

THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN DRIVING A SUCCESSFUL LITERACY PROGRAM AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the principal's role in implementing the literacy program at SD Negeri 3 Gedong, Patean District, Kendal Regency, Central Java, which includes the stages of planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The research focuses on how the principal, as an instructional leader, drives the success of the literacy program through strategic planning, teacher empowerment, and community collaboration. This study employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through interviews with the principal, teachers, students, and parents; observations of literacy activities; and documentation such as school literacy policies, teacher journals, student portfolios, and evaluation reports. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that the principal played a central role in four main stages: (1) participatory planning involving the literacy team and teachers; (2) implementation through 15-minute reading sessions, reading corners, and student recognition programs; (3) monitoring via academic supervision and coordination meetings; and (4) evaluation emphasizing reflection and continuous improvement. The principal's leadership significantly strengthened the school's literacy culture, reflected in higher student engagement, teacher participation, and parental support. The study concludes that developing principals' capacity in literacy-based academic supervision, enhancing literacy media, and fostering school-community collaboration are key strategies to sustain a strong literacy culture.

Keywords

Literacy Culture, Literacy Program, Principal's Role.



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INTRODUCTION

Literacy is widely recognized as a fundamental competency for lifelong learning and active participation in society. Ideally, literacy development in elementary schools should be integrated into all aspects of learning, supported by strong leadership, adequate resources, and collaboration among education stakeholders. However, a gap often arises between this ideal and the actual practice in schools. Literacy programs are frequently implemented inconsistently across classrooms and grade levels, lacking systematic integration into the curriculum and resulting in fragmented literacy activities (Beard, 2018; Snow & Matthews, 2016; Soto-Pérez et al., 2020). Schools also face challenges such as limited teacher pedagogical capacity, inadequate facilities, and low parental involvement in supporting literacy activities (Adao et al., 2023 ; Groenewald, 2024).

To address these challenges, instructional leadership becomes a crucial factor in bridging the gap between policy and classroom implementation. Principals, as instructional leaders, are responsible for guiding teachers, coordinating literacy initiatives, and fostering a school culture that values reading and writing (Hallinger, 2011; Kilag & Sasan, 2023; Brinia & Papantoniou, 2016). Moreover, parental and community involvement is essential to sustain children's literacy habits both at school and at home (Norman et al., 2021; Alfian et al., 2025); and (Townsend et al., 2018). Therefore, school leaders must empower teachers and parents through participatory management, supervision, and communication that promote a culture of reading and writing as a collective responsibility (Magnusson, 2020; Prabowo & Suyitno, 2023).

Empirical studies in recent years have highlighted the importance of principal leadership in improving literacy outcomes. (Hasanah & Pramono, 2025; Rahman et al., 2020) found that school principals play a strategic role in developing literacy policy, empowering teachers, and providing reading facilities. (Suryati & Sulistiyo, 2025) and (Li et al., 2024) demonstrated that effective school literacy programs depend on principals' ability to integrate reading and writing into everyday school activities. (Candrasari et al., 2023 and Khramova et al., 2022) emphasized that visionary leadership strengthens collaboration between teachers and students in literacy innovation. (Zhu et al., 2022) revealed that leadership indirectly influences students' reading performance through teacher trust and commitment, while (Abella et al., 2024) (Tarhid, 2017), and (Mcgeehan & Norris, 2020) showed that literacy leadership combined with community engagement enhances reading motivation and participation.

Although these studies show a consistent relationship between leadership and literacy culture, most were conducted in general or developing schools, with few exploring leadership practices in high-performing elementary schools that have successfully sustained literacy excellence. In addition, previous research rarely examined the complete management cycle—planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation—of literacy programs from the perspective of instructional leadership. This gap underscores the need to investigate leadership strategies that can serve as replicable models for other schools.

