

The Role of School Leadership in the Success of Literacy Programs

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Abstract

In an effort to foster a reading culture, the Indonesian government has launched various initiatives to improve literacy, particularly among the younger generation. Schools, as formal educational institutions, play a strategic role in shaping students' intellectual and moral development. In this context, school principals hold a central role as leaders—not only in promoting literacy culture but also in instilling Islamic values such as honesty, responsibility, and the pursuit of knowledge as a form of worship. This study aims to examine the role of school leadership in enhancing the literacy culture at SMP Negeri 21 Batang Hari. A descriptive qualitative method was used, with data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving principals, teachers, the head librarian, and students. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the principal plays a key role in mobilizing, guiding, motivating, and setting an example in fostering literacy at school. Islamic values are integrated into activities such as reading as a form of reflection (tadabbur), building unity (ukhuwah) through shared reading sessions, and modeling appropriate reading manners (adab). The study concludes that effective, inspirational leadership rooted in Islamic values is essential in creating a school environment that holistically and meaningfully supports the development of a literacy culture.

Keywords: Leadership, Principal, Literacy Culture

Abstrak

Dalam upaya menumbuhkan budaya membaca, pemerintah telah menginisiasi berbagai program untuk meningkatkan literasi, khususnya di kalangan generasi muda Indonesia. Sekolah sebagai lembaga pendidikan formal memiliki peran strategis dalam membentuk karakter intelektual dan moral peserta didik. Dalam hal ini, kepala sekolah memegang peran sentral sebagai pemimpin yang tidak hanya mendorong budaya literasi, tetapi juga menanamkan nilai-nilai Islam seperti kejujuran, tanggung jawab, dan semangat mencari ilmu sebagai bentuk ibadah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan budaya literasi di SMP Negeri 21 Batang Hari. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan kepala sekolah, guru, kepala perpustakaan, dan siswa. Teknik analisis data meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah menjalankan peran penting dalam menggerakkan, membimbing, memotivasi, dan menjadi teladan dalam pengembangan budaya literasi di sekolah. Nilai-nilai Islam diintegrasikan melalui kegiatan seperti tadabbur saat membaca, membangun ukhuwah dalam aktivitas membaca bersama, serta mencontohkan adab membaca dan menghargai ilmu. Simpulan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan yang efektif dan berlandaskan nilai-nilai Islam mampu menciptakan lingkungan sekolah yang mendukung budaya literasi secara menyeluruh dan bermakna.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan, Kepala Sekolah, Budaya Literasi

A. Introduction

Literacy is a fundamental skill essential for everyday life, particularly within the educational process¹. Literacy, which encompasses the ability to read, write, comprehend, and utilize information, forms the foundation of all learning. Strong literacy skills enable students to grasp academic concepts effectively, as literacy supports learning across various subjects such as science, mathematics, and social studies. When students possess proficient reading skills, they are better equipped to analyze academic texts and apply their knowledge in real-life contexts². From a religious perspective, Islam places significant emphasis on the importance of reading³. The command to read in the Qur'an, as stated in Surah Al-'Alaq verses 1–5, underscores reading as a vital part of the pursuit of knowledge and the process of teaching. The verses state: "Read in the name of your Lord who created. He created man from a clinging substance. Read, and your Lord is the Most Generous who taught by the pen taught man that which he knew not." (Qur'an, Surah Al-'Alaq: 1–5). These verses illustrate that acquiring knowledge through reading is not only an intellectual activity but also a spiritual one⁴, aligning the pursuit of literacy with the broader objectives of Islamic education⁵.

