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The Urgency of Educational Facilities and Infrastructure Management in Welcoming New Normal Era Learning

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Abstract

The transition into the new normal era following the COVID 19 pandemic presents unique challenges for the education sector, particularly in ensuring safe, effective, and adaptive learning environments. This study explores the urgency of managing educational facilities and infrastructure to support face-to-face learning during the new normal period at UPT SMAN 9 Bone, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative field research design, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving key school stakeholders. Findings reveal that effective management comprising planning, procurement, inventory, utilization, maintenance, and accountability is crucial for enabling a conducive and health-compliant learning environment. The study also highlights adaptive learning practices such as blended learning, limited face-to-face instruction, and home visits as part of the school's strategy. These findings underscore the strategic role of infrastructure management in maintaining educational continuity and resilience amid post-pandemic transitions.

Keywords: Educational Facilities Management, New Normal Learning, Post-Pandemic Education

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching consequences on various aspects of human life, with the education sector experiencing substantial disruption. In response to the outbreak, many governments globally, including Indonesia, implemented drastic measures such as the suspension of face-to-face learning activities in schools, substituting them with remote learning systems (UNESCO, 2020). While these measures were vital for curbing the spread of the virus, they also introduced new challenges in the delivery and management of educational services.

The shift to remote learning exposed infrastructural and managerial gaps, particularly in the availability and readiness of educational facilities. Many schools were unprepared for this abrupt transition, highlighting a critical need for comprehensive educational facility management that ensures resilience in times of crisis (Dhawan, 2020). The pandemic thus served as a stress test, revealing weaknesses in physical and technological infrastructure across educational institutions.

As the global situation stabilized, countries began adopting the "new normal," where face-to-face education resumed under strict health protocols. This transition brought about a hybrid mode of learning, combining online and offline methodologies. It also demanded that schools enhance their infrastructure and implement health-compliant facility management systems to support safe and effective teaching and learning environments (Zhao, 2020).

In Indonesia, the Ministry of Education and Culture issued a series of policies encouraging schools in green and yellow zones to resume limited face-to-face learning, provided that they adhered to strict health protocols (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2021). Consequently, educational facilities management became a crucial element in enabling schools to operate safely and responsibly during the new normal.

Educational facility management encompasses not only the physical preparation of learning spaces but also the administrative processes involved in planning, procurement, usage, and maintenance of infrastructure (Bafadal, 2014). In this context, facility management is not merely logistical it is strategic. Well-managed infrastructure supports not only operational efficiency but also directly influences educational quality and student outcomes.

In the new normal era, this strategic dimension becomes more pronounced. Educational institutions must now consider health oriented modifications, such as installing handwashing stations, contactless thermometers, adequate ventilation, and ensuring physical distancing in classrooms. These changes require a systemic approach to infrastructure management, grounded in planning and supported by sufficient budgeting and accountability (Matin & Fuad, 2016).

Studies on infrastructure management in education generally focus on supporting academic achievement and institutional accreditation (Nurmalina & Nellirahati, 2020). However, relatively limited research has explored how infrastructure management practices adapt to support learning in the context of a public health crisis. Thus, there remains a significant research gap in understanding infrastructure's role in the educational recovery process post-pandemic.

This study responds to that gap by examining how a public high school in Bone, Indonesia UPT SMAN 9 Bone manages its educational facilities and infrastructure to accommodate the demands of the new normal. The school was selected due to its proactive efforts in infrastructure adaptation, including classroom renovation, health facility procurement, and the implementation of blended learning models.

By exploring the strategies and practices employed by UPT SMAN 9 Bone, this study aims to provide insights into the urgency and practicalities of educational facility management during transitional educational periods. The findings are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on school readiness, crisis resilience, and sustainable infrastructure planning in education.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative field research design to explore how educational facilities and infrastructure are managed during the implementation of face-to-face learning in the new normal era. Qualitative methods are particularly suitable for investigating the depth and complexity of human behavior and organizational practices in real-world settings. The research was conducted at UPT SMAN 9 Bone, a public high school located in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. This site was chosen purposively due to its early adaptation to post-

pandemic learning requirements, including the implementation of health protocols and hybrid learning models.