The School Literacy Movement (*Gerakan Literasi Sekolah*), launched by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud, 2016), mandates that literacy be integrated across subjects. However, many schools still view literacy as an extracurricular or symbolic activity rather than a core instructional practice (Hatimah et al., 2025) and (Jean & Gading, 2024). Within the theoretical framework, Instructional Leadership Theory (Hallinger, 2011) and School-Based Management principles (Depdiknas, 2008) emphasize that effective principals must plan strategically, supervise learning, and build collaborative teacher cultures. This approach aligns with transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), which focuses on inspiring and empowering teachers to achieve shared goals.

SD Negeri 3 Gedong, located in Kendal Regency, Central Java, is one of the top-performing elementary schools in Indonesia. According to the 2025 *Rapor Pendidikan*, 94.44% of its students achieved the minimum literacy competence, ranking the school in the top 20% nationally. This achievement reflects the effectiveness of the principal's leadership in cultivating a literacy culture that is structured, participatory, and sustainable.

The urgency of strengthening literacy, particularly digital literacy, at SD Negeri 3 Gedong, has become increasingly evident in response to the growing demands of 21st-century competencies for elementary school learners. Digital literacy encompasses not only the ability to understand text-based information but also the skills to access, evaluate, and responsibly use digital content (Peng & Yu, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). In today's technology-driven learning environment, young learners must be able to distinguish credible information, recognize risks in digital spaces, and utilize digital tools to support academic tasks (Blyznyuk et al., 2025). This need is especially critical given that the 2025 Education Report (*Rapor Pendidikan*) indicates that 94.44% of students at SDN 3 Gedong have achieved minimum foundational literacy competence, yet the school's internal diagnostic assessment reveals that only 67% of students in Grades IV–VI are proficient in navigating digital

texts and comprehending multimedia-based instructions. This disparity signals a significant gap between traditional literacy and digital literacy that must be addressed, as limited digital literacy can impede students' learning readiness, particularly in self-directed tasks that increasingly rely on technology (Sari, 2022; Suwanto et al., 2022). Furthermore, recent community data in Kendal Regency show a sharp increase in students' use of personal devices, heightening the risk of exposure to inappropriate or misleading online content when not accompanied by strong digital competencies (Kemedikbudristek, 2024). These conditions underscore the academic concern that strengthening digital literacy at SDN 3 Gedong is not only relevant but necessary to ensure student protection, empowerment, and preparedness for future learning demands.

The implementation of a literacy program at SDN 3 Gedong is driven by several interrelated contextual factors, including the school's high yet uneven literacy outcomes, the increasingly digital-native characteristics of its learners, and the mandates of national education policies. The school's 2024 Self-Evaluation Report indicates that although a strong culture of reading is well established, only 43% of teachers have fully integrated digital literacy into classroom instruction, resulting in literacy practices that remain heavily centered on traditional reading routines rather than technology-supported activities. Moreover, an internal parent survey found that 72% of families allow their children to use digital devices, yet only 29% provide consistent supervision, reinforcing the need for the school to serve as a central agent that educates both students and families while fostering collaborative literacy partnerships (Norman et al., 2021; Townsend et al., 2018). The program is also supported by a strong legal and policy framework. The School Literacy Movement (*Gerakan Literasi Sekolah*) was mandated by Ministerial Regulation No. 23 of 2015 and strengthened under the Merdeka Curriculum (Kemedikbud, 2016) requires literacy to be integrated across intra-, co-, and extracurricular learning activities. Additionally, the principles of School-Based Management (Depdiknas, 2008) and Instructional Leadership Theory (Hallinger, 2011) emphasize that school principals must strategically plan, implement, and evaluate literacy initiatives through collaborative, systematic, and sustainable practices. As one of Indonesia's top-performing elementary schools, ranking in the top 20% nationally, SDN 3 Gedong has both the capacity and responsibility to model effective literacy leadership for other schools in Kendal Regency. Thus, the development of a strengthened literacy program, grounded in instructional leadership, not only fulfills national policy expectations but also directly addresses the school's contextual needs in preparing students to thrive in an increasingly digital learning environment.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on instructional leadership and school literacy management by providing an empirical model of best practices in a high-performing school. Practically, it offers insights and strategies for principals, teachers, and policymakers to strengthen literacy culture through participatory leadership, teacher empowerment, and school–community collaboration. Based on this context, this study aims to describe and analyze the principal's role in planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the literacy program at SD Negeri 3 Gedong.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the principal's role in driving the success of the literacy program at SD Negeri 3 Gedong, Patean District, Kendal Regency, Central Java. The qualitative case study approach was chosen because it allows for a deep understanding of leadership practices in their natural context (Creswell, 2009). The research data consisted of descriptive information about the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the literacy program. The sources of data included primary data obtained from interviews with the principal, literacy coordinator, teachers, students, and parents, as well as secondary data collected from official documents such as school literacy policies, decrees of the literacy team, meeting minutes, teacher journals, student portfolios, and literacy activity reports.

