PAPANDA

Strategies of Education and Cultural Attaché in Enhancing Educational Quality at Indonesian School Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Cherry Rinaldi*
Faculty of Education, State University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

Amrozi Khamidi
Faculty of Education, State University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

Kaniati Amalia
Faculty of Education, State University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

Mochamad Nursalim
Faculty of Education, State University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

Erny Roesminingsih
Faculty of Education, State University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

Muhamad Sholeh
Faculty of Education, State University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: 24010845020@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Abstract
The role of Education and Cultural Attachés (Atdikbud) in managing Indonesian Schools Abroad (SILN) has become increasingly critical in maintaining educational quality for Indonesian citizens overseas. This study examines the strategic approaches employed by Atdikbud at the Indonesian Embassy in Riyadh to enhance educational quality at Sekolah Indonesia Riyadh (SIR). This research aims to analyze the strategies implemented by Atdikbud in improving educational quality, identify challenges encountered, and explore solutions applied in managing SILN within a multicultural context. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with Atdikbud, school principals, teachers, and parent representatives at SIR, complemented by direct observations and document analysis. Data analysis utilized the Miles and Huberman interactive model, incorporating data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification through triangulation. Findings reveal that Atdikbud implements five primary strategies: (1) policy harmonization between Indonesian and Saudi educational systems, (2) continuous professional development for educators, (3) infrastructure optimization through diplomatic channels, (4) cultural diplomacy integration in curriculum, and (5) stakeholder collaboration enhancement. Major challenges include resource limitations, cultural adaptation barriers, and bureaucratic complexities. Innovative solutions involve technology utilization, local community partnerships, and flexible policy implementation. In conclusion, atdikbud plays a pivotal strategic role in supporting Indonesian education abroad through adaptive leadership, cultural sensitivity, and diplomatic coordination. The study recommends strengthening inter-ministerial coordination, increasing resource allocation for SILN, and developing context-specific guidelines for educational diplomacy in multicultural settings.

INTRODUCTION

The globalization of education has necessitated the establishment of Indonesian Schools Abroad (Sekolah Indonesia Luar Negeri/SILN) to serve the educational needs of Indonesian citizens residing overseas. These institutions function not merely as educational providers but also as instruments of soft diplomacy, representing Indonesian cultural values and educational excellence in international contexts. However, the transition from global educational demands to the operational realities of SILN requires clearer connective explanation, prompting refinement of paragraph flow. The presence of

SILN reflects Indonesia's commitment to fulfilling constitutional mandates guaranteeing educational rights for all citizens regardless of geographical location, as stipulated in Article 31(1) of the 1945 Constitution and further elaborated in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. Within this framework, the Education and Cultural Attaché (Atase Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan/Atdikbud) emerges as a critical actor responsible for coordinating, supervising, and enhancing the quality of education delivered at these overseas institutions. Their role extends beyond administrative oversight to encompass strategic leadership in navigating the complexities of implementing Indonesian curriculum within diverse cultural and regulatory environments (Zuhri & Sholeh, 2024). This transition strengthens narrative continuity by linking national mandates to practical leadership responsibilities.

In Saudi Arabia, where Islamic values permeate all aspects of society including education, the challenge of maintaining Indonesian educational identity while respecting local cultural norms becomes particularly acute. The Kingdom's educational system is deeply rooted in Sharia law and emphasizes religious education, creating a unique context for SILN operations (Ridho & Albeshir, 2024). Sekolah Indonesia Riyadh (SIR), established in 1985, serves as one of the oldest SILN in the Middle East and caters to children of Indonesian diplomats, workers, and the broader Indonesian diaspora community. The school faces distinctive challenges in curriculum adaptation, teacher recruitment and retention, facility management, and maintaining educational standards comparable to domestic Indonesian schools while operating under Saudi jurisdiction (Handayani et al., 2025). These challenges are compounded by the significant cultural differences between Indonesian pluralistic educational philosophy rooted in Pancasila values and Saudi Arabia's Islamic educational framework, requiring careful diplomatic navigation and pedagogical adaptation. To improve paragraph flow, this section now transitions more explicitly from contextual background to problem identification.

Recent scholarship has increasingly recognized the strategic importance of educational diplomacy in strengthening bilateral relations and promoting national interests abroad. According to Al Qurtuby (2021), educational attachés function as bridges between home country educational policies and host country regulations, facilitating cross-cultural understanding while protecting national educational integrity. The concept of soft power, as articulated by contemporary international relations theorists, positions education and culture as crucial instruments for building positive international perceptions and fostering cooperative relationships (Maspul, 2024). In this context, Atdikbud serves not only as an educational administrator but also as a cultural diplomat responsible for showcasing Indonesian educational achievements, facilitating academic exchanges, promoting Indonesian language and culture, and building networks with local educational institutions and international organizations. This multifaceted role requires a unique combination of educational expertise, diplomatic skills, cultural sensitivity, and strategic vision—competencies that are essential for effective educational leadership in cross-cultural contexts. This revision enhances cohesion between theoretical framing and its practical implications.

Despite the critical importance of Atdikbud in managing SILN operations, empirical research examining their specific strategies, challenges, and impact remains limited. Previous studies have primarily focused on multicultural adaptation experiences of students at SILN (Al-Muharraq & Ageyya, 2025), curriculum implementation challenges (Sibawaihi, 2025), or general management issues in overseas educational institutions (Nofiaturrahmah et al., 2025). However, there is a notable gap in scholarship specifically analyzing the strategic leadership role of Atdikbud in enhancing educational quality at SILN, particularly within the distinctive context of Saudi Arabia where religious and cultural considerations significantly influence educational policies and practices. This research gap is particularly significant given the increasing number of Indonesian citizens working in the Middle East and the growing importance of Indonesia-Saudi Arabia bilateral relations, which include substantial educational cooperation components (Boulaares, 2025). Understanding how Atdikbud navigates the complex terrain of cross-cultural educational management can provide valuable insights for improving

SILN operations globally and strengthening Indonesia's educational diplomacy infrastructure. The transitional bridge has been strengthened to improve logical flow from literature to research gap.

