

PRINCIPAL-LED PROGRAMS IN FOSTERING RELIGIOUS SCHOOL CULTURE: A CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract:

Public schools often emphasize academic achievement while giving limited attention to students' religious and moral development. However, parents' expectations toward education have shifted, demanding schools that are not only academically excellent but also capable of fostering strong religious character. This study aims to explore how principal-led programs contribute to the realization of a religious school in a public secondary school context. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo, Ngawi Regency, a public school recognized for its strong religious culture and academic performance. This study employed a qualitative field research design using a phenomenological approach to understand participants' lived experiences related to religious program implementation. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis involving the principal and selected teachers. Data analysis was conducted continuously using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques. The findings indicate that the principal plays a central role in fostering a religious school culture through structured, sustainable, and value-based programs. Six core programs were identified: Qur'anic memorization (tauhidz), orphan sponsorship, dawn charity (sedekah subuh), professional zakat, routine religious study sessions, and the "three day one juz" Qur'anic recitation program. These programs are strengthened by effective leadership strategies, including ideological integration with teachers, openness to feedback, and continuous motivation. The study concludes that strong principal leadership combined with well-designed religious programs significantly contributes to the development of a religious culture in public schools without compromising academic excellence.

Abstrak:

Sekolah umum sering menekankan prestasi akademik sambil memberikan perhatian terbatas pada perkembangan agama dan moral siswa. Namun, harapan orang tua terhadap pendidikan telah beralih, menuntut sekolah yang tidak hanya unggul secara akademis tetapi juga mampu menumbuhkan karakter religius yang kuat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana program yang dipimpin kepala sekolah berkontribusi pada realisasi sekolah agama dalam konteks sekolah menengah negeri. Penelitian dilakukan di SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo, Kabupaten Ngawi, sebuah sekolah negeri yang diakui karena budaya religius dan prestasi akademiknya yang kuat. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian lapangan kualitatif menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologis untuk memahami pengalaman hidup peserta terkait pelaksanaan program keagamaan. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan kepala sekolah dan guru terpilih. Analisis data dilakukan

KATA KUNCI

Sekolah Agama,
Kepemimpinan, Program
Keagamaan, Budaya
Sekolah,

secara terus menerus menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman, yang terdiri dari reduksi data, tampilan data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Validitas data dipastikan melalui triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah memainkan peran sentral dalam menumbuhkan budaya sekolah agama melalui program yang terstruktur, berkelanjutan, dan berbasis nilai. Enam program inti diidentifikasi: hafalan Al-Qur'an (tauhidz), sponsor anak yatim, sedekah subuh, zakat profesional, sesi belajar agama rutin, dan program pembacaan Al-Qur'an "tiga hari satu juz". Program-program ini diperkuat dengan strategi kepemimpinan yang efektif, termasuk integrasi ideologis dengan guru, keterbukaan terhadap umpan balik, dan motivasi berkelanjutan. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kepemimpinan kepala sekolah yang kuat dikombinasikan dengan program keagamaan yang dirancang dengan baik secara signifikan berkontribusi pada pengembangan budaya keagamaan di sekolah umum tanpa mengorbankan keunggulan akademik.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in shaping future generations, not only in terms of academic competence but also in moral and spiritual character development (Izzah, Mulyadi, Walid, Padil, & Wahyudin, 2024; Nafiudin, Hadi, & Jayadi, 2024). In Indonesia, religious values are deeply embedded in the national ideology, as reflected in the first principle of Pancasila, which emphasizes belief in One Supreme God (Fatah, 2021; Ridho & Solehah, 2022). Therefore, integrating religious values into school culture is an essential component of holistic education.

A religious school can be understood as a formal educational institution that systematically integrates religious values into learning processes and daily school life (Susanto et al., 2025). Such integration is not limited to religious subjects but extends to habitual practices, school programs, and interpersonal relationships within the school community. In this context, the role of the school principal becomes highly strategic, as leadership determines the direction, sustainability, and effectiveness of religious culture development (Kulsum & Apriyani, 2025; Yulia, Harahap, & SYAHRI, 2023).

