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Principal behavior in improving literacy culture

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Abstract

This research explores the impact of the school principal's behavior on the success of educational institutions, with a focus on literacy at SMP Global Islamic Boarding School Karanganyar, Trenggalek, Indonesia. The competence and leadership style of the school principal has a significant influence on school progress. Literacy culture, seen as a form of cultivating critical attitudes in understanding information, is considered crucial for improving access to knowledge and technology.

The research methodology used is qualitative, employing data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, and documentation. The results indicate that the school principal implements various strategies to enhance literacy in the school, including activities like book publishing, writing seminars, and promoting reading corners. Additionally, the principal pays special attention to numeracy literacy and digital literacy by involving training, problem-based learning, and the utilization of digital technology.

These findings support Mayo's theory and underscore the importance of a humanistic approach in shaping literate attitudes through leadership factors, student and teacher behavior, and a conducive school climate.

Keywords: School Principal's Behavior; Literacy Culture; Qualitative Research

1. Introduction

The school principal, as an educator and influencer, plays a crucial role in developing a literacy culture in the school (Rosdiana & Fathurrohman, 2022). The collaboration of all school components is essential to achieve a high literacy culture, and the school principal, as the organization's locomotive, has a vital role in promoting literacy in reading and writing. The high authority of the school principal allows them to regulate the development of various types of literacy, motivate teachers, and determine steps in realizing a literacy culture (Rosdiana & Fathurrohman, 2022). The role of the school principal also serves as the initial step in identifying literacy issues in the school, and their behavior as policymakers greatly influences the development of a literacy culture.

Literacy, as an essential attitude, behavior, and skill, provides significant benefits in training oneself to read, absorb information, and master the 4C skills (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity). The current generation needs to have a literate attitude to face future challenges and be responsive to developments in science and technology. Basic literacy, involving six aspects such as reading and writing literacy, numeracy, science, financial literacy, digital literacy, and cultural and citizenship literacy, is a crucial key in optimizing the abilities of the current generation, especially at the elementary education level (Kemdikbud, 2017).

Literacy is not only an integral part of teaching and learning activities in schools but also a moral commitment for educators to serve as role models in literacy. Schools serve as the foundation for shaping a literacy culture by creating

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a conducive ecosystem to instill attitudes, behaviors, and literacy habits. Interactions among school community members, especially students, provide motivation to enhance literacy activities, making schools an ideal place to instill character, ethics, and transform values and competencies through a literacy culture.

Communities beyond schools, such as Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*), also play a significant role in education. *Pondok pesantren* have proven to make substantial contributions to the nation's life, executing the transformation of knowledge through different educational methods and systems. Despite differences from formal education, *pondok pesantren* positively contribute to transforming religious values, ethics, and national identity. In this context, the role of the school principal as a leader is crucial in guiding the goal of creating literate, competitive, and character-rich generations. The competence and leadership style of the school principal significantly impact the success of educational institutions, and a transformative, literate, competitive, and character-driven school principal is expected to be a driving force in enhancing the literacy culture.

This study focuses on SMP Global Islamic Boarding School in Karanganyar, Trenggalek, which has caught the researcher's attention due to its achievements in literacy despite being a relatively new school. Initial observations and interviews with the headmaster have opened possibilities for further research. The school follows the boarding school / *pondok pesantren* pattern and holds three licenses from the Department of Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the Ibtikari Foundation. The headmaster actively organizes studies on yellow books, recitations of Nazhaman books, deepening ASWAJA (*Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah*), Quranic recitations, and book/literature literacy according to a set schedule.

Structured literacy activities, including reading and writing, are scheduled, such as writing seminars for students. The collaboration of three educational systems (Junior High School, *Madrasah Diniyah*, *Pondok Pesantren*) makes literacy activities highly prominent for students. The Global Study Club (GSC) serves as a platform for students to explore various fields, including Korean, Arabic, English, Javanese, multimedia, and science. A unique literacy culture emerges when students present their readings of yellow books/hadiths in their own language, creating creative and participative literacy activities.

The school principal actively promotes a culture of numeracy literacy by preparing students to participate in competitions and providing maximum guidance to ensure victory. In an interview, the school principal emphasized the importance of having a team that can compete and win in various competitions by bringing in professional coaches. This effort is supported by the views of Hasanah & Silitonga (2020), who emphasize the improvement of basic literacy skills, including reading and writing literacy, numeracy, science literacy, digital literacy, financial literacy, as well as cultural and civic literacy. In the context of the 21st century, reading and writing are considered crucial, enabling students to understand learning concepts, enhance knowledge, broaden perspectives, and develop their potential.