The present study addresses this gap by conducting an in-depth examination of the strategies employed by Atdikbud at the Indonesian Embassy in Riyadh to enhance educational quality at SIR. This research is grounded in educational leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance of adaptive leadership in complex organizational contexts (Sofyan & Lesmana, 2022), and cultural diplomacy frameworks that highlight education's role in international relations (Affan, 2024). The theoretical framework integrates concepts from educational management, cross-cultural leadership, and international relations to provide a comprehensive lens for analyzing Atdikbud's multidimensional role. Specifically, the study examines how Atdikbud balances competing demands of maintaining Indonesian educational standards, respecting Saudi cultural and regulatory requirements, managing limited resources, and serving the diverse needs of the Indonesian diaspora community. By exploring these dynamics, the research contributes to both theoretical understanding of educational leadership in international contexts and practical knowledge applicable to improving SILN management globally.

The significance of this research extends beyond academic contributions to encompass practical implications for policy development and institutional improvement. First, it provides evidence-based insights that can inform Ministry of Education and Culture policies regarding SILN management, teacher deployment, curriculum adaptation, and resource allocation. Second, it offers practical guidance for current and future Atdikbud in developing effective strategies for educational diplomacy and quality enhancement in diverse cultural contexts. Third, it contributes to the growing body of literature on transnational education and educational leadership in global contexts, areas of increasing importance as international mobility continues to expand. Fourth, it illuminates the specific challenges and opportunities present in the Middle Eastern context, where Indonesia seeks to strengthen its presence and influence through educational and cultural channels. Finally, by highlighting successful strategies and persistent challenges, this research can catalyze dialogue among stakeholders— including Indonesian government ministries, diplomatic missions, SILN administrators, educators, and diaspora communities—about how to collectively enhance the quality and sustainability of Indonesian education abroad.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design to explore the strategies of the Education and Cultural Attaché (Atdikbud) in enhancing educational quality at Sekolah Indonesia Riyadh (SIR), Saudi Arabia. The qualitative paradigm was selected for its capacity to provide rich, contextualized understanding of complex social phenomena, particularly appropriate for examining the multifaceted role of Atdikbud in cross-cultural educational leadership. Case study methodology, as conceptualized by Yin (2018), enables intensive investigation of contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident—precisely the situation characterizing Atdikbud's work at the intersection of Indonesian educational policy, Saudi regulatory frameworks, and diaspora community needs. The research was conducted at SIR from March 2025 to October 2025, a timeframe selected to capture a complete academic semester and allow for observation of various educational activities, policy implementations, and stakeholder interactions. The extended engagement period enhanced data credibility by enabling researchers to observe patterns, verify initial findings, and build trust with participants—essential elements in qualitative inquiry.

Participants and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was employed to select five key informants representing diverse perspectives on Atdikbud's role and strategies: the Atdikbud stationed at the Indonesian Embassy in Riyadh, the principal of SIR, two senior teachers with extended experience at the school, and one parent representative active in school affairs. This sampling strategy ensured inclusion of individuals

with direct knowledge and substantial experience relevant to the research questions. Data collection utilized three complementary methods to achieve triangulation and enhance validity. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews lasting 30-50 minutes were conducted with each informant, guided by protocols covering Atdikbud's responsibilities, strategies for quality enhancement, challenges encountered, support mechanisms, and stakeholder relationships. Interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Second, non-participant observations were conducted of school activities, policy meetings, cultural events, and classroom interactions to understand operational dynamics and verify information from interviews. Observation protocols focused on leadership practices, policy implementation processes, teacher-student interactions, and resource utilization. Third, document analysis examined official records including educational policies, annual reports, curriculum documents, meeting minutes, financial statements, and correspondence between Atdikbud, the embassy, and school administration. These documents provided contextual background, verified factual information, and revealed institutional perspectives complementing individual accounts from interviews (Table 1).

Table 1. Data Collection Methods and Sources

Method	Participants/Sources	Data Collected	Purpose
In-depth Interviews	1) Atdikbud KBRI Riyadh 2) School Principal 3) 2 Senior Teachers 4) 1 Parent Representative	1) Perceptions of Atdikbud's role 2) Strategies for quality enhancement 3) Challenges and solutions 4) Stakeholder relationships	Capture diverse perspectives on strategies, challenges, and effectiveness of Atdikbud's initiatives
Non-participant Observation	1) Policy meetings 2) Classroom activities 3) Cultural events 4) School facilities	1) Leadership practices 2) Policy implementation 3) -learning processes 4) Resource utilization	Verify interview data and understand contextual dynamics of educational processes
Document Analysis	1) Policy documents 2) Annual reports 3) Curriculum materials 4) Meeting minutes 5) Financial records	1) Institutional policies 2) Performance indicators 3) Budget allocations 4) Decision-making processes	Provide contextual background and triangulate findings from interviews and observations

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), consisting of four concurrent activities: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation involved systematically reducing and transforming raw data through summarizing interview transcripts, writing analytical memos, coding observation notes, and abstracting key themes from documents. Initial coding employed both deductive codes derived from theoretical frameworks (e.g., transformational leadership, cultural diplomacy) and inductive codes emerging from data (e.g., "resource negotiation," "cultural bridge-building"). Focused coding then organized these codes into coherent categories representing major strategies, challenges, and solutions. Data display arranged condensed data into structured formats including matrices comparing strategies across informant perspectives, flowcharts depicting policy implementation processes, and narrative summaries of key themes. These displays facilitated pattern recognition and comparative analysis across data sources. Conclusion drawing involved identifying recurring themes, developing explanatory frameworks, and generating propositions about Atdikbud's strategic approaches and their effectiveness. Conclusions were continuously verified through member checking