One of the government's strategic steps to address literacy challenges has been the launch of the School Literacy Movement⁶ (Gerakan Literasi Sekolah – GLS), an initiative that builds upon the framework outlined in the Indonesian National Education System Law (Law No. 20 of 2003), specifically Article 4, Paragraph 5. This law emphasizes that education must be carried out by fostering a culture of reading, writing, and numeracy among all members of society⁷. Consequently, education is positioned as a vital tool for nurturing a culture of literacy both within schools and the broader community. The literacy movement involves educators and

¹ Yeni Rakhmawati and Ali Mustadi, "The Circumstances of Literacy Numeracy Skill: Between Notion and Fact from Elementary School Students," *Jurnal Prima Edukasia* 10, no. 1 (2022): 9–18.

² Lia Agustina and Umi Anis Ro'isatin, "The Efficacy of Case-Based Learning Model Integrated with Critical Thinking Skills to Improve EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension," *J. Lang. Lang. Teach* 12, no. 3 (2024): 1443–54.

³ Kurniawan Arif Maspul, "Integration of Reading and New Literacies with Islamic Education," *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Ushuluddin* 4, no. 1 (2024): 1–17.

⁴ Wael Yousef et al., "The Development of Islamic Education Curriculum from the Quranic Perspective," *Ar-Fachruddin: Journal of Islamic Education* 1, no. 2 (2024): 93–123.

⁵ Yousef Ali Ahmed Saleh Al-Nahdi and YAJUAN LI, "Educational Values in Islam and Confucianism: A Comparative Analysis," *Arts for Linguistic & Literary Studies* 7, no. 1 (2025): 640–73.

⁶ Sri Nurabdiah Pratiwi, Indra Prasetya, and Nurhamidah Gajah, "Literacy Culture in Elementary Schools: The Impact of the Literacy Movement Program and Library Facilities," *Jurnal Kependidikan: Jurnal Hasil Penelitian Dan Kajian Kepustakaan Di Bidang Pendidikan, Pengajaran Dan Pembelajaran* 8, no. 3 (2022): 786–94.

⁷ Bambang Widi Pratolo and Hana Amri Solikhati, "Investigating Teachers' Attitude toward Digital Literacy in EFL Classroom," *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)* 15, no. 1 (2021): 97–103.

education personnel across all levels, beginning with educational institutions as foundational spaces for developing students' interests and talents⁸.

Literacy skills enable students to think critically when engaging with a wide range of reading materials and to evaluate information effectively⁹. Moreover, literacy fosters creativity and innovation by expanding students' imagination and inventive thinking through the exploration of new ideas from books, articles, or other sources. Literacy is not confined to formal education; it is a core life competency that allows individuals to comprehend essential information related to health, economics, governmental regulations, and global policies. For instance, reading directions or understanding employment contracts requires fundamental literacy¹⁰.

In the current digital age, literacy also encompasses digital competencies, including media and information literacy. It is therefore crucial to teach students how to discern credible information, protect themselves from misinformation, and use technology for productive purposes. Literate individuals are better equipped to participate actively in society—from expressing opinions in public forums to understanding their rights and responsibilities as citizens¹¹. Additionally, literacy is essential for entering and thriving in an increasingly information-driven workforce.

School principals, as educational leaders, must possess a range of competencies, including the ability to mobilize, direct, guide, protect, nurture, exemplify, encourage, and provide support¹². Further notes that trustworthy (amanah) and dynamic leadership by school principals is particularly effective in preparing and implementing educational programs, including literacy initiatives¹³. Institutions led by capable and proactive principals are often regarded as higher quality than those with strong infrastructure but less effective leadership¹⁴.

⁸ Rakhmawati and Mustadi, "The Circumstances of Literacy Numeracy Skill: Between Notion and Fact from Elementary School Students."

⁹ Augustine Ozor and James Toner, "Information Literacy Behavior and Practice: An Assessment of Undergraduate Students at Ada College of Education, Ghana," *Journal of Library Administration* 62, no. 1 (2022): 132–51.

¹⁰ Abigail Sutherland and Sara Incera, "Critical Reading: What Do Faculty Think Students Should Do?," *Journal of College Reading and Learning* 51, no. 4 (2021): 267–90.

