

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF SCHOOL PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' LITERACY CULTURE AT SMP NEGERI 1 SIANTAN

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the transformation of school principal leadership in developing students' literacy culture at SMP Negeri 1 Siantan. The main issue addressed in this research is the relatively low level of students' literacy, which remains a significant challenge in improving educational quality. School leadership plays a strategic role in integrating literacy programs systematically and sustainably within the school environment. This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. The participants consisted of a principal, teachers, and students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicate that the transformation of school principal leadership is reflected in the strengthening of literacy-oriented vision, the development of innovative literacy programs, the enhancement of collaboration among teachers and stakeholders, and the creation of a conducive literacy environment. Transformational leadership was found to significantly improve students' engagement in literacy activities. However, several challenges remain, including limited resources and initially low reading interest among students. This study concludes that school principal leadership plays a crucial role in fostering a sustainable literacy culture in schools.

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### INTRODUCTION

Literacy culture is one of the fundamental pillars in developing the quality of human resources in the 21st century, which is characterized by the rapid advancement of information and technology. Literacy is no longer merely defined as the ability to read and write, but also encompasses the ability to understand, analyze, evaluate, and utilize information critically and reflectively in daily life (OECD, 2019). In the educational context, literacy culture serves as an important indicator of successful learning processes, as it is closely related to students' higher-order thinking

skills. Schools, as formal educational institutions, have a strategic responsibility to instill and develop literacy culture from an early stage. However, various international assessment results, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), indicate that the literacy level of students in Indonesia remains relatively low compared to other countries (OECD, 2019). This condition suggests that efforts to strengthen literacy culture in schools have not been optimally implemented. Therefore, a more systematic and sustainable approach is required to build literacy culture, one of which is through the leadership role of school principals as key drivers in educational management at the school level (Hallinger, 2020).

The challenges in developing literacy culture in schools are not only related to students' low reading interest but are also influenced by various other factors, such as the lack of integration of literacy programs into teaching practices, limited facilities and infrastructure, and weak support from the school environment. Studies indicate that literacy programs are often implemented merely as formalities and have not succeeded in fostering sustainable reading habits among students (Pratiwi, 2020). Furthermore, teachers' roles in supporting literacy activities are not yet optimal due to insufficient coordination and policy support from school management. In a global context, countries with high literacy levels, such as Finland and Singapore, have successfully developed literacy culture through visionary, collaborative, and teacher capacity-oriented school leadership (Schleicher, 2019). Research by Leithwood et al. (2020) emphasizes that school leadership significantly influences the improvement of instructional quality and academic culture. Similarly, Robinson et al. (2019) argue that instructional leadership directly contributes to improving student learning outcomes, including literacy. Therefore, the transformation of school principal leadership becomes a key factor in addressing various literacy-related challenges in schools.

Although numerous studies have examined the relationship between school leadership and literacy culture, there remains a research gap, particularly concerning the transformational aspects of leadership that are adaptive and contextual. Most previous studies have focused on administrative and managerial leadership, without deeply exploring how shifts in leadership styles can influence literacy culture more substantially (Bush, 2020). Moreover, existing research tends to emphasize literacy program implementation without examining the leadership transformation processes underlying such initiatives. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on analyzing the transformation of school principal leadership in developing students' literacy culture, including innovative strategies, collaborative approaches, and adaptations to students' needs and school contexts. This study also contributes by specifically examining the context of junior secondary schools, which possess unique characteristics in terms of students' cognitive and social development compared to other educational levels. Thus, this research is expected to provide new insights into literacy-based educational leadership.

This study aims to analyze in depth the transformation of school principal leadership in developing students' literacy culture at SMP Negeri 1 Siantan. Specifically, this research examines four main indicators: (1) literacy vision and policies developed by the principal, (2) strategies for implementing literacy programs, (3) the principal's role in fostering collaboration with teachers and educational stakeholders, and (4) the creation of a conducive literacy environment both physically and socially. The scope of this study is limited to the leadership role of the school principal and its impact on students' literacy culture within the school environment, without addressing broader external factors such as macro-level educational policies. Through this focus, the study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of transformational leadership concepts in education and practically to assist school principals in designing effective strategies to enhance students' literacy culture sustainably.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of school principal leadership transformation in developing students' literacy culture. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of research participants in a contextual and holistic manner (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The descriptive design was utilized to provide a systematic depiction of the principal's leadership practices in developing literacy

culture without manipulating any variables. This study was conducted in a natural school setting so that the data obtained reflect real conditions occurring in the field.