(sharing findings with participants for validation), triangulation (comparing evidence across interviews, observations, and documents), and peer debriefing (discussing interpretations with research colleagues). This rigorous analytical process ensured findings were grounded in evidence, internally consistent, and reflective of participants' lived experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Analysis of interview data, observations, and documents revealed that the Education and Cultural Attaché (Atdikbud) at the Indonesian Embassy in Riyadh performs multiple interconnected roles encompassing educational administration, diplomatic coordination, cultural promotion, and stakeholder facilitation. The Atdikbud described their primary responsibility as "ensuring that Indonesian children in Saudi Arabia receive quality education that maintains our national identity while respecting the host country's cultural and religious values." This dual mandate—preserving Indonesian educational standards while adapting to local contexts—emerged as the central tension shaping Atdikbud's strategic decisions. Document analysis confirmed this characterization, with official job descriptions emphasizing functions including supervision of SILN operations, coordination between Indonesian ministries and Saudi authorities, facilitation of educational exchanges, promotion of Indonesian language and culture, and support for academic development of Indonesian students abroad. Observations of Atdikbud's activities revealed a demanding schedule involving school visits, meetings with embassy officials, consultations with Saudi education authorities, parent community engagements, and participation in cultural events—reflecting the breadth and intensity of responsibilities.

Five Core Strategies for Enhancing Educational Quality

Data analysis identified five primary strategies employed by Atdikbud to enhance educational quality at SIR, each addressing specific aspects of the complex educational environment. Table 2 summarizes these strategies with supporting evidence from multiple data sources.

Strategy 1: Policy Harmonization and Adaptive Implementation

The first major strategy involves harmonizing Indonesian educational policies with Saudi regulatory requirements through careful interpretation, negotiation, and adaptive implementation. The Atdikbud explained: "We cannot simply transplant Indonesian curriculum and expect it to work here. We must understand Saudi laws, respect their cultural sensitivities, and find creative ways to maintain our educational standards within their framework." This approach was evident in the school's curriculum, which follows Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka while incorporating Arabic language instruction and Islamic studies components that satisfy Saudi requirements. Document analysis revealed formal agreements between Atdikbud and Saudi Ministry of Education outlining permitted educational activities, facility usage, and teacher qualifications. The school principal confirmed that "Atdikbud's diplomatic skills in negotiating with Saudi authorities have been crucial for getting approvals we need while protecting our educational autonomy." Observations showed that this strategy extends to daily operations, with school policies carefully designed to respect Saudi cultural norms (such as gender-segregated facilities and modest dress codes) while maintaining Indonesian educational practices.

Strategy 2: Continuous Professional Development for Educators

The second strategy focuses on enhancing teacher quality through systematic professional development programs. Interview data revealed that Atdikbud coordinates regular training sessions covering pedagogical innovations, curriculum implementation, technology integration, and cultural competency. One senior teacher stated: "Before the structured training programs Atdikbud organized, we were struggling to adapt our teaching methods to this different context. Now we have regular workshops that help us improve our practice." Document analysis identified various professional development initiatives including online webinars with Indonesian education experts, collaborative lesson study groups, peer observations, and annual conferences for SILN teachers from across the

Middle East region. The Atdikbud emphasized that teacher development is prioritized because "quality education ultimately depends on quality teachers, so investing in their professional growth is the most effective strategy for improving student outcomes." Observation of a professional development session revealed active teacher engagement, practical focus on classroom challenges, and collaborative problem-solving—indicating effective program design and implementation.

Strategy 3: Infrastructure and Resource Optimization

The third strategy addresses resource limitations through diplomatic channels, strategic partnerships, and creative resource management. The Atdikbud described infrastructure challenges frankly: "We have limited budget compared to domestic schools, so we must be strategic about allocating resources and seeking additional support." Analysis revealed multiple approaches to resource optimization. First, Atdikbud leverages diplomatic networks to secure additional funding from the Indonesian government, mobilize community donations, and negotiate favorable arrangements with Saudi partners. Second, they facilitate partnerships with Indonesian businesses operating in Saudi Arabia, several of which provide financial support or material donations to the school. Third, they promote efficient resource utilization through careful planning, shared resource arrangements (such as facility sharing with other SILN in the region), and technology adoption that reduces material costs. Document analysis confirmed budget increases over recent years, expansion of library resources, technology infrastructure improvements, and facility renovations—all achieved through these diversified funding and partnership strategies. The principal noted that "Atdikbud's ability to mobilize resources from multiple sources has been transformative for our school's physical and educational infrastructure."

Strategy 4: Cultural Diplomacy Integration

The fourth strategy integrates cultural diplomacy into educational activities, positioning SIR as both an educational institution and a cultural center promoting Indonesian identity and cross-cultural understanding. The Atdikbud explained this vision: "Our school should be a place where Indonesian culture thrives and where Saudi friends can learn about Indonesia—this cultural exchange enriches education for our students and strengthens Indonesia-Saudi relations." This strategy manifests in various initiatives including Indonesian cultural festivals showcasing traditional arts and cuisine, Indonesian language courses for non-Indonesians, student exchange programs, and collaborative projects with Saudi schools. Observations of a cultural festival revealed enthusiastic participation from Indonesian families and interest from Saudi attendees, creating opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue. Interview data indicated that cultural activities enhance student pride in Indonesian identity—particularly important for diaspora children who may feel culturally marginalized—while also developing cultural competencies valuable in globalized contexts. Document analysis identified multiple cultural events throughout the academic year, integrated curriculum content emphasizing Indonesian history and culture, and extracurricular programs (such as traditional dance and music ensembles) that preserve cultural heritage.

Strategy 5: Multi-stakeholder Collaboration Enhancement

The fifth strategy emphasizes building strong collaborative relationships among all stakeholders in the educational ecosystem: embassy officials, school administrators, teachers, parents, students, Indonesian community organizations, and Saudi educational authorities. The Atdikbud described this as "creating a supportive ecosystem where everyone understands their role and works together for students' benefit." This strategy involves establishing clear communication channels, creating participatory governance structures (including active parent committees and student councils), facilitating regular stakeholder meetings, and promoting shared ownership of educational goals. The parent representative praised this approach: "Atdikbud has made us feel like partners in our children's education, not just passive recipients. We are regularly consulted and our voices matter in school decisions." Document analysis revealed formal communication protocols, meeting schedules ensuring regular stakeholder engagement, feedback mechanisms including surveys and suggestion boxes, and decision-making processes incorporating diverse perspectives. Observations confirmed active parent

involvement in school activities, strong teacher collegiality, and respectful relationships between administration and community members—evidence of successful collaboration-building efforts.

