



The Role of School Principals Through Religious Programs in Motivating Students' Religiosity Levels

Wanda Puspita Sari*, Samsilayurni, Nurlena

Universitas Muhammadiyah Palembang, Indonesia

Email : yurni.samsila66@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

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*Corresponding Author

This study aims to examine the role of the principal in motivating students' levels of religiosity through the implementation of religious programs. The research employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving principals, religious education teachers, and students. The data were analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. The findings indicate that the principal plays an active role as a leader, motivator, and supervisor in organizing and overseeing various religious programs, including joint prayers, congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation (tadarus), infaq activities, religious extracurricular programs, and memorization of Asmaul Husna. These programs contribute positively to enhancing students' religiosity, as reflected in their stronger commitment to religious values, increased participation in religious activities, and positive changes in attitudes and behavior. The study implies that effective leadership by school principals is crucial in strengthening students' religious character through well-managed and consistently implemented religious programs. Such leadership can serve as a strategic model for character education in schools, particularly in fostering students' moral and spiritual development.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role not only in transmitting knowledge but also in shaping students' character, particularly their religious character, which is essential for social harmony and moral stability. In today's globalized society, rapid modernization and cultural westernization have significantly influenced students' lifestyles, values, and behavior (Kusumawati et al., 2025). This condition has raised public concern regarding the declining religious awareness and weakening moral values among younger generations. Various studies indicate that moral degradation among students often manifests in

reduced discipline, weakening spiritual commitment, and diminishing respect for religious norms (Susanti et al., 2025). Religious education therefore becomes a strategic instrument to preserve spiritual values and strengthen students' moral foundations. Schools, as formal educational institutions, are expected to serve as centers for cultivating ethical and religious values through structured programs. When religious values are successfully internalized, students are more likely to develop self-control, social responsibility, and moral integrity (Fauzi et al., 2025). Thus, strengthening students' religiosity through school-based religious programs is not merely an institutional concern but a crucial societal need to ensure sustainable character development in future generations.

Despite the strategic role of education in shaping religious character, many schools face challenges in effectively fostering students' religiosity (Hasanah et al., 2024). One major problem lies in the gap between religious instruction and students' daily behavior, where religious knowledge is often limited to cognitive understanding without meaningful internalization (Suhermanto, 2024). This condition is exacerbated by external influences such as digital media, peer pressure, and permissive social environments that tend to weaken students' spiritual motivation. Additionally, religious programs in schools are frequently implemented as routine activities without proper supervision, evaluation, or leadership direction. As a result, these programs fail to create a lasting impact on students' attitudes and behavior. Another critical issue is the lack of strong leadership commitment in managing and sustaining religious programs. Without effective leadership, religious activities risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative. Consequently, students may participate formally but lack genuine spiritual engagement. This situation highlights the need for stronger leadership roles within schools to ensure that religious programs function effectively as instruments for character formation and moral development.

In practice, various religious programs have been introduced in schools, such as collective prayers, Qur'an recitation, religious extracurricular activities, and charity initiatives. However, their implementation often varies in quality and consistency. In some cases, religious activities are conducted merely to fulfill administrative requirements rather than to nurture students' spiritual growth. Observations in educational settings show that students' participation in religious programs is sometimes driven by obligation rather than intrinsic motivation (Jannah et al., 2025). Furthermore, the absence of systematic supervision and motivation from school leaders can reduce students' enthusiasm and commitment. Teachers may focus on instructional duties without integrating religious values into daily learning processes. As a result, the expected outcomes of religious programs—such as improved discipline, moral behavior, and spiritual awareness—are not optimally achieved. This phenomenon indicates

that the effectiveness of religious programs is not solely determined by their existence but by how they are managed, supervised, and exemplified by school leadership, particularly the principal as the central figure in educational governance.

Previous studies emphasize the importance of the principal's role in strengthening religious values within schools. Ali (2020) asserts that principal's function not only as administrators but also as leaders who mobilize school communities toward achieving religious visions. Puspitasari (2019) highlights that principals who actively motivate teachers and students contribute significantly to increased participation in religious activities. Similarly, Kurniawansyah and Mustari (2024) argue that effective supervision by principals ensures the sustainability and quality of religious programs. Botutihe (2020) further explains that principals serve as role models whose behavior directly influences students' character formation. Fitriah and Rahmah (2020) add that principals bear responsibility for improving educational quality, including character education through religious initiatives. Ardiansyah and Nisa (2020) describe principals as multifunctional leaders who integrate managerial, supervisory, and motivational roles to strengthen school culture. These studies collectively demonstrate that leadership is a critical factor in religious character development.