2. Literature Review

The definition of the term leadership behavior involves understanding the terms "behavior" and "school principal." In general, behavior can be interpreted as an individual's response or reaction to stimuli or the environment, not limited to humans but also other organisms. In the context of human behavior, this term encompasses how an individual acts or interacts with others, commonly known as behavior. The definition of behavior can be adjusted according to its context of use (Shulhan & Soim, 2013).

The behavioral approach in leadership focuses on the idea that the success or failure of a leader is determined by the attitudes and leadership styles they apply. A leader's behavior is evident in how they give orders, delegate authority, communicate, motivate, make decisions, and more. Djatmiko (2022) mentions two dimensions that stand out in a manager's perception related to leadership behavior: determining task structures for subordinates and the level of attention to subordinates' needs.

Behavior includes various organism activities, such as walking, talking, reacting, dressing, as well as internal activities like thinking, perception, and emotions. Behavior is the second-largest factor after the environment that influences the health of individuals, groups, or communities. This is why understanding leadership behavior is key to analyzing and comprehending leadership dynamics in various contexts (Utami, 2010).

Performance, is the result or output of a process. According to the behavioral approach in management, performance is the quantity or quality of something produced or the service provided by someone performing a job. Performance is a work achievement, which is the comparison between the results of work and the established standards. It is the

outcome, in terms of both quality and quantity, achieved by an individual in carrying out tasks in accordance with the assigned responsibilities (Nurlaila, 2010)

Meanwhile, Mathis and Jackson (2002) state that performance is essentially what employees do or do not do. Performance management is the overall activities conducted to enhance the performance of a company or organization, including the performance of each individual and work groups within the company.

The school principal, as a leader, must demonstrate commitment to the school's vision, use the vision as a guide in management and leadership, and focus on teaching and the performance of teachers in the classroom. The three main characteristics of an effective school principal include commitment to the vision, application of the vision as a guide, and a focus on teaching and the performance of teachers.

In the context of educational management, the school principal plays a key role in improving the quality of education in the school. The principal has full authority and responsibility for the organization of education within the school environment, as outlined in the *Wawasan Wiyata Mandala*. With the position as the formal and organizational leader of the school, the principal has a vital role in achieving educational goals and improving the quality of education in the school.

Dorce Bu'tu (2011) underscores the pivotal role of school principals in enhancing teacher performance through various approaches. These include leading by personal example, motivating teachers without coercion, providing guidance and supervision on curriculum implementation, and empowering teachers through delegated responsibilities and competency development. The influence of effective school leadership on teacher performance is evident in these strategies.

The capacity of a school principal to coordinate, direct, motivate, and empower teachers significantly shapes the quality of education. To bolster teacher performance, school principals must employ appropriate leadership behaviors, fostering a conducive learning environment and improving overall teacher effectiveness. Identifying potential school principals involves recommendations, teacher assessments, leadership preparations, and presentations to the national assessment board (Halverson, Kelley, & Shaw, 2014). This rigorous process ensures the appointment of qualified leaders and avoids unprofessional school leadership. The balance between task-oriented and employee-oriented leadership styles is crucial for effective leadership.

Usman (2014) emphasizes the importance of considering human feelings and relationships in leadership. School principals, by paying attention to subordinates, can create a comfortable school atmosphere, influencing established habits and contributing to the formation of the school's culture. Evaluating a school principal's leadership extends beyond assessing their work and encompasses positive changes in the school, aligning with the need for new assessments to support organizational development. School culture, encompassing professional collaboration, vision-mission, discipline, commitment, and more, is crucial in fostering an environment where students develop intrinsic motivation for learning. Continuous nurturing and maintenance of this culture, primarily led by the school principal, are essential for effective school leadership, as highlighted by Yazid and Jabar (2013).

Literacy originates from the Latin word "*litera*" (letter) and is often interpreted as literacy. Literally, literacy means the ability to read and write. Literacy plays a crucial role in the success of learning and shares similar meanings with studying and understanding reading materials. Romdhoni (2013) and Kern (2000) describe literacy as a social event that involves specific skills to convey and obtain information in written form. Digital literacy is the interest, attitude, and individual's ability to use digital technology and communication tools to participate effectively in society.

Digital literacy involves understanding and using information in various forms from various sources accessed through computer devices. The concept of digital literacy includes the ability to use technology, information, and communication, as well as social, creative, and critical skills. Digital literacy is a technological innovation that transforms the process of information retrieval and dissemination from analog to digital. There are three subject positions in digital literacy: technology users, technology questioners, and technology producers.