The participants in this study were selected through non-probability purposive sampling. Key informants included the principal, vice principals responsible for facilities and curriculum, and several teaching staff. These individuals were considered to possess in-depth knowledge and direct experience related to the planning, execution, and evaluation of infrastructure management during the transition to the new normal. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, direct observation of school facilities and practices, and documentation analysis of institutional reports and guidelines.

To analyze the collected data, the researchers followed a three-stage process: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved selecting and simplifying raw data, while data display entailed organizing the information in a structured manner to identify emerging patterns. The final stage was drawing conclusions that are grounded in the data, ensuring validity through triangulation of sources and techniques. This methodical approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the urgent role infrastructure management plays in supporting educational continuity and safety during post-pandemic recovery.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The management of educational facilities and infrastructure at UPT SMAN 9 Bone reflects a structured and collaborative effort to support learning in the new normal era. The school implemented a seven-stage process: planning, procurement, inventory, usage, maintenance, disposal, and accountability. Each of these stages was conducted with attention to effectiveness and compliance with educational regulations. The planning phase involved needs assessment through collaborative discussions among school leaders, teachers, and administrative staff, ensuring that proposed developments aligned with pedagogical priorities and health protocols.

Procurement processes at UPT SMAN 9 Bone were guided by transparency and efficiency. The school coordinated with multiple stakeholders, including government and

community partners, to acquire essential resources. These included handwashing stations, thermal scanners, and improvements to classroom ventilation. Budget planning and prioritization were crucial, particularly due to limited funding during the pandemic recovery phase. These efforts were aimed at creating a safe and conducive environment for both students and staff.

The school also maintained a detailed inventory system, combining manual and digital recordkeeping. This dual approach enhanced the accuracy and accessibility of inventory data. Items were coded, categorized, and regularly updated through an online platform aligned with governmental systems. The principal and facility vice principal emphasized the importance of inventory data for planning and reporting purposes, as well as for minimizing losses or mismanagement of assets.

In terms of usage, the facilities were employed effectively and monitored systematically. Teachers and students were encouraged to use resources responsibly, with administrative oversight in place to authorize and track the use of certain items. For instance, electronic devices and multimedia tools were made available but required proper documentation and user accountability. Such measures ensured that infrastructure was both accessible and sustainable in the long term.

Maintenance was conducted routinely and reactively. Minor repairs and upkeep were performed internally, while more significant renovations were carried out with external support. The school community was engaged in promoting care and responsibility, including classroom cleanliness and furniture preservation. Awareness campaigns were conducted to encourage students to treat school property with respect, reinforcing the role of collective responsibility in infrastructure longevity.

In cases where facilities or equipment were beyond repair, a formal disposal process was implemented. Items were removed from the inventory and either stored or discarded according to state regulations. However, when feasible, repairs were prioritized over disposal to optimize resource use and avoid unnecessary expenditure. This policy reflected a commitment to sustainability and accountability within the institution.

The final stage of infrastructure management was accountability, which involved reporting activities to both internal and external stakeholders. Periodic reports were

generated and submitted to school leadership and government bodies. These included details of facility usage, maintenance, and financial expenditures. Digital platforms facilitated real-time tracking and submission, improving transparency and supporting continuous improvement in infrastructure governance.

In addition to infrastructure management, the study revealed various instructional adaptations in response to the new normal. These included limited group learning, home visits, and online instruction for absent students. While full online learning had been discontinued, digital tools continued to support blended learning models. Teachers used platforms such as WhatsApp and Zoom to distribute materials and reinforce classroom instruction, ensuring continuity despite occasional disruptions.

Overall, the findings indicate that UPT SMAN 9 Bone has embraced a proactive and organized approach to infrastructure management. The school's practices highlight the strategic role of facilities in enabling a smooth transition to face-to-face instruction during the new normal. With well-implemented planning, resource optimization, and technology integration, the institution successfully created a safe and adaptive learning environment that meets both educational and health-related demands.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the idea that infrastructure management is a fundamental component of educational quality, especially in times of crisis. The structured and proactive approach taken by UPT SMAN 9 Bone demonstrates how school leaders can mobilize resources to ensure learning continuity during the post-pandemic transition. This aligns with the view that educational resilience depends significantly on institutional preparedness and adaptability (Zhao, 2020).