The research subjects consisted of 17 participants, including 1 principal, 6 teachers, and 10 students at SMP Negeri 1 Siantan. The selection of subjects was conducted using purposive sampling, which involves selecting informants based on specific considerations relevant to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2020). The principal was selected as the key informant due to their strategic role in decision-making and managing literacy programs. Teachers were selected based on their active involvement in implementing literacy programs, while students were selected based on their level of participation in school literacy activities. This diverse composition of participants enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive and in-depth data regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

The research instruments included semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and strategies related to the development of literacy culture. The interview guidelines were developed based on indicators of transformational leadership and literacy culture, referring to the framework proposed by Leithwood et al. (2020). Observations were carried out to directly examine literacy-related activities in the school, such as reading activities, library utilization, and the implementation of literacy programs. Documentation was used to complement the data, including school policies, literacy programs, and records of students' literacy activities. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation, while reliability was maintained through consistency in data collection and analysis (Miles et al., 2019).

The research procedure was conducted in several stages: preparation, implementation, and data analysis. In the preparation stage, the researcher conducted a preliminary study to understand the initial condition of literacy culture in the school. During the implementation stage, data were collected simultaneously through interviews, observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain detailed information, while observations were conducted repeatedly to ensure data consistency. In the analysis stage, the collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process was conducted continuously throughout the research to ensure the validity of findings. The analyzed data were then interpreted to address the research objectives related to the transformation of school principal leadership in developing students' literacy culture.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Transformation of Literacy-Oriented Leadership Vision

The findings reveal that the transformation of school principal leadership in fostering literacy culture is prominently reflected in the reorientation of the school's vision toward literacy-centered development. Based on in-depth interviews and observational data, literacy is no longer positioned as a supplementary program but has been strategically embedded as a core institutional value. The principal actively redefined the school vision by incorporating literacy as a fundamental pillar of educational practice, ensuring its alignment with instructional processes and extracurricular activities. This shift signifies a transition from a predominantly administrative leadership model toward a more transformative and pedagogically driven leadership approach. Consequently, teachers increasingly integrate literacy-based activities into classroom instruction, while students demonstrate heightened engagement in reading-related practices. This institutionalization of literacy within the school vision has contributed to a more cohesive and sustained literacy culture.

Furthermore, the principal demonstrated a strong commitment to disseminating and reinforcing the literacy vision through continuous and structured communication strategies. This was achieved through formal meetings, professional development sessions, and school-wide initiatives that emphasized literacy engagement. The principal's leadership approach was characterized by participatory and persuasive communication, fostering a shared understanding and collective ownership among stakeholders. Observational evidence indicates that teachers began incorporating contextual reading materials and literacy-driven discussions into their pedagogical practices. Simultaneously, students exhibited increased awareness of the importance of reading, as reflected in the rising frequency of library visits and active participation in literacy-related activities. These findings suggest that effective

communication of institutional vision plays a pivotal role in shaping behavioral transformation within educational settings.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings align with transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the critical role of vision in inspiring and mobilizing organizational members (Leithwood et al., 2020). Hallinger (2020) further argues that principals who articulate a clear and compelling vision are more likely to enhance instructional quality and school effectiveness. Similarly, Robinson et al. (2019) highlight that leadership practices focused on teaching and learning have a direct impact on student outcomes, including literacy achievement. Therefore, the transformation of leadership vision represents a foundational element in cultivating a sustainable literacy culture within schools.

Despite these positive developments, several challenges were identified during the implementation process. Initial resistance from some teachers emerged due to limited familiarity with literacy-integrated instructional approaches. Additionally, constraints related to workload and time allocation hindered the full adoption of literacy practices. These findings underscore that leadership transformation requires not only structural and policy changes but also a gradual shift in organizational mindset and professional capacity. Continuous professional development and targeted support are therefore essential to ensure the effective realization of literacy-oriented leadership vision.

#### **Innovation in Literacy Programs**

The transformation of leadership was further manifested through the development and implementation of innovative literacy programs tailored to the contextual needs of the school. The principal demonstrated adaptive leadership by not merely adopting standardized literacy initiatives but by redesigning them to suit students' interests and learning characteristics. One prominent initiative identified in this study was the implementation of a structured daily reading program, which allocated dedicated time for students to engage in reading activities prior to formal instruction. This initiative aimed to cultivate habitual reading behavior and establish literacy as a routine practice within the school environment. Additionally, classroom-based reading corners were developed to provide accessible and diverse reading materials, thereby promoting independent reading practices among students.

Beyond routine reading activities, the principal introduced a range of participatory and creative literacy programs designed to enhance student engagement. These included reading competitions, creative writing activities, and collaborative book discussions, all of which were structured to foster intrinsic motivation toward literacy. The findings indicate that students became increasingly enthusiastic and actively involved in these programs, demonstrating a shift from passive participation to active engagement. Moreover, the integration of digital literacy tools, such as e-reading platforms and online learning resources, further enriched the literacy experience by aligning it with students' technological preferences. This reflects the principal's responsiveness to contemporary educational demands and digital transformation.

These findings are consistent with OECD (2019), which emphasizes that sustained reading habits significantly contribute to literacy development. Guthrie and Klauda (2020) further highlight the importance of motivation and engagement in reading, arguing that meaningful and interactive literacy activities enhance students' reading comprehension and interest. The innovative literacy programs identified in this study therefore serve as critical mechanisms for fostering both cognitive and affective dimensions of literacy development.