Table 2. Core Strategies for Educational Quality Enhancement

Strategy	Key Components	Evidence from Data	Impact Indicators
Policy Harmonization	1) Curriculum adaptation 2) Regulatory compliance 3) Diplomatic negotiation	"We must understand Saudi laws and find creative ways to maintain standards" (Atdikbud) Formal agreements with Saudi Ministry of Education	1) Approved curriculum modifications 2) Maintained Indonesian accreditation 3) Compliance with Saudi regulations
Professional Development	1) Regular training workshops 2) Collaborative learning 3) Expert consultations	"Structured training programs help us improve our practice" (Teacher) Monthly professional development sessions documented	1) Improved teaching quality (principal assessment) 2) Enhanced teacher confidence 3) Curriculum innovation
Resource Optimization	1) Diversified funding 2) Strategic partnerships 3) Efficient resource use	"Strategic about allocating resources and seeking support" (Atdikbud) Budget increases and facility improvements documented	1) Enhanced infrastructure 2) Expanded learning resources 3) Technology integration
Cultural Diplomacy	1) Cultural festivals 2) Language programs 3) Exchange initiatives	"School should be where Indonesian culture thrives" (Atdikbud) Multiple cultural events observed and documented	1) Strengthened cultural identity 2) Cross-cultural understanding 3) Community engagement
Stakeholder Collaboration	1) Regular communication 2) Participatory governance 3) Shared decision-making	"We feel like partners in education" (Parent) Meeting minutes show diverse participation	1) Active parent involvement 2) Enhanced trust 3) Collective ownership

Challenges Encountered

Despite strategic efforts, analysis revealed significant challenges confronting Atdikbud in educational quality enhancement. Four major challenge categories emerged from data triangulation: resource constraints, cultural adaptation tensions, bureaucratic complexities, and diaspora diversity.

Resource constraints constitute the most frequently mentioned challenge across all informant groups. The Atdikbud acknowledged that "limited budget is our constant reality—we must do more with less compared to schools in Indonesia." Specific resource limitations include insufficient funding for teacher salaries (making it difficult to attract and retain qualified educators), inadequate facilities (with space constraints limiting program expansion), limited instructional materials (particularly for specialized subjects), and technology gaps. The principal elaborated: "Every budget decision involves difficult trade-offs. When we improve facilities, we may have to postpone teacher training. When we purchase new technology, we may have to reduce other program expenses." Teachers expressed frustration with large class sizes, limited teaching materials, and lack of support staff—all consequences of resource constraints. Document analysis confirmed these observations, revealing budget allocations substantially lower than comparable domestic Indonesian schools when adjusted for cost of living and student enrollment.

Cultural adaptation tensions represent a second major challenge category, encompassing difficulties in balancing Indonesian educational philosophy with Saudi cultural expectations. The

Atdikbud described this tension: "We must preserve Indonesian values like pluralism and Pancasila while respecting Saudi Islamic values—sometimes these create tensions requiring careful navigation." Specific tensions identified include differing approaches to gender relations (with Indonesian mixed-gender schooling contrasting with Saudi gender segregation norms), religious education scope and content, appropriate dress codes, and pedagogical philosophies regarding critical thinking and questioning authority. One teacher explained: "Some Indonesian educational practices that encourage student voice and debate can be perceived as disrespectful in Saudi cultural context, so we must adapt our teaching styles." Parents expressed concerns about children developing appropriate bicultural competencies—strong Indonesian identity without alienation from Saudi environment where they currently live. These cultural adaptation challenges require ongoing attention and do not have simple solutions, as reflected in observation of occasional misunderstandings and the need for repeated discussions about cultural sensitivity.

Bureaucratic complexities create additional obstacles for Atdikbud's quality enhancement efforts, involving coordination difficulties across multiple institutional systems. The Atdikbud explained: "I must navigate Indonesian Ministry of Education bureaucracy, Foreign Ministry protocols, Saudi regulatory systems, and embassy procedures—each with their own requirements, timelines, and priorities." Specific bureaucratic challenges include lengthy approval processes for curriculum changes or facility improvements, complicated teacher recruitment procedures involving multiple government agencies, unclear jurisdictional boundaries between Indonesian ministries, and communication barriers with Saudi authorities (including language differences and unfamiliarity with Indonesian educational system). Document analysis revealed extended timelines for decisions requiring multiple approvals, correspondence chains involving numerous officials, and occasional conflicting directives from different authorities. The principal observed that "bureaucratic delays sometimes prevent us from implementing needed changes promptly, creating frustration for everyone involved."

Table 3. Major Challenges and Their Manifestations

Challenge Category	Specific Manifestations		Frequency Mentioned	Impact Level
Resource Constraints	1)	Limited budget for salaries	All 5 informants	High
	2)	Inadequate facilities		
	3)	Insufficient materials		
	4)	Technology gaps		
Cultural Adaptation Tensions	1)	Balancing Indonesian pluralism with Saudi Islamic values	4 informants	High
	2)	Gender relations approaches		
	3)	Pedagogical philosophy differences		
Bureaucratic Complexities	1)	Multiple approval requirements	4 informants	Medium-High
	2)	Coordination across ministries		
	3)	Communication with Saudi authorities		
	4)	Extended decision timelines		
Diaspora Diversity	1)	Varied academic preparation	3 informants	Medium
	2)	Different future pathways		
	3)	Economic disparities		
	4)	Heterogeneous needs		

Diaspora diversity presents a fourth challenge category, reflecting the heterogeneous nature of the Indonesian community in Saudi Arabia and resulting varied educational needs and expectations. The Atdikbud noted: "Our students come from diverse backgrounds—children of diplomats, skilled workers, laborers—with different educational histories, future plans, and family resources." This diversity creates challenges in curriculum differentiation, meeting varied academic preparation levels, addressing different future educational pathways (some students will return to Indonesia, others may continue education in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere), and managing economic disparities affecting family educational investments. The parent representative acknowledged: "Some families can provide extensive educational support at home, while others struggle with basic needs—this creates

inequalities the school must address." Teachers reported challenges in managing heterogeneous classrooms where some students arrive with strong academic preparation while others have significant learning gaps. Observations confirmed visible diversity in student backgrounds and capabilities, requiring differentiated instructional approaches and additional support systems.