Educational leadership literature emphasizes that principals play a decisive role in shaping school culture through vision-building, program implementation, and value-based leadership (Novia & Aimah, 2024; Supendi, Rosa, Fahrurrozi, & Gaffar, 2025). Effective principals are not only managers but also moral leaders who influence teachers and students through example and shared values (Fiqri & Said, 2025; Utami, Nelitawati, & Al-Kadri, 2024). However, many public schools still prioritize academic achievement while paying limited attention to religious and moral aspects (Fiqri & Said, 2025; Mashoedi, Munif, & Suhermanto, 2025). This condition has contributed to parents' growing preference for private or religious-based schools (Gore & Schrems, 2025; Jonathan, Rantung, & Mandagi, 2023).

In Ngawi Regency, SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo is the only public junior high school known for consistently implementing comprehensive religious programs alongside

strong academic performance. Under the leadership of a nationally recognized principal, the school has successfully developed a religious brand identity. Therefore, this study aims to explore how the principal's programs contribute to the realization of a religious school at SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo and to identify leadership strategies that support sustainable religious culture development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative field research approach with a phenomenological perspective to explore participants' lived experiences related to the implementation of religious programs(Adlini, Dinda, Yulinda, Chotimah, & Merliyana, 2022; Darmalaksana, 2020). The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo, Ngawi Regency. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, consisting of the principal and teachers directly involved in religious program implementation.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: direct observation of school activities, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observation was conducted to capture daily religious practices and program implementation, while interviews provided in-depth insights into leadership strategies and program effectiveness. Document analysis was used to examine school policies, program guidelines, and activity reports.

Data analysis was carried out continuously using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing(Hamzah, 2025; Hardian, Dewi, Tania, & Hikmatiah, 2025). To ensure data credibility and trustworthiness, triangulation of sources and techniques was applied by comparing interview data with observations and documentary evidence(Chand, 2025; Hamzah, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Principal Leadership in Developing a Religious School

Leadership in education refers to the ability of a leader to influence others to collaborate in achieving institutional goals(Lambrecht et al., 2022). In the context of religious school development, leadership must also encompass moral and value-based dimensions (Akhyar, Zukdi, & Deliani, 2024; Rahman, 2025). The principal of SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo demonstrated effective leadership by integrating religious values into school management and culture.

The findings show that the principal implemented three key leadership strategies. First, ideological integration with teachers was established by aligning shared religious values and school vision, fostering collective commitment(Alazmi, 2025). Second, openness to criticism and feedback was practiced to maintain harmonious collaboration and organizational trust (Nurbani, Nurdin, & Dikdik, 2025). Third, continuous motivation and guidance were provided to encourage teachers' active participation in religious programs, reflecting the principal's role as

a motivator and educator (Kotten, Bataona, Ali, Koten, & Tasrim, 2025; Mushthofa, Muqowin, & Dinana, 2022).

These leadership practices align with international studies emphasizing that successful school leaders combine managerial competence with moral leadership to build sustainable school culture (Orunbon, Ifenaike, & Adeleke, 2022; Tan, 2024).

Religious Programs Implemented

The realization of a religious school at SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo is supported by six structured religious programs.

Qur'anic Memorization (Tahfidz) Program

The Tahfidz program is designed to enhance students' Qur'anic literacy and memorization abilities, which are essential components of Islamic education. By focusing on the Qur'an, the program not only promotes the spiritual and moral growth of students but also nurtures a deep connection with the teachings of Islam (Anisaturrizqi, Hanifiyah, & Crismono, 2025; Saputra, Dylan, & Alon, 2023). It recognizes that the memorization of the Qur'an is a valuable skill that fosters discipline, patience, and understanding among students, further cultivating their ethical and spiritual development in alignment with Islamic principles.

The program is implemented through a combination of strategies, including partnerships with Islamic boarding schools, extracurricular activities, and dedicated halaqah sessions in classrooms. These various platforms provide students with continuous support and guidance throughout their memorization journey, ensuring that they remain committed and motivated in their efforts. The integration of different methods allows for a holistic approach to Qur'anic learning, making it accessible and effective for students from various backgrounds and abilities. Furthermore, the program's structure encourages community engagement, promoting the exchange of knowledge and experiences between students and teachers.