¹¹ Nancy Kranich, "Civic Literacy: Reimagining a Role for Libraries," *The Library Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (2024): 4–34.

¹² Simon Paul Cloudesley, "'Informed', 'Active' and 'Engaged'? Understanding and Enacting Information Literacy from a UK Citizenship Perspective," *Journal of Information Literacy* 15, no. 3 (2021).

¹³ Aliesa Sadaus Pilo, "Strategies for Effective School Principal Leadership and Management Practices in Integrated Muslim Schools" (North-West University (South Africa), 2023).

¹⁴ Gohar Rahman, "Transforming Islamic Education Through Value-Based Leadership: A Narrative Review," *Sinergi International Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2025): 83–95.

From an Islamic perspective, leadership is a trust (amanah) that entails responsibility, accountability, and service to the community¹⁵. The Qur'an emphasizes the critical role of leaders in guiding others toward righteousness. This is clearly conveyed in Surah Al-Anbiya (21:73): "And We made them leaders guiding by Our command. And We inspired them to do good deeds, establish prayer, and give zakat. And they worshipped Us alone." (Qur'an, Surah Al-Anbiya: 73). This verse highlights that effective leadership, including in educational settings, must be grounded in divine guidance, moral integrity, and a commitment to fostering goodness and social benefit. In this context, literacy programs, when led by principled and visionary school leaders, not only enhance academic success but also contribute to the development of a knowledgeable, ethical, and spiritually aware generation¹⁶.

In the effort to improve the quality of education, school principals are expected to explore and develop the potential of their institutions. One of the key initiatives implemented at SMP N 21 Batang Hari involves strengthening the literacy culture among students. The literacy program is specifically designed to enhance students' reading and writing skills. Based on the researcher's preliminary observations, SMP N 21 Batang Hari has achieved notable accomplishments in literacy over the past three years (2022, 2023, and 2024), including: First Place Winner in the Regional Literacy Festival as the most active school in literacy, organized by the Batang Hari District Education Office in 2023; Second Place in the synopsis writing competition for junior high schools across Batang Hari Regency; Multiple publications of student anthology books; Top Participant in institutional coaching activities for the use of the national language in 2024, held by the Language Office of Jambi Province; Significant improvements in literacy scores on the national education report card issued by the Ministry of Education: a score of 57.78 in 2022, increasing by 46.14% to 84.44 in 2023, and further rising by 11.12% to 95.56 in 2024.

The success of literacy development at SMP N 21 Batang Hari is closely linked to the principal's ability to exercise effective leadership. The implementation of strategic leadership practices has been critical in creating a school environment conducive to literacy growth. Recognizing the challenges that schools face and the principal's pivotal role in overcoming them, this research aims to explore the role of school leadership in the success of literacy programs at SMP N 21 Batang Hari. This study, seeks to provide valuable insights into effective

¹⁵ Nurul Iman Maulana, "The Principles Of Prophet's Leadership In Organizational Management," *International Journal of Sharia Business Management* 3, no. 1 (2024): 24–29.

¹⁶ Hendy Herijanto, "Al Amanah in Al Qur'an vs Trust: A Comparative Study," *International Journal of Ethics and Systems* 38, no. 4 (2022): 549–75.

leadership strategies that address literacy challenges and enhance the overall quality of education within the school setting.

B. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis. Qualitative research is designed to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects—such as behaviors, perceptions, and actions holistically, and described in words and language within a natural context, utilizing a variety of naturalistic methods¹⁷. Descriptive research refers to the investigation of problems based on factual realities within a population, including attitudes, opinions, organizational conditions, or procedures. Descriptive research is a research strategy in which the researcher explores events or individual life experiences and asks individuals or groups to narrate their lives¹⁸. This information is then recounted by the researcher in a descriptive chronology. The key characteristic of descriptive research is that the data collected are in the form of words and images, rather than numerical data, as is the case in quantitative research. Emphasizes that descriptive research relies on data such as words and visuals due to its use of qualitative methods¹⁹. With this approach, descriptive research seeks to provide in-depth portrayals of characteristics or observed conditions without establishing causal relationships or correlations between variables. Based on these definitions, the researcher concludes that qualitative descriptive research is a type of research aimed at understanding the lived experiences of participants and describing the unique qualities or characteristics of social influences that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative approaches²⁰. This method will be used to describe all aspects related to the role of leadership and the school community in promoting literacy. Data collection methods were adopted based on Creswell, which include: Observation: Conducted to gather data on the condition of the school and to describe the research site, in this case, SMP N 21 Batang Hari. Interviews: Structured interviews were used, with systematically prepared questions to obtain detailed insights. Documentation: Data were collected through the examination and recording of written materials relevant to the research problem²¹. Data analysis which includes four steps: Data collection, Data reduction, Data

¹⁷ NASIRU Anas and KAMILU Ishaq, “Qualitative Research Method in Social and Behavioural Science Research,” *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies* 5, no. 1 (2022): 89–93.

¹⁸ Claudine Borg, “Qualitative Naturalistic Research,” 2024.

¹⁹ Tapiwa Muzari, Goerge Nevers Shava, and Samantha Shonhiwa, “Qualitative Research Paradigm, a Key Research Design for Educational Researchers, Processes and Procedures: A Theoretical Overview,” *Indiana Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2022): 14–20.

²⁰ Weng Marc Lim, “What Is Qualitative Research? An Overview and Guidelines,” *Australasian Marketing Journal* 33, no. 2 (2025): 199–229.

²¹ Emily Weyant, “Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches: By John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2018, \$38.34, 304pp., ISBN: 978-1506386706” (Taylor & Francis, 2022).

display, and Conclusion drawing/verification. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applies criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

C. Discussion

Based on the fundamental concept of literacy, it serves as a means for students to access, comprehend, and apply school-based learning through the foundational activity of reading. For secondary school students, literacy plays a crucial role in enriching learning experiences and forming the basis for the development of life skills essential for future academic or professional pursuits. Consequently, school principals strive to enhance students' literacy quality by cultivating a literacy culture through supportive programs. Achieving this goal requires the active participation of the entire school community. Thus, the principal must exercise leadership to engage all school members in collaborative efforts to develop a robust literacy culture, thereby improving students' literacy competencies.

1. The Principal as a Driver of Change

Policy is a decision formulated and agreed upon by a group to choose goals and the means to achieve them²². Describe school policy as a decision made by the school leader in collaboration with others, realized in the form of school programs or activities²³. In implementing school policies, the principal actively involves stakeholders in the decision-making process, encouraging contributions of ideas and perspectives to minimize the risk of missteps and ensure the school's strategic planning aligns with shared objectives. At SMPN 21 Batang Hari, several literacy-related policies have been enacted, such as: Embedding literacy culture into the school's vision and implicitly within its mission, Establishing strategies to implement literacy development, including a daily 15-minute reading activity before the first lesson, and Encouraging all parties, particularly teachers, to engage in advancing the school's literacy culture.

Policy implementation encompasses not only administrative tasks but also community involvement, political and socio-economic forces, and inter-institutional cooperation. Effective and targeted implementation can solve educational challenges. A sound policy analysis especially regarding its impact is critical to ensure alignment with public interest and prevent adverse outcomes²⁴. The principal's position as a driver of change is evident through his strategic role in policy formulation and implementation. In

²² Heleen L Van Soest, Michel G J den Elzen, and Detlef P van Vuuren, "Net-Zero Emission Targets for Major Emitting Countries Consistent with the Paris Agreement," *Nature Communications* 12, no. 1 (2021): 2140.

²³ Kenneth Leithwood, Doris Jantzi, and Rosanne Steinbach, "Leadership and Other Conditions Which Foster Organizational Learning in Schools," in *Organizational Learning in Schools* (Taylor & Francis, 2021), 67–90.