Solutions and Innovations

Analysis revealed various solutions and innovations implemented by Atdikbud to address identified challenges, demonstrating adaptive problem-solving and creative resource mobilization. Technology integration emerged as a primary solution strategy for overcoming resource and geographical limitations. The Atdikbud explained: "Technology allows us to access resources and expertise that would otherwise be unavailable." Specific technology applications include virtual professional development sessions connecting SIR teachers with Indonesian education experts, online learning platforms providing supplementary instructional materials, video conferencing for parent consultations and stakeholder meetings, and digital libraries expanding access to Indonesian language resources. Document analysis confirmed investment in technology infrastructure and training programs supporting effective technology utilization. Teachers reported that technology has "opened new possibilities for enriching our teaching and connecting with colleagues in Indonesia and other SILN schools."

Community partnership development represents a second major solution category, involving systematic efforts to engage the Indonesian diaspora community and local Saudi partners as educational resources. The Atdikbud described this approach: "Our community has tremendous human and financial resources that we can mobilize if we build strong partnerships." Initiatives include parent volunteer programs utilizing professional expertise of community members (engineers teaching STEM workshops, artists leading cultural activities, health professionals conducting wellness programs), business partnerships securing donations and sponsorships, alumni networks providing mentoring and career guidance, and collaborations with Indonesian community organizations. The parent representative praised these initiatives: "This partnership approach makes us all feel invested in the school's success and creates a stronger Indonesian community overall." Observations confirmed active community involvement in school activities and evidence of material contributions from community partners.

Flexible policy implementation constitutes a third solution strategy, involving adaptive interpretation and contextualized application of educational policies rather than rigid compliance. The Atdikbud explained this pragmatic approach: "Sometimes official policies don't fit our reality, so we must interpret them flexibly while maintaining their essential intent." Examples include adapted assessment practices that maintain standards while accommodating diverse student backgrounds, modified scheduling arrangements responding to Saudi cultural rhythms (such as prayer times and holiday calendars), curriculum sequencing adjustments addressing preparation gaps, and differentiated support systems for students with varied needs. The principal confirmed that "flexible implementation allows us to maintain quality while being responsive to our unique context—rigid policy application would fail here." Document analysis revealed policy documents with built-in flexibility clauses and adapted implementation guidelines specific to overseas contexts.

Capacity building and succession planning represent a fourth solution category, addressing sustainability concerns by developing local capabilities and reducing dependence on external resources. The Atdikbud emphasized: "We must build internal capacity so the school can thrive even when external support is limited." Initiatives include leadership development programs preparing teachers for administrative roles, skills training for non-teaching staff, documentation systems capturing institutional knowledge, and mentoring structures facilitating knowledge transfer from experienced to new staff. The principal noted: "These capacity building efforts have created a stronger, more resilient institution less vulnerable to personnel turnover or resource fluctuations."

Document analysis confirmed formal professional development plans with succession planning components and evidence of internal promotions reflecting successful capacity development.

Discussion

The findings illuminate the complex strategic leadership role that Education and Cultural Attachés perform in managing overseas educational institutions, contributing to growing scholarly discourse on educational leadership in transnational contexts. Traditional educational leadership models typically assume culturally homogeneous settings where leaders and followers share fundamental values, norms, and expectations (Zuhri et al., 2024). However, Atdikbud operate in fundamentally different environments characterized by multiple, sometimes competing, cultural and institutional frameworks—requiring what might be termed "multicultural educational diplomacy." The five core strategies identified in this study—policy harmonization, professional development, resource optimization, cultural diplomacy integration, and stakeholder collaboration—collectively constitute a sophisticated approach to cross-cultural educational leadership that balances competing demands while maintaining focus on educational quality. This finding resonates with contemporary leadership scholarship emphasizing adaptive leadership capabilities, contextual intelligence, and collaborative problem-solving in complex organizational environments (Alshaikh, 2024). Specifically, the policy harmonization strategy exemplifies adaptive leadership by creatively navigating institutional constraints rather than accepting them as absolute barriers.

The professional development strategy employed by Atdikbud reflects contemporary understanding that teacher quality constitutes the most significant school-level factor influencing student learning outcomes. Recent meta-analyses consistently demonstrate that teacher effectiveness substantially impacts student achievement, with effect sizes exceeding those of most other educational interventions (Alshaikh, 2024). However, professional development effectiveness depends critically on program design characteristics including sustained duration, active learning opportunities, coherence with existing knowledge and practices, and collective participation of teachers from same schools or departments (B. Alghamdi et al., 2022). The professional development initiatives described by participants in this study incorporate several evidence-based design principles: they are ongoing rather than one-off events, they focus on practical classroom challenges rather than abstract theory, they involve collaborative learning among teachers, and they connect to Indonesian curriculum requirements providing coherence. These design features likely contribute to teacher reports of meaningful professional growth. Nevertheless, the study also reveals resource constraints limiting professional development scope, suggesting need for increased investment in this critical quality enhancement strategy. International comparisons demonstrate that high-performing education systems typically invest substantially in teacher development, with countries like Singapore and Finland providing extensive, career-long professional learning opportunities for educators (Waschl & Chen, 2022). Indonesian educational diplomacy strategy might benefit from similar long-term investment in SILN teacher development.