As students progress through the program, those who meet their memorization goals are celebrated in special tahfidz graduation ceremonies. These ceremonies serve as a recognition of the students' hard work and commitment, providing them with a sense of accomplishment and pride in their Qur'anic memorization achievements (Rabbani, Shohib, & Inayati, 2025). This formal acknowledgment not only boosts the students' morale but also motivates others to follow in their footsteps. The program's culmination in these graduation ceremonies is a testament to the value placed on both academic and spiritual milestones in the students' educational journey.

Orphan Sponsorship Program

The program reflects the values of Islamic social responsibility, with a particular emphasis on caring for orphans as outlined in the Qur'an. This focus on charity and compassion aligns with the teachings of Islam, which strongly advocate for helping those in need, especially orphans and the underprivileged (Lubis, Tumanggor, Hidayat, & Azhar, 2025). By engaging in this initiative, students not only

gain an understanding of their moral duties but also actively participate in the broader community's welfare, reinforcing the importance of empathy and kindness in their everyday lives.

The program is conducted twice a year and specifically targets orphaned and underprivileged students, ensuring that those most in need are provided with the support and care they deserve. Through this initiative, students and school members are given an opportunity to engage in acts of kindness, promoting a sense of solidarity and social responsibility. It offers a platform where they can contribute to improving the lives of others, directly benefiting those who face financial and social hardships.

Furthermore, the program helps foster empathy and social awareness among the school community, encouraging students to look beyond their own circumstances and consider the needs of others (Karmilah, Fakhri, & Anwar, 2025). This initiative cultivates a deeper sense of social justice, teaching students the value of giving back to society and ensuring that they develop into individuals who prioritize the welfare of others, in line with the Islamic principles of charity and social responsibility.

Dawn Charity (Sedekah Subuh)

Sedekah Subuh is a voluntary charity practice that plays a significant role in strengthening both individual faith and social solidarity within the community. This practice encourages the act of giving in the early morning hours, which is considered especially virtuous in Islamic teachings. It fosters a deep sense of spiritual fulfillment and communal unity, aligning with the values of compassion and selflessness that are central to Islam (Maesyaroh, Rifa Santika, Sevtiani, & Fauziah, 2025). By engaging in this charitable act, individuals are reminded of their responsibility to support those in need, further cultivating a culture of generosity and kindness.

At SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo, the Sedekah Subuh program has been implemented as a regular initiative in which teachers contribute through designated donation containers. This organized approach ensures that the practice is consistent and accessible for all members of the school community. The contributions are collected in the mornings, allowing teachers to begin their day with an act of charity and spiritual reflection. The funds raised through this program are then allocated to various social initiatives, with one of the key focuses being the sponsorship of orphans. This form of charity allows teachers to directly impact the lives of vulnerable individuals, particularly those who lack family support.

The funds raised through Sedekah Subuh not only benefit the orphan sponsorship program but also contribute to other social programs aimed at alleviating the challenges faced by underprivileged members of the community. Through this initiative, SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo promotes a culture of care and social responsibility, demonstrating the power of small but consistent acts of charity in creating a more compassionate and interconnected society. The program also serves as a reminder of the importance of regular giving, ensuring that the values of generosity and solidarity are instilled in the school community.

Professional Zakat Program

Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam, a compulsory obligation that carries profound social and economic significance. It serves as a mechanism for redistributing wealth within the Muslim community, ensuring that those in need receive support. The practice of zakat not only purifies the wealth of individuals but also strengthens social bonds by encouraging compassion, generosity, and a sense of communal responsibility (Widyanata, Nasirun, & Kusumawardani, 2022). By fulfilling this obligation, Muslims contribute to the well-being of society and help address inequality, poverty, and other social issues.

At SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo, the professional zakat program targets civil servants and contract teachers, providing a structured and formal way for educators to fulfill this important religious duty. The contributions made by these teachers are collected and then distributed through the regional zakat authority. This ensures that the funds are channeled to support various community welfare programs, including assistance for the poor, orphaned, and those facing economic hardship. By organizing zakat contributions within the school, the program reinforces the values of generosity and social responsibility among teachers, while also fostering a collective effort to improve the quality of life for the less fortunate.

