developing a solid academic curriculum requires careful planning, goal-setting, alignment with national standards, and collaboration with teachers. By investing time and effort into these processes, educational institutions can provide their students with an engaging and rigorous education that prepares them for success in their academic journey.

Theme 2. Implementing Innovative Teaching Methods and Technologies

The second strategy, which emerged based on the thematic analysis results, is implementing innovative teaching methods and technologies. According to the school principals who were respondents to this research, teachers must implement innovative learning methods and use technology to support the learning process to improve the academic and non-academic quality of schools. They argue that

educators must adapt and embrace innovative teaching methods and technologies in today's rapidly evolving world. they say,

"We support our teachers to implement innovative teaching methods and empower educators to move away from traditional lecture-based approaches and promote active learning..." (P2)

Another aspect that concerns the respondents in improving academic quality is the use of technology. According to them, by leveraging technology, teachers can create interactive lessons that captivate students' attention and foster a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Whether using virtual reality to transport students to different historical eras or utilizing gamification techniques to make learning more enjoyable, technology integration opens up a world of possibilities. One of the respondents said,

"By integrating technology into education, we can revolutionize the way students learn and engage in the classroom..." (P3)

Furthermore, they stress the importance of providing teachers with professional development opportunities on new teaching approaches and technologies. By equipping educators with the necessary skills and knowledge, they can confidently navigate the digital landscape and effectively utilize these tools in their classrooms. they said,

"In order for teachers to be able to apply new learning approaches and also be able to apply technology to support education effectively, their skills in applying learning methods and technology must be improved..." (P5)

Ultimately, implementing innovative teaching methods and technologies enhances student engagement and prepares them for the future, where technology plays an increasingly significant role. We must embrace these educational advancements to create a dynamic learning environment that fosters creativity, critical thinking, and lifelong learning.

Theme 3. Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

The third theme from the data analysis is creating a supportive learning environment. Several participants explained that creating a supportive learning environment through non-academic programs is essential in forming empowered students with solid character. In this case, they say,

"Academic quality will be good if it is supported by a good environment too..." (P3)

Extracurricular activities were among the non-academic programs that were of concern to the principals who were the respondents of this study. According to them, students can develop their interests and talents outside of academic subjects through this activity.

"Extracurricular programs can help strengthen students' personality and social skills through interaction with peers and instructors..." (P8)

In addition, some respondents also saw the importance of Adiwiyata activities to create a supportive educational environment, such as exhibitions and outdoor activities. In this case, they say,

"The Adiwiyata program can also be an interesting learning tool for students..." (P2)

Theme 4. Building a Solid Working Team

The fourth theme researchers found from the results of data analysis on strategies to improve academic and non-academic quality in madrasas from the perspective of school principals is the importance of building a solid work team. According to them, building a solid work team is the primary key to improving the quality of education in madrasas. Effective team management, cooperation, and high motivation of teachers and educational staff are critical in achieving common goals. In this case, they say,

"In order to achieve the goals of education in madrasas, a solid work team is needed, both between leaders, teachers and other educational staff..." (P2)

They believe collaboration and cohesiveness between team members are necessary to create a harmonious work environment. By supporting and working together, teams can tackle challenges more effectively and develop the best solutions. they say,

"In my opinion, building togetherness is an essential thing in strengthening the bond between team members...(P4)

However, conflict cannot be avoided in a team. Therefore, management needs an effective conflict resolution strategy to maintain work performance and atmosphere. To avoid such conflicts, they emphasize the need for open communication. One participant said,

"Open communication and professional conflict management are the keys to maintaining harmony in the team..." (P9)

By building a solid work team, madrasas can improve the quality of education. Good cooperation between team members will positively impact the student learning process and provide inspiration and motivation for all parties involved in the world of madrasah education.

Theme 5. Implementation of a Clear Evaluation and Monitoring System

The fifth theme from data analysis related to strategies to improve academic and non-academic quality in madrasas is the importance of implementing a precise evaluation and monitoring system in assessing and measuring the quality

of madrasah education. Several informants emphasized the importance of this aspect in improving the quality of madrasas. they say,

"With this system, we can objectively evaluate the performance of teachers and students, and ensure that education quality standards are met..." (P2)

According to them, through measuring teacher performance, we can see whether the teaching methods implemented are adequate or need to be adjusted. Apart from that, measuring student performance also helps determine their understanding of the subject matter. However, it is not enough to carry out an evaluation. According to them, monitoring the quality of madrasa education is also very important to ensure that quality standards are maintained over time. By periodic monitoring, schools can identify problems that arise and immediately take the necessary corrective actions. they say,

"The implementation of this evaluation and monitoring system also provides benefits for education stakeholders. Parents can see their child's development in a more transparent manner, while schools or educational institutions can carry out strategic planning based on evaluation results..." (P6)

In general, school principals emphasize the importance of implementing a technology-based evaluation and monitoring system to improve the quality of academic and non-academic education. By implementing a good evaluation and monitoring system, we can ensure that the quality of madrasa education continues to improve, positively impacting student development and the overall quality of education.