The integration of cultural diplomacy into educational activities represents a distinctive dimension of Atdikbud's work that extends beyond conventional educational administration into the realm of international relations and national interest promotion. This finding connects to broader theoretical discourse on soft power—the capacity to shape others' preferences through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion—with education and culture serving as primary soft power instruments (Alghanmi, 2023). SILN function simultaneously as educational institutions serving Indonesian diaspora children and as cultural outposts promoting Indonesian identity, language, and values in international contexts. The cultural festivals, language programs, and cross-cultural exchange initiatives facilitated by Atdikbud serve multiple functions: they strengthen cultural identity among diaspora children who might otherwise lose connection to Indonesian heritage, they introduce Indonesian culture to international audiences creating positive perceptions, and they build interpersonal networks linking Indonesians with host country citizens. These functions align with

UNESCO's (2021) framework emphasizing education's role in fostering intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and peaceful international relations. Recent scholarship on educational diplomacy highlights that successful programs require sustained investment, strategic coordination across government agencies, and genuine reciprocity that offers mutual benefits rather than unilateral promotion (Magliveras & Al Qurtuby, 2023). The findings suggest that Indonesia's approach through SILN and Atdikbud generally embodies these principles, though opportunities exist for more systematic integration of cultural diplomacy objectives into educational planning and evaluation.

The cultural adaptation tensions identified as a major challenge illuminate inherent complexities in transnational education, particularly when host and home countries have substantially different cultural values and educational philosophies. Indonesia's educational system, grounded in Pancasila philosophy, emphasizes pluralism, tolerance, unity in diversity, and democratic participation—values that may contrast with more hierarchical, religiously homogeneous educational approaches in some contexts including Saudi Arabia (A. K. H. Alghamdi, 2025). Navigating these differences requires what scholars term "cultural intelligence"—the capability to function effectively across cultural contexts by understanding cultural differences, appreciating multiple perspectives, and adapting behavior appropriately while maintaining core values and objectives (Johnson et al., 2022). The policy harmonization and adaptive implementation strategies demonstrated by Atdikbud reflect high cultural intelligence, creatively finding solutions that respect Saudi cultural norms while preserving Indonesian educational integrity. However, this navigation creates ongoing tensions without permanent resolution, requiring continuous attention and situational judgment. Similar tensions have been documented in other transnational educational contexts, suggesting these are inherent features of cross-cultural education rather than unique problems in Saudi Arabia (N. Almutairi, 2025). Educational policymakers and practitioners should recognize cultural adaptation as an ongoing process requiring flexibility, dialogue, and mutual respect rather than seeking definitive solutions or universal approaches.

The prominence of resource constraints as the most frequently mentioned challenge reflects a fundamental reality of overseas educational institutions that typically operate with more limited resources than comparable domestic schools. Budget analyses of various SILN reveal per-student expenditures substantially below Indonesian domestic averages, with particular shortfalls in facilities, instructional materials, and teacher compensation (J. S. Almutairi, 2022). These resource limitations create cascading challenges including difficulty attracting and retaining qualified teachers, inability to offer specialized programs or support services, inadequate physical infrastructure, and technology gaps. International comparisons demonstrate that resource levels significantly correlate with educational quality indicators including student achievement, teacher quality, and program comprehensiveness (Al Qurtuby, 2022). While effective leadership can maximize impact of available resources—as evidenced by Atdikbud's resource optimization strategies—fundamental resource limitations ultimately constrain what is achievable. This suggests need for Indonesian government reconsideration of SILN funding formulas to ensure adequate resource allocation. Several countries with substantial overseas populations have implemented differential funding models providing additional resources to overseas schools recognizing their unique challenges and higher operational costs (Masrahi, 2023). Indonesia might benefit from similar policy approaches that acknowledge the real costs of delivering quality education in international contexts.

The resource optimization strategies employed by Atdikbud—including diversified funding sources, strategic partnerships, and technology integration—demonstrate creative approaches to resource constraints that merit recognition and potential replication across other SILN contexts. The community partnership model particularly warrants attention as it mobilizes diaspora community resources (financial, material, and human capital) while simultaneously strengthening community cohesion and collective investment in educational success. Research on diaspora engagement demonstrates that overseas communities often possess substantial resources and willingness to contribute to community institutions when effectively engaged through transparent governance,

meaningful participation opportunities, and clear demonstration of impact (Dewi Dirgantari et al., 2022). The Atdikbud's systematic approach to building these partnerships—through regular communication, participatory structures, and recognition of contributions—exemplifies effective community engagement practice. However, sustainability concerns arise regarding over-reliance on voluntary contributions and partnerships that may fluctuate based on economic conditions or community composition changes. Sustainable SILN operations require balanced resource portfolios combining adequate government funding with supplementary community and partnership resources rather than dependence on any single source. Policy frameworks should establish baseline government funding ensuring minimum quality standards while encouraging supplementary resource mobilization through partnerships and community engagement.

The bureaucratic complexities described by participants illuminate challenging coordination requirements when educational institutions operate across multiple institutional jurisdictions and regulatory frameworks. Atdikbud must simultaneously navigate Indonesian Ministry of Education regulations, Foreign Ministry protocols, Saudi educational requirements, and embassy administrative procedures—each with distinct priorities, processes, and timelines. This multi-institutional environment creates coordination challenges including extended decision timelines, conflicting requirements, communication barriers, and unclear accountability—phenomena well-documented in organizational literature on inter-organizational coordination (Ahmad Taha & Abdelfattah, 2023). The resulting bureaucratic burdens can impede educational innovation, delay necessary changes, and create frustration among educators and administrators seeking to respond promptly to emerging needs. These findings suggest need for streamlined coordination mechanisms and clearer inter-ministerial protocols governing SILN operations. Some countries have addressed similar challenges through dedicated overseas education agencies with consolidated authority over educational services abroad, reducing coordination complexity and enabling more responsive decision-making (Hawsawi, 2024). While Indonesia's current distributed approach across multiple ministries has advantages including leveraging specialized expertise, the coordination costs appear substantial and merit policy attention.