Functional literacy is the ability to use technology, while critical literacy involves the ability to recognize, criticize, and react to reading materials. Rhetorical literacy is related to empowering writers. The Ministry of Education and Culture establishes eight essential elements and three indicators of digital literacy in schools. Literacy now involves not only the ability to read and write texts but also texts in visual, audiovisual, and computerized forms. In the technology era, a literate society is said to exist when they use information for social communication and knowledge, creating a stage of social behavior that involves individuals' ability to read, interpret, and analyze information to achieve well-being.

The research on the behavior of school principals in improving literacy culture among students at SMP Global Islamic Boarding School Karangany, Trenggalek, is relevant to previous studies conducted by other researchers. Azizah, Latief, & Tumanggung (2018) focuses on the effectiveness of school principal leadership in developing literacy culture at Madrasah Aliyah Aziziyah Tangerang. The study shows that the literacy culture development in MA Aziziyah Tangerang aligns with the guidelines formulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud). The study identifies factors influencing literacy culture development, such as psychosocial, leadership, environmental, organizational, ecological, and government policy factors. The effectiveness of the school principal's leadership is crucial for optimizing literacy culture development.

Asmawan's research in 2018 examines the role of transformational leadership of school principals in supporting the school literacy movement. The study emphasizes the government's efforts to improve education quality through programs like the school literacy movement. Challenges in implementing the program include student-related factors, insufficient library books, less strategic library spaces, inadequate library facilities, and the competence of library staff. The school principal's transformational leadership is essential in overcoming these obstacles.

Falentin & Roesminingsih (2021), their research aims to describe and analyze the role of school principal leadership in developing literacy culture, specifically in junior high schools. The results highlight the principal's roles as a policy-maker, motivator, role model, and accountable figure in literacy culture development.

Mahfudh & Imron (2020) explore the strategies employed by the school principal to enhance reading literacy among students at SMA Negeri (State Senior High School) 1 Kota Kediri. The findings indicate that the principal's strategies include habituation at the first level, directing students towards religious literacy at the second level, and forming a literacy team as the third strategy. The study acknowledges challenges such as limited reading facilities and potential differences in students' abilities due to delays.

Teguh research in 2017 focused on cultivating students' character through the school literacy ecosystem to make them lifelong learners. The study emphasizes that the school literacy movement goes beyond reading and writing, encompassing thinking skills aligned with literacy stages and components. The research suggests implementing various literacy concepts daily, weekly, monthly, and per semester to foster students' reading interest.

Wana & Dwiarno (2018) analyzed the implementation of the scientific approach to enhance literacy culture in elementary schools. The study focuses on the literacy program in SDN Kincang 02, highlighting efforts such as adding enrichment books, creating reading corners in classrooms, conducting literacy activities, and involving the public. Challenges include low teacher awareness and a shortage of suitable reading materials.

Baharun & Rizqiyah (2020) explore the efforts of an Islamic boarding school in boosting students' learning enthusiasm through literacy culture. The study identifies initiatives such as the INTISHOB program, study groups, cultural orientation, library facilities, and learning evaluations. These efforts contribute to the successful establishment of literacy culture among students at Pondok Pesantren Lubbul Labib. Therefore, the researcher can convey that this study occupies a position of filling the void that has not been explored by previous researchers, with a distinction: the behavior of school principals in enhancing literacy culture at SMP Global Islamic Boarding School Karangany, Trenggalek.

3. Research Method

Qualitative research is conducted using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological research is a type of qualitative research that closely observes and listens to detailed explanations and individual understanding of their experiences. The goal of phenomenological research is to interpret and explain the experiences of individuals in life, including experiences during interactions with others and the surrounding environment. In phenomenological research, emphasis is placed on seeking, studying, and conveying the meaning of phenomena, events, and their relationships with ordinary people in specific situations. The research approach is phenomenological because the researcher will synthesize the planning, implementation, controlling, and evaluation of the GLS program conducted by the educational institution, then analyze, test, and draw a research conclusion.

This type of research can be viewed from several perspectives. First, in terms of location, this research is field research, where the researcher will reach the study location and be present directly to collect data through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentation. Second, considering the difference in the subjects studied, this research is a multi-case study. Third, considering its design, this research is qualitative, where the researcher uses an inductive thinking paradigm and presents it by writing qualitative data from field phenomena until saturation and climax.

In line with this research approach, namely the phenomenological approach, the researcher personally meets the key informant, namely the school principal. The first initial observation was conducted by the researcher at SMP Global, Islamic Boarding School Karanganyar, Trenggalek. This school has students as well as boarding school students as a characteristic of the institution. The researcher met with the School Principal and TU staff, engaging in direct interviews regarding the school's literacy culture program. In this meeting, the researcher stated the purpose and objectives of their presence.