²⁴ Kenneth Leithwood, "A Review of Evidence about Equitable School Leadership," *Education Sciences* 11, no. 8 (2021): 377.

educational institutions, particularly in public schools, policy is not merely a set of written directives, but a dynamic process that translates collective aspirations into actionable programs. At SMPN 21 Batang Hari, the principal demonstrates adaptive leadership by integrating literacy objectives into the school's core vision and operational strategies. This integration reflects an awareness that institutional transformation must begin with clear, shared goals. Embedding literacy as a foundational aspect of the school's mission enables continuity, sustainability, and consistency in program delivery across all stakeholders²⁵.

The participatory approach adopted by the principal in crafting and enacting school policies further strengthens institutional legitimacy and ownership. By actively involving teachers, librarians, and even parents in decision-making, the principal fosters a culture of collaboration and shared accountability. This inclusive governance model aligns with contemporary theories of educational leadership, which emphasize distributed leadership as a means of promoting professional agency and collective efficacy. Such involvement not only enhances the relevance of the policies but also minimizes resistance and increases the likelihood of successful implementation²⁶.

Furthermore, the literacy policies implemented such as the 15-minute daily reading activity serve as concrete expressions of the school's commitment to academic improvement. However, policy success is not determined solely by program presence but by its adaptability, responsiveness, and contextual relevance. Therefore, continuous policy analysis is essential to assess the impact of these initiatives on student outcomes. Consideration of socio-economic factors, community engagement, and institutional capacity provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating effectiveness. This is particularly important in rural or semi-urban contexts, where disparities in access and support structures may challenge program sustainability.

2. The Principal as a Mentor

The development of a literacy culture necessitates the active involvement of all school members. The principal supports this by granting teachers the autonomy to create their classroom environments. This fosters teacher creativity and innovation in instructional methods. Principals conduct instructional supervision by observing, evaluating, and providing constructive feedback to teachers, thereby enhancing their

²⁵ Peggy L Maki, *Assessing for Learning: Building a Sustainable Commitment across the Institution* (Routledge, 2023).

²⁶ Arten Mobonggi et al., *Kepemimpinan Dalam Manajemen Pendidikan Kekinian* (MEGA PRESS NUSANTARA, 2024).

professional growth. This is vital in improving literacy instruction quality in schools. Administrative staff support teaching and learning operations by managing documentation, logistics, and other essential tasks. The school also collaborates with external institutions to strengthen teacher and staff competencies. For instance, teachers at SMPN 21 Batang Hari have participated in literacy training programs, and the school library receives regular mentoring from the local education office and certified librarians.

The literacy programs initiated include. 15-minute reading session before lessons begin. A literacy publication program where students summarize books, and their work such as short stories, poems, and magazines is compiled quarterly. These initiatives thrive in environments where literacy is embedded as part of the broader school culture, which reflects the core values and beliefs practiced within the school community. One key component of the School Literacy Movement (Gerakan Literasi Sekolah/GLS) is the daily 15-minute reading activity involving non-academic texts to instill a reading habit and improve reading comprehension. Reading materials encompass moral values, local wisdom, national heritage, and global perspectives suited to students' developmental stages. Such efforts must involve all stakeholders government, school staff, parents, and the broader community.

The School Literacy Movement is a participatory initiative involving all school stakeholders (students, teachers, principals, education personnel, school supervisors, school committees, parents, academics, publishers, media, community figures, and the private sector), under the coordination of the Ministry of Education²⁷. Affirm the importance of sustaining this policy²⁸. Emphasizes that literacy helps students understand and apply knowledge gained in school, both in academic contexts and in daily life, thereby fostering noble character²⁹. The principal plays a central role in ensuring the success of such literacy initiatives. Interviews with the principal of SMPN 21 Batang Hari reveal several key activities: a) Socializing the literacy program to all stakeholders, b) Establishing a formal School Literacy Team (via principal's decree), c) Creating reading corners in classrooms and the school library, d) Reinforcing literacy efforts during weekly flag ceremonies, e) Allocating BOS (School Operational Assistance) funds for purchasing literacy materials, f) Organizing literacy competitions in collaboration with five partner