Although existing research has extensively discussed the principal's leadership role, most studies focus on general leadership effectiveness rather than its specific impact on students' religiosity through structured religious programs. Ahmad (2020) emphasizes that religious education should transform knowledge into meaningful values, yet limited attention is given to leadership strategies that facilitate this transformation. Misniaty (2020) proposes comprehensive indicators of student religiosity, but empirical studies rarely link these indicators directly to principals' leadership practices. Gobel et al. (2020) highlight motivational strategies such as rewards, while Sunaedi et al. (2023) emphasize supervision, yet these elements are often examined separately. Moreover, studies on religious programs such as congregational prayers, tadarus, Rohis activities, and memorization of Asmaul Husna (Sumarto & Nahar, 2024; Nafilah et al., 2025; Sholihah & Billfath, 2024) tend to focus on outcomes without analyzing leadership processes. This gap indicates the need for integrative research examining how principals' leadership roles systematically influence students' religiosity.

This study offers a novel contribution by integrating leadership theory with practical implementation of religious programs to analyze their influence on students' religiosity. Unlike previous research that examines religious activities or leadership roles separately, this study positions the principal as a

central actor who simultaneously functions as a leader, motivator, and supervisor within religious program implementation. The novelty lies in exploring how leadership practices directly shape students' religious motivation, attitudes, and behavior through daily, weekly, and monthly religious activities. By focusing on leadership-driven religious programs, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how spiritual values are internalized rather than merely taught. This approach is essential to address contemporary challenges in character education, where moral and spiritual development requires consistent guidance, modeling, and institutional commitment. The findings are expected to enrich theoretical discussions on educational leadership and offer practical insights for strengthening religious character education in schools.

Based on the identified issues and research gaps, this study addresses the problem of how principals play a role in motivating students' religiosity through religious programs. The central argument of this research is that effective principal leadership significantly influences students' religious motivation and character formation. When principals actively lead, motivate, and supervise religious programs, students are more likely to internalize religious values and demonstrate them in daily behavior. Conversely, weak leadership may result in superficial participation without meaningful impact. This study assumes that leadership-driven religious programs function not only as routine activities but as transformative processes shaping students' spiritual awareness. Therefore, this research contributes by providing empirical evidence on the strategic role of principals in religious character education and offers a leadership-based framework that can be adapted by schools seeking to strengthen students' religiosity and moral development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of social phenomena by emphasizing meanings, experiences, and perspectives of the research subjects. A case study design was considered appropriate as the research focused on exploring the role of the principal in motivating students' religiosity through religious programs within a specific educational context. This design enables a comprehensive examination of the dynamics, interactions, and processes involved in the implementation of religious programs, allowing the researcher to capture the complexity of leadership practices and their influence on students' religious behavior in a natural setting.

The research was conducted at MA Al-Akbar Sidomulyo. This location was selected because the madrasa consistently implements structured religious programs as part of its educational activities, making it a relevant setting for examining the principal's leadership role in fostering student religiosity. The researcher's presence in the field was essential, as the researcher served as the primary instrument in data collection and interpretation. Data sources consisted of primary data obtained directly from participants and secondary data derived from institutional documents and records relevant to religious programs and school activities.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations focused on the implementation of religious programs and students' participation in these activities. Interviews were conducted with the principal, religious education teachers, and students to obtain in-depth information regarding leadership roles and program effectiveness. Documentation was used to support and validate data obtained from observations and interviews. Data analysis followed systematic stages, including data condensation and reduction, data display, and data verification or conclusion drawing. Through these stages, findings were formulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the principal supports religious programs and motivates students' religiosity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of the Principal as a Driver of Religious Programs

The research findings indicate that the principal plays a central role as the primary driver of religious programs. Interview and observation data show that the principal is directly involved in planning, coordinating, and monitoring religious activities, including congregational prayers, istighosah, and Rohis programs. The principal's active presence during religious activities provides guidance to teachers and encourages students to participate consistently. This involvement demonstrates that leadership in religious programs extends beyond administrative responsibilities to direct engagement in school spiritual life.

Teachers acknowledged that the principal consistently motivates them to integrate religious values into daily learning and extracurricular activities. This leadership support strengthens teachers' commitment and enhances the continuity of religious programs. Similar findings are reported by Effendi (2025) and Maulana and Istanto (2025), who found that principals play a decisive role in integrating spiritual and moral values through leadership-driven programs. Septariani (2024) also emphasized that transformational leadership contributes significantly to strengthening religious values in schools.

From a discussion perspective, these findings reinforce the argument that principals function as moral leaders whose behavior directly influences school culture. The principal's role as a role model aligns with studies by Idayani et al. (2023) and Taufiqurrahman et al. (2023), which highlight leadership behavior as a determining factor in developing students' religiosity. This study strengthens existing literature by showing how direct leadership engagement sustains religious programs and motivates students' religious commitment.