The professional zakat program at SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo not only facilitates the fulfillment of religious obligations but also plays a vital role in uplifting the community. The funds collected through this program are directly invested in improving the welfare of those in need, demonstrating the tangible impact of zakat on social justice and community development. As a result, the program serves as a model for integrating religious practices with efforts to address broader societal challenges, helping to create a more equitable and caring society. (Iqbal et al., 2024)

Three-Day One Juz Program

This program encourages teachers and staff at SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo to complete one juz of Qur'anic recitation every three days, promoting a disciplined approach to religious practice. The practice of regular Qur'an recitation is deeply rooted in Islamic tradition and has been shown to significantly enhance spiritual discipline and religious commitment. By dedicating time to recite and reflect on the Qur'an, participants not only strengthen their personal faith but also develop a deeper understanding of the teachings and principles of Islam (Che Wan Mohd Rozali et al., 2022). This initiative aims to integrate spiritual practices into the daily lives of educators, fostering an environment where faith is nurtured alongside academic duties.

The structured nature of the program encourages teachers and staff to maintain a steady pace of recitation, ensuring that they engage with the Qur'an consistently. Completing one juz every three days allows for a manageable yet meaningful approach to Qur'anic study, ensuring that the recitation becomes a regular part of their routine. This practice is not only beneficial to the individual's spiritual growth but also contributes to a collective sense of devotion and unity

within the school community. It encourages teachers to lead by example, demonstrating to students the importance of ongoing engagement with the Qur'an.

To ensure consistency and accountability, progress is monitored through digital platforms, which provide an innovative and efficient way to track recitation goals. These platforms allow participants to log their recitation progress, receive reminders, and connect with one another for mutual encouragement. The use of digital tools not only supports the completion of the program's targets but also promotes a culture of accountability, where participants are motivated to stay committed to their spiritual practice. Through this approach, the program ensures that Qur'anic recitation becomes an integral and sustainable aspect of the teachers' spiritual lives.

Routine Religious Study Sessions

Monthly religious study sessions are organized for teachers, staff, and parents, with a focus on topics such as Islamic parenting and moral education. These sessions provide a platform for discussing the values and principles that guide both personal and familial development within an Islamic context. By engaging in these discussions, participants gain a deeper understanding of the importance of nurturing children in accordance with Islamic teachings, ensuring that the values of respect, empathy, and responsibility are passed down to the next generation (Lumban Gaol et al., 2023; Nasution, Siahaan, & Zulheddi, 2022). These sessions also provide an opportunity for parents and educators to learn together, fostering a shared sense of responsibility in the moral and spiritual development of students.

In addition to enhancing the individual understanding of Islamic values, these study sessions strengthen the collaboration between the school and parents. The collective involvement of both groups in the religious education process ensures that students receive consistent guidance, not just in the classroom but also at home. This partnership fosters a holistic approach to a child's development, aligning the messages and teachings that children receive from their school environment with those they encounter in their family life. The shared commitment to Islamic values also helps to build a strong sense of community, reinforcing the school's role as a key player in shaping the moral and spiritual growth of students.

Overall, the integration of these programs underscores the importance of a strong religious school culture, which can be best cultivated through effective leadership, well-structured programming, and the active participation of all stakeholders. The collaboration between teachers, staff, parents, and students ensures that religious values are not only taught but are deeply embedded in the everyday life of the school community. By fostering a culture of collective participation and shared responsibility, the school helps to cultivate an environment where both academic and moral development are prioritized, supporting the overall growth of students in a spiritually nurturing atmosphere.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the principal of SMP Negeri 1 Jogorogo plays a decisive role in realizing a religious school through effective, value-based leadership and well-structured religious programs. Three leadership strategies ideological integration with teachers, openness to feedback, and continuous motivation serve as the foundation for successful program implementation. Furthermore, the six religious programs implemented at the school significantly contribute to fostering religious culture among students, teachers, and the broader school community. These findings confirm that public schools can successfully integrate religious values without compromising academic excellence when supported by committed leadership and sustainable programs.

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