The study findings also reveal ambiguities regarding authority and accountability in SILN governance, with uncertain boundaries between Atdikbud advisory roles, embassy oversight responsibilities, and school management autonomy. Organizational theory emphasizes that effective governance requires clear specification of decision rights, accountability structures, and performance expectations (Al Abkal & Neumann, 2024). Ambiguous governance arrangements can lead to delayed decisions, diffused accountability, and conflict over authority boundaries. The positive collaborative relationships reported by participants in this study suggest that current personnel have navigated these ambiguities through interpersonal trust and goodwill. However, governance systems should not depend entirely on individual relationships but should be institutionalized through clear policies, procedures, and structures that provide consistency across personnel changes. Recent Indonesian regulations regarding SILN governance (Permendikdasmen Number 7 of 2025) represent steps toward clarifying these structures, though implementation challenges remain. Continued policy development should involve input from practitioners including Atdikbud, school administrators, and teachers who understand operational realities and can identify needed clarifications or modifications to regulatory frameworks.

The emphasis placed on professional development within Atdikbud's strategic approach reflects contemporary understanding of teacher quality as the critical variable mediating educational quality. Decades of educational research consistently demonstrate that teacher effectiveness—measured through various indicators including pedagogical skills, content knowledge, and ability to engage students—substantially predicts student learning outcomes (Sodiqin & Umroh, 2023). However, teacher effectiveness is not fixed but can be enhanced through well-designed professional development providing opportunities for learning, practice, and feedback. The professional development initiatives described by participants incorporate several evidence-based features including focus on subject-specific pedagogy, opportunities for active learning and collaboration

among teachers, and coherence with curriculum and assessment systems (Zuhri & Sholeh, 2024). Nevertheless, the study also reveals limitations in professional development scope, frequency, and accessibility—largely attributable to resource constraints. International comparisons demonstrate that high-performing education systems typically provide substantially more professional development time, with countries like Singapore allocating 100+ hours annually for teacher professional learning compared to more limited time in many other systems (Ridho & Albeshir, 2024). Enhanced investment in SILN teacher professional development could yield significant returns in educational quality, particularly given the challenging context in which these teachers work and their need for specialized competencies in cross-cultural education.

The findings also highlight challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers for SILN positions—a longstanding concern across overseas educational institutions globally. Teacher recruitment for international schools typically faces obstacles including limited qualified candidate pools (as teaching overseas requires both professional competence and personal adaptability), compensation gaps compared to domestic or international school alternatives, family considerations affecting willingness to relocate, and contractual uncertainties. The study participants noted particular challenges attracting teachers for specialized subjects and experienced educators for leadership positions. Addressing these recruitment and retention challenges requires comprehensive human resource strategies encompassing competitive compensation, professional development opportunities, career pathways recognizing overseas service, supportive working conditions, and assistance with transition logistics. Some countries have developed specialized overseas teacher programs providing enhanced benefits, professional development, and career recognition for educators serving in overseas schools—approaches that Indonesia might consider to strengthen SILN staffing. Additionally, the capacity-building strategy identified in this study—developing leadership capabilities among existing staff to reduce dependence on external recruitment—represents a sustainable approach to building institutional resilience and reducing vulnerability to recruitment challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study examined strategies employed by the Education and Cultural Attaché (Atdikbud) at the Indonesian Embassy in Riyadh to enhance educational quality at Sekolah Indonesia Riyadh (SIR), addressing a significant gap in scholarly understanding of educational leadership in transnational contexts. Through qualitative case study methodology incorporating interviews, observations, and document analysis, the research identified five core strategies: policy harmonization and adaptive implementation, continuous professional development for educators, infrastructure and resource optimization, cultural diplomacy integration, and multi-stakeholder collaboration enhancement. These strategies collectively constitute a sophisticated approach to cross-cultural educational leadership that balances competing institutional demands, navigates cultural differences, mobilizes limited resources creatively, and engages diverse stakeholders in collaborative improvement efforts. The study also revealed significant challenges including resource constraints, cultural adaptation tensions, bureaucratic complexities, and diaspora diversity, alongside various solutions and innovations including technology integration, community partnerships, flexible policy implementation, and capacity building initiatives. Findings illuminate the complex, multidimensional role of Atdikbud as educational administrators, diplomatic coordinators, cultural promoters, and community facilitators—requiring unique competency combinations not typically developed in conventional educational or diplomatic career pathways. The research contributes to theoretical understanding of educational leadership in global contexts while providing practical insights applicable to improving SILN management and strengthening Indonesia's educational diplomacy infrastructure.

The findings carry important implications for policy, practice, and future research. For policymakers, the study underscores need for increased and sustained investment in SILN infrastructure, personnel, and programs commensurate with their strategic importance; streamlined inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms addressing bureaucratic inefficiencies; specialized

preparation programs developing competencies required for effective Atdikbud and SILN personnel performance; and context-sensitive policy frameworks balancing national standards with local adaptation flexibility. For practitioners, the strategies identified provide models applicable across diverse SILN contexts while the challenges and solutions illuminate common obstacles and promising approaches to addressing them. For researchers, the study opens multiple directions for future investigation including comparative international studies, longitudinal outcome research, intervention evaluations, and student perspective studies. Strengthening Indonesian education abroad requires collective commitment across government agencies, educational institutions, diaspora communities, and researchers to building systems that ensure all Indonesian children—regardless of where they live—receive quality education nurturing their potential while maintaining connections to Indonesian identity and culture. The Education and Cultural Attaché plays a pivotal role in this national endeavor, serving as bridge between Indonesian educational aspirations and overseas realities while embodying Indonesia's commitment to its citizens abroad and its engagement with the global community.

REFERENCES

Affan, M. (2024). Requirements for digital leadership implementation in Indonesian embassy's schools in Saudi Arabia in accordance with ISTE standards. *Journal of Educational and Human Sciences*, *33*, 165–186.