Data were collected using three techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted from June to August 2025 to record the implementation of literacy activities such as the 15-minute reading sessions, classroom reading corners, and coordination meetings between teachers and the principal. Interviews were held with the principal, literacy coordinator, five classroom teachers, six students, and four parents to obtain comprehensive perspectives on the literacy program's planning and implementation. Documentation analysis was used to review literacy plans, reports, photos, and meeting records that supported the findings from observation and interviews. All data collection techniques were applied through triangulation to ensure data validity and reliability by comparing information from different sources and methods.

The data analysis process followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. During data reduction, the researcher selected, categorized, and summarized information related to the principal's leadership in literacy management. The data were then displayed in descriptive and tabular forms according to George R. Terry's four management

functions—planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn by identifying leadership patterns and verifying them through cross-checking among data sources. This analytical process allowed the researcher to interpret the principal’s leadership role comprehensively and relate the findings to relevant theories of instructional leadership and school-based management.

Below is the conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between the research focus, data collection methods, and analysis stages:

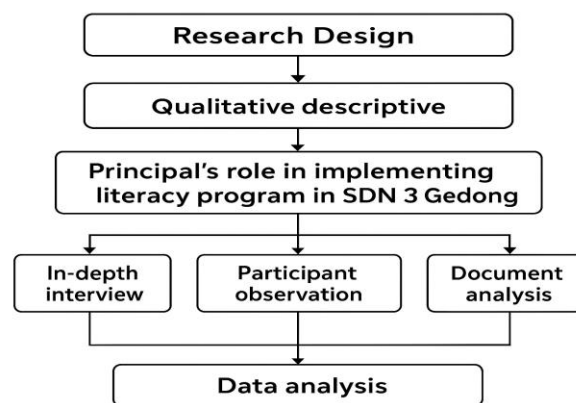


Figure 1. Research Design

This framework demonstrates that the study examines the principal’s role through the four management functions, linking leadership practices directly to literacy program success and, ultimately, student literacy achievement.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents the results of the field research conducted at SD N 3 Gedong, focusing on the principal’s leadership role in the literacy program. The data were collected through interviews, observations, document analysis, and questionnaires, and are organized into four key components: planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation.

Table 1. The Principal's Role in Supporting the Literacy Program at SD Negeri 3 Gedong

Aspect	Findings
Planning	The principal led participatory planning involving the literacy team and teachers, identified student literacy needs, developed annual literacy work plans, and integrated literacy into daily routines.
Organizing	The principal established a school literacy team with clear roles and responsibilities, assigned teachers according to competence, and coordinated schedules, supervision, and resource management.
Implementation	The principal implemented daily and thematic literacy activities such as 15-minute reading sessions, reading corners, journal writing, and storytelling, and provided resources and motivation to teachers and students.
Evaluation	The principal conducted systematic monitoring, reflection meetings, and follow-up action plans to improve literacy quality, involving teachers, students, and parents collaboratively.

Source: School Literacy Program Report SDN 3 Gedong (2024)

The Principal's Role in Planning the Literacy Program

The findings reveal that literacy planning at SD Negeri 3 Gedong was carried out through a collaborative and systematic process. The principal initiated the planning stage by identifying literacy needs based on student reading levels, school resources, and teacher input. Through coordination meetings, the principal involved teachers and the literacy team to formulate a shared vision, set goals, and prepare an annual literacy work plan. The plan included daily, weekly, and monthly literacy activities such as reading sessions, journal writing, and storytelling, each with measurable indicators.