Implementation of Religious Programs in Schools

The results show that religious programs are implemented in a structured and systematic manner. These programs include collective prayers before and after lessons, Qur'an recitation before classes, memorization of Asmaul Husna and short surahs, congregational Dhuha and Dhuhur prayers, monthly istighosah, Rohis activities, Qiro'ah, and Friday almsgiving (infaq). All activities are conducted routinely under the supervision of religious and homeroom teachers, ensuring consistency and discipline in implementation.

Observations indicate that these religious activities are embedded within the school's daily, weekly, and monthly schedules. The principal facilitates program implementation by allocating time, providing infrastructure, and coordinating teachers' roles. This structured approach allows religious activities to function as habitual practices rather than incidental events. Similar patterns were identified by Al Khozi and Amrullah (2025) and Berliana Khofifah Febriyanti and Supriyadi (2023), who found that religious habituation embedded in school culture effectively strengthens students' religious character.

In discussion, the findings suggest that systematic implementation supported by leadership enhances the effectiveness of religious programs. Consistent religious habituation fosters a strong religious school culture, as also emphasized by Maulana and Istanto (2025). This study contributes by demonstrating how leadership support transforms religious activities into sustainable cultural practices that reinforce students' spiritual development.

Impact of Religious Programs on Student Motivation

The findings reveal that religious programs positively influence students' motivation, particularly in spiritual and moral dimensions. Students reported increased enthusiasm for worship when religious activities were conducted collectively. Congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation, and memorization activities encouraged discipline, consistency, and spiritual awareness. Additionally, Friday almsgiving activities fostered empathy, social responsibility, and a spirit of sharing among students.

The habit of reading the Qur'an before lessons also increased students' interest in religious knowledge. Students not only engaged in reading but also demonstrated efforts to understand and apply religious teachings in their daily lives. These findings are consistent with Murharyana et al. (2024), who found that Islamic religious education significantly enhances students' learning motivation. Lee (2018) similarly emphasized that participation in religious activities fosters intrinsic motivation and personal meaning.

From a discussion perspective, these results indicate that religious programs function as motivational mechanisms that strengthen students' intrinsic motivation. Junaidi et al. (2023) highlight that religious engagement enhances motivation and self-efficacy, while this study extends their findings by showing that school-based religious programs also shape students' discipline and moral awareness. Collective religious practices create a supportive environment that encourages sustained motivation and religious commitment.

Formation of Religiosity Through Habituation and Synergy

The results demonstrate that continuous habituation through religious programs significantly contributes to the formation of students' religiosity. Students showed increased obedience to religious teachings, respect for religious symbols, and active involvement in religious activities. Over time, these practices became part of students' daily behavior, indicating internalization of religious values rather than situational compliance.

The success of these programs is reinforced by strong synergy between the principal, teachers, and students. Teachers guide technical implementation, students act as active participants, and the principal functions as a coordinator and unifier. This collaborative leadership structure strengthens program sustainability and effectiveness. Similar conclusions were drawn by Al Ghazi and Amrullah (2025) and Idayani et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of collective commitment in building religious school culture.

In discussion, the findings confirm that religiosity formation is most effective when supported by consistent habituation and collaborative leadership. This study complements previous research by illustrating how synergy among school stakeholders transforms religious programs into meaningful experiences that shape students' religious character, discipline, and moral responsibility.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the principal plays a decisive role in strengthening students' religiosity through consistent and well-managed religious programs. The key insight of this research is that religious character formation is most effective when leadership functions not only administratively but also

pedagogically and morally. The principal's role as a driving force, mentor, and role model creates a supportive religious atmosphere that encourages students' intrinsic motivation toward worship, discipline, social awareness, and spiritual commitment. The habituation of religious activities, carried out collectively and continuously, enables students to internalize religious values, resulting in observable improvements in commitment to religious teachings, enthusiasm for learning, and spiritual closeness. These findings emphasize that synergy among principals, teachers, and students is essential for developing a madrasa environment that balances academic achievement with religious and moral character formation.

In terms of scholarly contribution, this study strengthens the discourse on educational leadership by demonstrating how principal-led religious programs function as an effective strategy for enhancing student religiosity. The research contributes empirically by integrating leadership roles, religious habituation, and student motivation within a single analytical framework. However, this study is limited by its focus on a single institutional context and the use of qualitative data, which may restrict generalizability. Future research is encouraged to involve multiple schools, apply mixed-method approaches, or examine longitudinal effects to gain deeper insights into the sustainability and broader impact of leadership-driven religious programs on students' religiosity.

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