The implementation of planning, procurement, usage, maintenance, and accountability processes shows that UPT SMAN 9 Bone practices core principles of educational facility management as outlined in existing frameworks (Bafadal, 2014; Matin & Fuad, 2016). Each stage of the management cycle was conducted in a participatory and transparent manner, which is essential for building collective responsibility and institutional

trust. The use of digital systems to support inventory and reporting processes reflects how technology can strengthen administrative efficiency.

One notable contribution of this study is the emphasis on the relationship between health protocols and infrastructure planning. The provision of sanitation facilities, classroom ventilation, and temperature monitoring devices supports earlier research suggesting that post-COVID school environments must integrate health-focused infrastructure elements (UNESCO, 2020). This integration is not merely a technical response but a pedagogical one, as it creates psychological safety for learners and educators.

Moreover, the adaptation of teaching strategies such as home visits and blended learning illustrates how infrastructure must support diverse instructional modalities. While many schools have struggled to adjust, UPT SMAN 9 Bone capitalized on its existing resources and innovated through digital integration. This aligns with Dhawan's (2020) argument that flexible and multimodal instruction is essential in maintaining learning quality during and after a crisis.

The school's approach to facility use and maintenance also highlights the importance of user engagement. Students and teachers were encouraged to share responsibility for the upkeep of facilities, creating a culture of care and sustainability. According to Pratiwi (2016), school-based management is more effective when all stakeholders are actively involved in decision-making and resource stewardship.

The dual system of inventory manual and digital used at UPT SMAN 9 Bone provides a model for schools with limited technological infrastructure. It balances traditional practices with modern tools, allowing for scalability and redundancy. This approach mitigates the risk of data loss and improves institutional memory, which is essential for long-term planning and auditing (Nurmalina & Nellirahati, 2020).

From an accountability perspective, the school's routine reporting mechanisms enhance transparency and ensure that infrastructure decisions are data-driven. Such practices are consistent with government mandates on school governance and contribute to the school's credibility in the eyes of regulators and the community. As Bafadal (2014) notes, accountability in resource use directly influences public trust in educational institutions.

Another critical insight from the study is the evolving role of school leadership in post-pandemic recovery. The principal and vice principals were not only administrators but also change agents who navigated uncertainty, facilitated collaboration, and led innovation. Their leadership reflects characteristics of adaptive governance, which is increasingly seen as vital in education management during periods of disruption (Zhao, 2020).

In conclusion, the experience of UPT SMAN 9 Bone demonstrates how educational infrastructure management, when executed comprehensively and strategically, becomes a backbone for institutional resilience. This case contributes to the broader literature on post-pandemic education by providing a practical example of how schools in developing contexts can effectively manage their facilities to meet new demands. Future research may explore how these practices can be institutionalized across broader systems or scaled to support regional or national educational reform.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that comprehensive and adaptive management of educational facilities and infrastructure is essential for ensuring learning continuity in the post-pandemic context. UPT SMAN 9 Bone successfully implemented a structured management cycle comprising planning, procurement, inventory, usage, maintenance, disposal, and accountability that aligned with both national education standards and evolving public health requirements. These efforts contributed significantly to the school's preparedness in transitioning to face-to-face and blended learning under the new normal conditions.

The findings further underscore the critical interplay between infrastructure and pedagogy. Well-managed facilities not only support operational needs but also foster a safe, engaging, and flexible learning environment. The integration of health-compliant infrastructure and technology-enabled instruction highlights the importance of strategic infrastructure planning in enhancing educational resilience. Moreover, participatory governance and accountability mechanisms proved vital in promoting transparency, stakeholder trust, and sustainability.

In conclusion, the experience of UPT SMAN 9 Bone provides a valuable reference for educational institutions seeking to navigate the challenges of post-crisis recovery. Effective facility management is not merely a logistical necessity but a foundational element of educational quality and institutional adaptability. Future policy and practice should prioritize capacity-building in this area to ensure that schools remain responsive, resilient, and inclusive in the face of ongoing and future disruptions.

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