As a key instrument, the researcher gathers and collects data while capturing the meaning of what the informant conveys. In collecting initial data, the researcher uses the technique of participant observation, interviews, and documentation. In this initial observation, the data collected by the researcher is still limited and not yet in-depth. As a commitment to research ethics, the researcher requested permission to conduct further research, which was approved by the School Principal.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. The behavior of the school principal in improving the literacy culture of reading and writing

The leadership behavior of the school principal pays attention to the details of a plan that will be implemented, and coordination (task allocation for an activity) is done without compromise, adjusted to the capabilities and competencies of the education staff. The principal must perform leadership functions involving education and other educational staff to map the direction of the expected school quality, focus on effective teaching and learning processes, and build a conducive learning environment to produce superior and quality students in order to enhance the culture of literacy.

The school principal's behavior in enhancing the culture of literacy is carried out by:

- Conducting studies on Yellow Book Study, Nazhaman Book Recitation, Deepening ASWAJA, Qur'an Reading, and Book/*Kitab* Literacy.
The school conducts studies on Yellow Book Study, Nazhaman Book Recitation, Deepening ASWAJA, Qur'an Reading, and Book/*Kitab* Literacy according to a predetermined schedule.
- Organizing writing seminars.
The school principal organizes writing seminars to enhance literacy culture among students, aiming to shape morally excellent and knowledgeable students.
- Encouraging reading during break time in the reading corner.
The school encourages the habit of reading in the reading corner during break time to make students accustomed to reading in their free time, emphasizing that reading is a window to the world.

The information gathered from interviews with the school principal, curriculum deputy head, and teachers supports the school's efforts to improve literacy. The activities observed during school visits confirm that scheduled literacy activities, such as reading during break time in designated corners and writing seminars, are indeed implemented as planned. The involvement of students in various literacy-related activities is documented through photographs, further validating the school's commitment to fostering a culture of reading and writing.

4.2. The behavior of the school principal in improving the culture of numeracy literacy

The school principal is making various efforts to enhance the culture of literacy and numeracy at the school. In the context of literacy, the principal organizes studies on "*kitab kuning*" (Islamic classical texts), recitation of the Qur'an (*Tadarus* Al-Qur'an), and literacy of books according to a predetermined schedule. These activities are expected to familiarize students with literacy and improve their reading and writing skills.

Furthermore, the principal also organizes writing seminars as a strategy to improve the culture of literacy. This seminar is attended by all students and guided by a speaker from the Graduate School of UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung. The writing seminar is considered highly beneficial by teachers and is expected to enhance students' writing abilities.

In the context of numeracy literacy, numeracy literacy learning takes place 15 minutes before the start of the morning teaching activities. The principal believes that the morning is an optimal time as children's minds are still fresh. The strategy involves utilizing the school's facilities and infrastructure, including the use of numeracy literacy posters in classrooms.

The school principal also enhances the culture of numeracy literacy by involving students in life skills activities. Students are educated to grow with noble character, extensive knowledge, skills, and usefulness for themselves and society. Life skills training includes various activities such as scouting, "*muhadoroh*" (speech training), and other extracurricular activities. The principal recognizes the importance of strengthening life skills to create independent students capable of competing in society.

Moreover, the school principal actively prepares students to compete in various competitions. By bringing in professional coaches and experts, the principal strives to ensure that students can compete and achieve success in competitions. The use of the school environment as a learning medium, including literacy posters, is also considered an effective strategy in improving numeracy literacy.

Overall, the school principal demonstrates a proactive role in advancing the culture of literacy and numeracy at the school, involving various activities and strategies to enhance students' abilities.

4.3. School principal behavior in improving digital literacy culture

The school principal exhibits proactive behavior in enhancing the culture of digital literacy through two main strategies:

4.3.1. Provision of Computers and Internet Access to Support Learning:

- The principal emphasizes the importance of computer and internet access in fostering digital literacy, aiming to enhance the quality of learning.
- The school library is equipped with valuable learning resources to facilitate student activities.
- The implementation of a digital literacy-based learning society is supported by interviews with the principal, the Curriculum Vice Principal (*Waka Kurikulum*), and the Student Affairs Vice Principal (*Waka Kesiswaan*). These interviews reveal that the availability of a well-equipped library and internet access enhances the learning experience.