²⁷ Miftahul Jannah, Siti Masfiah, and Much Arsyad Fardani, "Gerakan Literasi Sekolah Meningkatkan Minat Baca Siswa Sekolah Dasar," *Jurnal Prasasti Ilmu* 2, no. 3 (2022): 115–20.

²⁸ Tara Bartlett and Daniel Schugurensky, "Reinventing Freire in the 21 St Century : Citizenship Education , Student Voice and School Participatory Budgeting" 23, no. 2 (2021): 55–79.

²⁹ Riki Nasrullah et al., "Establishing Literacy Foundations : Policies and Interventions for Indonesia's Future Excellence," *Jurnal Kependidikan* 10, no. 3 (2024): 1219–30.

schools, and g) Enforcing the daily 15-minute reading requirement before lessons. Interviews with teachers and students confirm that the library is well-managed, reading spaces are comfortable, and the daily reading activity is monitored by subject teachers.

3. The Principal as a Motivator

As a motivator, the principal energizes both staff and students to actively participate in the literacy program. Motivational leadership contributes significantly to achieving institutional goals by inspiring positive behavior and productivity. School leader should provide guidance, direction, inspiration, and foster confidence among staff to perform their duties effectively³⁰. Motivation also sustains task performance and prevents burnout. Motivation can be conveyed both verbally and non-verbally through: a) Recognition – Understanding individual strengths and weaknesses to support personal and professional growth, b) Instilling pride – Reinforcing that their contributions are essential to the school's success and recognizing their efforts, c) Fostering enthusiasm and involvement – Engaging staff in decision-making processes to enhance commitment and ownership of the school's mission³¹.

The principal's role as a motivator significantly impacts the active participation of both staff and students in the literacy program. Motivational leadership functions not only as a catalyst for positive behavior but also as a mechanism to enhance productivity and sustain high-quality performance over time. By providing clear guidance and inspiration, the principal fosters a supportive work environment that builds confidence among teachers and staff. This is especially critical given the challenges and workload pressures that can lead to burnout among educators.

Motivation conveyed by the principal extends beyond verbal encouragement to include concrete actions such as recognizing individual strengths and weaknesses, which supports personal and professional growth. Meaningful recognition cultivates a sense of pride and ownership, allowing individuals to feel that their contributions are vital to the school's advancement³². Furthermore, by involving staff in decision-making processes, the principal promotes engagement and strengthens commitment, fostering a collective responsibility to realize the school's vision.

³⁰ Muhammad Hengky Wijaya, Abu Khoir, and Abdul Wahid Zaini, "Fostering Public Trust: The Transformative Leadership of School Principals," *Indonesian Journal of Education and Social Studies* 01, no. 01 (2022): 51–62.

³¹ Kenneth Leithwood, "Education Sciences A Review of Evidence about Equitable School Leadership," *Educational Science* 11, no. 137 (2021): 1–49.

³² M Amzah, Lailatul Husna, and Miftahurrahmah Miftahurrahmah, "Peran Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Menerapkan Nilai Dan Perilaku Islami Terhadap Loyalitas Guru Di KB Kapalo Koto Padang Pariaman," *Al-Marsus: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 1 (2024): 75–88.

The principal's motivational strategies such as encouraging participation in professional development programs demonstrate that empowering staff is key to the success of literacy initiatives. This approach not only enhances individual competencies but also fosters collaboration and synergy within the school community. Thus, motivational leadership supports the technical implementation of programs while ensuring sustained enthusiasm and dedication, enabling the school's literacy culture to develop effectively and sustainably.