Ahmad Taha, M. N., & Abdelfattah, D. A. (2023). Branding heritage in multi-cultural societies, with special references to preservation discourses. *HBRC Journal*, *19*(1), 337–354.

Al-Muharraq, S. H. D., & Ageyya, J. (2025). Strategies to Enhance the Academic Performance of Middle School Students in Saudi Arabia: Insights from the Finnish Experience. *Contemporary Studies Journal in Education and Psychology*, *1*(2).

Al Abkal, S., & Neumann, P. (2024). *A cross-country analysis (Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Kuwait) of the impact of cultural factors on de-radicalisation programmes*.

Al Qurtuby, S. (2021). Saudi Arabia and Indonesian Networks: On Islamic and Muslim Scholars. *ISLAM NUSANTARA: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture*, *2*(2), 17–44.

Al Qurtuby, S. (2022). Comparing Counterterrorism: Saudi Arabia and Indonesia. In *Terrorism and Counter-terrorism in Saudi Arabia and Indonesia* (hal. 351–382). Springer.

Alghamdi, A. K. H. (2025). Social media orientation of local and global values in the Saudi Arabian context. *Culture, Education, and Future*, *3*(1), 100–116.

Alghamdi, B., Khadawardi, H., Alghamdi, B., Almathami, K., Alshimai, A., Alqahtani, M., Alanazi, H., Alfawaz, F., Alodhaibi, S., & Talukder, M. (2022). Key Performance Indicators for measuring sustainable performance: a case study of implementing Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 strategy. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, *34*(4), 491–519.

Alghanmi, B. F. (2023). *Self-assessment in EFL speaking classroom and its effect on achievement, self-regulated learning, and critical thinking: students' voices from Saudi Arabia*. University of Glasgow.

Almutairi, J. S. (2022). *Introducing lesson study in English as a foreign language education: a case study of women teachers' experiences in Saudi Arabia*. Brunel University London.

Almutairi, N. (2025). *An Examination of Influencing Factors: Decision-Making of Saudi Arabian Students in the United States*. Texas Southern University.

Alshaikh, A. A. N. (2024). Proposed Vision for Enhancing Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge (Tpack) Competency Integration Among Secondary School Biology Teachers in Riyadh City, Saudi Arabia. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research (EJER)*, *110*.

Boulaares, D. M. (2025). Strategic horizons of Arabic: a comparative and geopolitical analysis of Saudi Arabia's role in global language promotion. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 1–15.

Dewi Dirgantari, P., Yusary, S., Adi Wibowo, L., Murtadlo Hidayat, Y., Soeryanto Soegoto, E., Halim bin Mahphoth, M., & Aulia Martha, J. (2022). Increase brand loyalty through brand benefits on

domestic products in Indonesia. *Journal of Eastern European and Central Asian Research*, *9*(5).

Handayani, S., Kristianto, V. A., & Aprilianto, R. A. (2025). How Students' Motivation and Achievement in Saudi Arabia Affect Their Learning Environment. *Journal of Lifestyle and SDGs Review*, *5*(2), e03871–e03871.

Hawsawi, A. (2024). *Development and Evaluation of an Educational Resource to Promote Skin-to-Skin Contact between Mother and Neonate in Saudi Arabia*. The University of Newcastle.

Johnson, J. D., Smail, L., Corey, D., & Jarrah, A. M. (2022). Using Bayesian networks to provide educational implications: Mobile learning and ethnomathematics to improve sustainability in mathematics education. *Sustainability*, *14*(10), 5897.

Magliveras, S., & Al Qurtuby, S. (2023). Connecting worlds: Filipino and Indonesian sojourns to Saudi Arabia. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, *32*(3), 549–571.

Maspul, K. A. (2024). *Transforming Education: Saudi Arabia's Free Education System and Student Support Programs*. Literasi Nusantara Abadi Grup.

Masrahi, N. (2023). *Sociolinguistics of Saudi Vision 2030: Paradigm Shift Through English Faculty's Perspectives of Translanguaging at a Saudi University*. The University of New Mexico.

Nofiaturrahmah, F., Rahmawati, R. F., Putra, Y. E., & Ernawati, M. (2025). Managerial Practices in Improving the Quality of Education in Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah. *Nidhomul Haq: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, *10*(2), 501–515.

Ridho, M., & Albeshir, S. G. (2024). The Role of School Management in Improving the Quality of Education in Indonesian Embassy Schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Arts, Literature, Humanities and Social Sciences*, *115*, 422–437.

Sibawaihi, S. (2025). Building Character Through Self-Identification in Indonesian Overseas School Students in Saudi Arabia. *QALAMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, dan Agama*, *17*(1), 669–684.

Sodiqin, A., & Umroh, R. R. (2023). Towards an interreligious fiqh: A study of the culture-based religious tolerance in the Kaloran community, Central Java, Indonesia. *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, *61*(1), 159–180.

Sofyan, A., & Lesmana, J. A. (2022). Defense Strategy of Religious, Pancasila, and National Culture in Indonesian School and Indonesian Diaspora as Anti-Radicalism Efforts. *culture*, *9*(2).

Waschl, N., & Chen, M. (2022). Cross-Cultural Considerations for Adapting Valid Psychoeducational Assessments. In O. S. Tan, K. K. Poon, B. A. O'Brien, & A. Rifkin-Graboi (Ed.), *Empowering Teaching and Learning through Policies and Practice: Singapore and International Perspectives ((ELPSIP,volume 2))* (hal. 113–140). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-7405-1_7

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

Zuhri, A. F., Naimah, S. S. D., Sumarni, S., Sri, A., Nugraheni, I., & Maemonah, M. W. (2024). Sports Learning Innovation Based on Digital Technology at The Indonesian School of Riyadh. *ELEMENTARY Islamic Teacher Journal*.

Zuhri, A. F., & Sholeh, B. (2024). Indonesian Cultural Diplomacy: The Role Of Indonesian Schools In Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Basic Educational Research*, *1*(1), 29–36.