Theme 6. Building Good Relationships and Collaborating with Parents of Students

Principals of schools highlighted the importance of collaborating and communicating with parents of students to build the quality of academic and non-academic education in schools. According to them, building good relationships with students' parents is essential in improving the quality of education in madrasas. Collaboration with parents is not only beneficial for educators but also for children's development and success.

"Effective communication with parents of students is an important step in developing the quality of education in schools..." (P2)

According to them, by sharing information and understanding, schools can work together to find the best solutions to support children's academic and social development. Collaboration also involves joint problem-solving between teachers and parents of students. When facing challenges or problems in the teaching and learning process, we can work together to find the right solution. Involving parents as active partners in the decision-making process will give them a sense of ownership of their children's education, thereby increasing students' learning motivation and active participation.

"At my school, collaboration between school and parents is carried out intensely, so that any activities that are non-academic in nature, I definitely involve parents..." (P5)

Schools can create an inclusive and supportive learning environment by building good relationships with students' parents as collaborators, which will help improve the overall quality of madrasa education and positively impact students' academic development and personal characteristics.

Discussion

The research found that there were six strategies implemented by madrasa principles in improving the quality of education, both academic and non-academic, in their school environment, namely (1) strong academic curriculum, (2) innovative teaching methods and technologies, (3) creating supportive learning environment, (4) building a solid work team, (5) a precise educational evaluation and monitoring system, (6) collaboration and good relations with parents of students. On this occasion, we will discuss these six themes to see how far these six elements can improve the quality of education in the madrasa environment.

The research revealed that developing a solid academic curriculum is an effective strategy to improve academic and non-academic quality. A strong academic curriculum is the main foundation for implementing education in madrasas. The curriculum covers various subjects, including religion, languages, mathematics, and science. With a comprehensive curriculum, madrasas can provide students with a balanced and holistic education.

The finding confirms several previous studies which explain that a solid academic curriculum is improving the quality of education [35], evaluate student achievement [36], allowing madrasas to identify weaknesses and strengths in their education system to make appropriate improvements [37], improve student competence in various fields [38], better understand religion and Islamic values [39], prepare student to face future challenges [40], and preparing them to have the skills needed by society and the evolving world of work [41].

The second theme revealed on strategies for improving educational quality in madrasa is implementing innovative teaching methods and technologies. This finding hints at the importance of using innovative teaching methods and technologies to improve the quality of learning. Teachers can use technological aids such as multimedia, interactive simulations, or online learning platforms to make learning more exciting and interactive for students.

The finding confirms some previous researches which point out that Innovative teaching methods can create a more engaging and interactive learning environment for students [42]. By using creative and different methods, teachers can motivate students to study more enthusiastically [43], improve

communication between teachers, students, and parents [44], and provide feedback quickly and effectively to students [45].

The research also confirm that creating a supportive educational environment is necessary to improve the quality of madrasa education. This finding in line with some previous researches which confirm that supportive educational environment will allow students to develop optimally [46] and feel comfortable and safe to learn [47].

The research pointed out the essential of building a solid work team for increasing educational quality at madrasa education. Madrasas need to build a solid work team to achieve this goal. A solid work team will be able to improve the quality of madrasa education as a whole. This finding confirm previous research conduct by Lick which revealed that with a solid work team, synergy will be created between educators and education staff in implementing the established educational programs [48]. Good collaboration between work team members will ensure program implementation runs smoothly and effectively [49].

Another critical point revealed in this study is the education evaluation and monitoring system for improving the quality of madrasa education. With this system, madrasa can measure the extent to which madrasa education goals have been achieved and identify areas that need improvement. A precise evaluation and monitoring system also allows us to identify weaknesses in the curriculum and teaching methods [50], to make madrasa education more effective and relevant to students' needs [51] and encouraging them to continue improving the quality of education they provide to students [52].

The last theme that emerges from the research findings is collaboration and good communication between schools and parents of students. Through collaboration and close cooperation, schools can achieve the common goal of providing the best education to students. The research confirms previous research, which revealed that establishing good collaboration with parents can help schools understand their needs and expectations for their children's education [53] and gain valuable insights that can be used to improve curricula and teaching methods tailored to student needs [44]. Therefore establishing good collaboration and communication with parents must be considered in improving the quality of madrasa education.

Conclusion

In the context of madrasas, six strategies can be implemented to improve the quality of education. These strategies include an academic solid curriculum, innovative teaching methods, and technologies, creating a supportive learning environment, building a solid work team, a precise educational evaluation and monitoring system, and collaboration and good communication with parents of students.

Implementing these strategies will provide a strong foundation for improving Madrasa's education quality. By prioritizing a strong curriculum, innovative teaching methods, a conducive learning environment, a solid work team, a transparent evaluation system, and collaboration with student's parents, madrasas will create meaningful educational experiences and positively impact students.

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PAGE 1

PAGE 2

PAGE 3

PAGE 4

PAGE 5

PAGE 6

PAGE 7

PAGE 8

PAGE 9

PAGE 10

PAGE 11

PAGE 12

PAGE 13

PAGE 14

PAGE 15

PAGE 16

PAGE 17

PAGE 18