4. The Principal as a Role Model

The concept of "role model" or *uswah hasanah* in Islamic teachings signifies exemplary conduct worthy of emulation³³. A school leader must display integrity and ethical behavior, both deliberately and inadvertently, as their actions influence the broader school community. According to Islamic principles, a leader is accountable before Allah for the trust placed in them (*amanah*), and thus must embody good character (*akhlaq karimah*) and righteousness (*taqwa*)³⁴. The principal of SMPN 21 Batang Hari leads by example—demonstrating a strong personal commitment to reading, motivating others to embrace reading habits, and consistently overseeing the implementation of literacy programs³⁵. This modeling fosters a culture of literacy and reflects the Islamic ideal of leadership by virtuous example. As stated in the Qur'an, "Indeed, the best of those whom you can hire is the strong and trustworthy one." (QS. Al-Qasas: 26). This verse affirms the importance of leadership characterized by capability and trustworthiness traits essential in promoting educational excellence and moral literacy among students.

The principal's function as a role model holds strategic significance in shaping the school's literacy culture, especially when grounded in ethical and spiritual values. Modeling behavior is not limited to formal instructional settings, but is embedded in daily interactions, decision-making processes, and the leader's visible commitment to reading and self-development. By embodying the literacy habits expected of students and teachers—such as maintaining reading routines, referencing texts in discussions, or promoting book-related events the principal fosters an environment where literacy is seen not only as a task, but as a shared value and communal identity.

³³ Ali Mustofa, "Metode Keteladanan Perspektif Pendidikan Islam," *CENDEKIA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 5, no. 1 (2019): 23–42.

³⁴ Faikatul Husna, "Kepemimpinan Islami Dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Lembaga Pendidikan Islam," *MISYKAT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Quran Hadits Syari'ah Dan Tarbiyah* 2, no. 2 (2017): 131–54.

³⁵ Mustajab, Chuen Lee, and Jansee, "Principal Leadership as a Quality Culture Motivator," *At-Tasyrih Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. June 2021 (2023): 38–50.

The alignment between personal conduct and institutional vision creates a strong symbolic leadership. In Islamic educational leadership, symbolic actions are essential in legitimizing authority and generating trust³⁶. When the principal consistently demonstrates values like honesty, intellectual humility, and a love for learning, these become normative behaviors within the school. The principal's actions then act as a moral and professional benchmark, particularly in a community where spiritual values intersect with educational goals. This fusion strengthens not only students' academic growth but also their character formation an outcome consistent with the Islamic goal of holistic education (*tarbiyah*). The principal at SMPN 21 Batang Hari emerges as a transformative leader—one whose personal behavior aligns with institutional aspirations and spiritual commitments. The impact of such leadership extends beyond administrative success; it cultivates a deeply rooted literacy culture supported by ethical consistency and faith-driven motivation. This reinforces the idea that effective school transformation requires not just strategic planning, but also ethical presence and spiritual leadership.

D. Conclusion

The principal's role in the success of the literacy program at SMPN 21 Batang Hari includes four main dimensions. First, as a mobilizer, the principal sets policies and directs the school's vision, including the promotion of literacy. Second, as a motivator, the principal encourages staff and students to actively engage and commit to the literacy program. Third, as a mentor, the principal supports and empowers teachers, fosters collaboration with parents, and builds a conducive learning environment. Fourth, as a role model, the principal demonstrates a personal commitment to reading and lifelong learning. These roles are rooted in Islamic values such as integrity (*amānah*), sincerity (*ikhhlās*), and the obligation to seek knowledge (*ṭalab al-ʿilm*). Through this integration of leadership and spirituality, the principal not only enhances literacy but also contributes to the moral and intellectual growth of students in line with Islamic principles.

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³⁶ Ahmad Helwani Syafi'i and Lc M Pd, "Interaksi Marusia Dan Kebudayaan," *Mosaik Peradaban: Interaksi Manusia Dan Kebudayaan* 28 (2025).

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