However, the implementation of these programs was not without limitations. Challenges included limited availability of resources, insufficient access to diverse reading materials, and varying levels of student motivation. Additionally, parental involvement in supporting literacy practices at home remained relatively low. These findings suggest that while program innovation is essential, its effectiveness is contingent upon broader systemic support, including resource allocation and stakeholder engagement.

#### **Collaboration Among Teachers and Stakeholders**

Another significant dimension of leadership transformation identified in this study is the strengthening of collaborative practices among teachers and educational stakeholders. The principal adopted a facilitative leadership role by promoting professional collaboration and collective responsibility in literacy development. Regular meetings, reflective discussions, and collaborative planning sessions were conducted to enable teachers to share strategies,

challenges, and best practices related to literacy instruction. This collaborative culture contributed to the development of a shared pedagogical framework that supports literacy integration across subjects.

In addition to internal collaboration, the principal actively engaged external stakeholders, including parents and community institutions, to support literacy initiatives. Programs such as family reading activities and partnerships with local libraries were implemented to extend literacy practices beyond the school environment. These initiatives aimed to create a holistic literacy ecosystem that supports students both academically and socially. The findings indicate that such collaborative efforts enhanced students' access to reading materials and strengthened their motivation to engage in literacy activities.

The importance of collaboration in educational leadership is widely supported in the literature. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2020) emphasize that collaborative professionalism enhances teaching quality and fosters innovation in educational practices. Similarly, Fullan (2020) argues that sustainable educational change is driven by collective capacity-building and shared leadership. The findings of this study reinforce the notion that collaboration is a critical factor in the successful implementation of literacy programs.

Nevertheless, several challenges were identified in fostering collaboration, including differences in teachers' perspectives, limited time for joint activities, and varying levels of commitment. These challenges highlight the need for structured collaboration mechanisms and supportive leadership practices to sustain collaborative engagement. Effective communication and trust-building are therefore essential components in strengthening collaborative culture within schools.

#### **Development of a Conducive Literacy Environment**

The creation of a supportive literacy environment emerged as a crucial factor in the development of students' literacy culture. The principal implemented various strategies to enhance both the physical and social dimensions of the literacy environment. Physically, the school provided well-equipped libraries, reading corners, and visually engaging literacy displays that encouraged students to interact with written materials. These facilities were designed to create a comfortable and stimulating reading atmosphere, thereby increasing students' interest in reading activities.

Socially, the principal fostered a culture that values literacy through consistent reinforcement and modeling. Activities such as collective reading sessions, book discussions, and literacy campaigns were regularly आयोजित to normalize reading as a shared practice. Teachers also played an active role in modeling reading behavior, thereby reinforcing literacy as a valued norm within the school community. These efforts contributed to the development of a positive literacy climate that supports student engagement.

The findings are consistent with Snow (2020), who emphasizes the importance of supportive learning environments in enhancing literacy outcomes. UNESCO (2021) further highlights that literacy development is significantly influenced by environmental factors, including access to resources and social support. The results of this study therefore underscore the importance of integrating environmental strategies into literacy development efforts.

Despite these achievements, several constraints were identified, including limited infrastructure and underutilization of existing facilities. Some students also demonstrated inconsistent engagement with literacy resources. These challenges indicate that environmental improvements must be accompanied by continuous monitoring and program reinforcement to ensure optimal utilization.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the transformation of school principal leadership plays a pivotal role in the development of students' literacy culture. The findings reveal that leadership practices characterized by vision-driven orientation, innovation, collaboration, and environmental support significantly contribute to the enhancement of literacy engagement among students. The principal's ability to integrate literacy into the school's vision and institutional practices has led to a shift in the educational paradigm, where literacy is no longer treated as an additional activity but as a fundamental component of the learning process.

Furthermore, the implementation of innovative literacy programs has proven effective in fostering students' motivation and participation in reading activities. These programs, supported by collaborative efforts among teachers

and stakeholders, have strengthened the overall literacy ecosystem within the school. The establishment of a conducive literacy environment, both physically and socially, has also played an essential role in sustaining students' engagement with reading and learning.

However, the study also identifies several challenges that may hinder the effectiveness of literacy development initiatives, including limited infrastructure, insufficient access to diverse reading materials, and varying levels of student motivation. These constraints highlight the need for continuous improvement and broader support from educational stakeholders.

In conclusion, transformational leadership of school principals is a key determinant in building a sustainable literacy culture. Therefore, it is recommended that school leaders enhance their capacity in literacy-oriented leadership practices, promote continuous innovation in literacy programs, and strengthen collaboration with teachers, parents, and the wider community. Future research is suggested to explore the integration of digital literacy and expand the scope of investigation across different educational levels to provide a more comprehensive understanding of literacy development in diverse contexts.

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