4.3.2. Utilization of Digital Literacy in Teaching Activities: Digital-Based Books, Exegesis, and YouTube Accounts:

- Digital literacy is actively promoted by integrating digital tools like accessing answers to questions online, utilizing digital-based books and exegesis, and engaging with educational content on YouTube.
- The principal highlights the significance of digital literacy in accessing online resources, while also providing digital-based books and exegesis to broaden students' knowledge.

Interviews with the principal, Curriculum Vice Principal, and teachers confirm the efforts made to stimulate learning through digital literacy. The use of digital references for traditional subjects, such as the Qur'anic exegesis, is incorporated into the learning process, making students comfortable with technology. Additionally, various activities in the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) are uploaded on YouTube, enabling parents to observe their children's involvement from home.

In conclusion, the principal is actively involved in creating a digital literacy culture within the school, focusing on both infrastructure development and the integration of digital tools in teaching activities. The use of digital references and online platforms enhances the overall learning experience for students, preparing them for the challenges of a technology-driven world

The implementation of literacy culture in reading, writing, numeracy, and digital skills at SMP Global Islamic Boarding School Karanganyar, Trenggalek is carried out by the headmaster through several steps. In order to enhance the culture of reading and writing literacy, the headmaster organizes various activities such as studying yellow books, reciting *kitab nazham*, deepening ASWAJA (Islamic teachings), reciting the Qur'an, and literacy of books. These activities are conducted at specific times, such as from 15:15 to 17:00 every afternoon. In addition, the headmaster also organizes writing seminars aimed at improving the students' writing skills, so they can participate in writing competitions and win.

To enhance the culture of numeracy literacy, the headmaster implements life skills to make the students independent. In addition to religious and general education, the students are also given life skills that will be useful in society. The headmaster prepares the students to participate in competitions and invites professionals in the field to guide the students to achieve victory. The goal is to encourage the students' development and demonstrate their hard work through winning competitions.

Meanwhile, to enhance the culture of digital literacy, the headmaster provides computers and internet access in the library. This facility is expected to assist the students' learning activities. In addition, the headmaster also utilizes digital literacy in teaching activities by using digital-based books and interpretations, as well as accessing YouTube accounts. Students are given stimuli to learn through tasks related to digital references in the library.

With these steps, SMP Global Islamic Boarding School Karanganyar, Trenggalek has activities aimed at improving the culture of reading, writing, numeracy, and digital literacy among its students.

5. Conclusion

The behavior of the headmaster in enhancing the culture of literacy through the publication of literacy books by students and teachers, the publication of books about legends and culture, through the study of yellow books, reciting poems from books, deepening ASWAJA, reciting the Qur'an and literacy of books; through the seminar program "it's time for students to become writers"; through the habit of reading in the classroom reading corner can be effective in cultivating literate behavior for students and teachers.

The behavior of the headmaster in enhancing the culture of numeracy literacy; through relevant learning media that are available; through training for mathematics and non-mathematics teachers; thematic mathematics learning based on problem and project-based learning; non-mathematics learning that involves numeracy literacy elements; through life skills practice, guidance in preparation for academic/non-academic competitions can train students' independence and skills and improve teacher creativity.

The behavior of the headmaster in enhancing the culture of digital literacy through the provision of computer laboratories, electronic libraries, and internet access; the provision of digital screens and information boards; digital-based books/tafsir and YouTube accounts; the use of educational applications can train technology skills and information and communication.

Refining Mayo's theory that the behavior of the headmaster in enhancing the culture of literacy, especially reading, writing, numeracy, and digital literacy, a headmaster not only uses a task-oriented approach (EMASLIM), but also uses a humanistic approach in shaping literate attitudes through literacy culture. There are three things that need to be considered: a) school leadership, b) student and teacher habits/behaviors, c) a conducive environment/climate that supports literate attitudes, so that the goals of a work program can be achieved maximally.

Suggestions

- For School Principals

The results of this research can contribute alternative thoughts or references regarding the behavior of school principals in improving the culture of reading, writing, numeracy, digital literacy for school principals or a broader scope.

- For Teachers

The results of this research can be a guide for teachers in their efforts to support the behavior of school principals in improving the culture of literacy in reading and writing, numeracy, digital or a wider scope.

- For the School Committee

The results of this research can be used as input in order to improve the quality of schools through the behavior of school principals in improving the culture of reading, writing, numeracy and digital literacy, so that they can produce students who are creative and can think critically in welcoming a progressive era.

- For DISDIKPORA Trenggalek Regency

The results of this research are used as a contribution to creating a generation of literate students who do not miss out on information, because reading and writing will open students' insights and horizons towards the 21st century era.

- For the Ministry of Religion of Trenggalek Regency

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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