In addition, the principal aligned literacy planning with the school curriculum to ensure that reading and writing were integrated into thematic learning. Reading activities were designed to become part of daily school routines rather than extracurricular events. The principal also emphasized contextual literacy by linking reading materials to students' experiences and local culture. Supporting documents such as the Literacy Team Decree, annual work plans, and meeting minutes confirmed that the planning process was structured, participatory, and aligned with the school's literacy goals. Overall, the planning process demonstrated the principal's leadership as a facilitator and policy initiator who mobilized teachers, students, and parents to participate actively in building a school literacy culture.

The Principal's Role in Organizing the Literacy Program

The organizing process was evident through the establishment of a functional School Literacy Team (SLT). The principal formally appointed team members through an official decree, assigning clear responsibilities such as literacy coordination, reading material management,

classroom supervision, documentation, and evaluation. Each teacher was involved in literacy activities according to their expertise and interest—for example, facilitating reading sessions, maintaining reading corners, or documenting literacy activities. Coordination among teachers and the literacy team was maintained through regular meetings and monitoring schedules. The principal ensured that each member understood their duties and that literacy activities were implemented consistently. Document analysis confirmed the existence of structured task divisions, coordination notes, and work reports. The principal's leadership style reflected transparency, cooperation, and shared responsibility. Furthermore, the organization of literacy activities extended beyond internal teamwork. The principal also involved students and parents in supporting literacy projects, such as book donations and reading exhibitions. This inclusive approach fostered ownership and strengthened the sustainability of the literacy movement within the school.

The Principal's Role in Implementing the Literacy Program

The implementation of the literacy program at SD Negeri 3 Gedong reflected consistent leadership in managing daily routines and creating a conducive reading culture. Literacy activities were conducted regularly every morning through the 15-minute reading program, where students read under teacher supervision. Each classroom had a reading corner filled with storybooks and student writings. Teachers maintained literacy journals to document reading progress, while the principal monitored classroom implementation and gave recognition to active readers. The principal also facilitated thematic literacy learning by integrating reading and writing into classroom subjects. Teachers were encouraged to use local stories and real-life experiences to make literacy learning more engaging. Regular literacy events, such as storytelling competitions, writing exhibitions, and book fairs, were organized to strengthen students' motivation. Another key finding was the principal's effort to provide adequate resources and facilities. Books were continuously added through BOS funding and community contributions, while teachers received short training sessions on creative reading and writing strategies. The implementation of literacy activities showed a strong sense of collaboration, discipline, and innovation—indicators of an active literacy culture nurtured through consistent leadership.

The Principal's Role in Evaluating the Literacy Program

The evaluation stage demonstrated the principal's reflective and managerial ability in maintaining program quality. Evaluation was carried out periodically through classroom observations, literacy team reports, and structured reflection meetings. Teachers submitted weekly

and monthly reports containing summaries of literacy activities and student reading progress. The principal led evaluation meetings to identify strengths, weaknesses, and improvement plans. This process encouraged collective reflection among teachers, enabling them to share experiences and best practices. Evaluation data were also used to improve program planning, adjust reading schedules, and develop new literacy initiatives.

In addition, the principal ensured transparency by communicating evaluation results to parents during school meetings. Student literacy portfolios and journals were presented as evidence of progress, encouraging parental involvement in supporting children's reading at home. The evaluation process did not merely assess performance but functioned as a cycle of continuous improvement, fostering a sustainable literacy culture in the school. Overall, the findings confirm that the principal's leadership at SD Negeri 3 Gedong was evident in all four managerial functions—planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating. Each stage was carried out collaboratively, systematically, and reflectively, resulting in a strong and sustainable literacy culture that engaged teachers, students, and parents.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the principal's leadership at SD Negeri 3 Gedong played a crucial role in establishing a strong and sustainable literacy culture through systematic planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. The discussion below elaborates on each stage by relating the empirical data to relevant theories and previous research, followed by the researcher's interpretative analysis. The planning stage reflected the principal's capacity as a strategic leader who formulates literacy goals based on school needs and conditions. The results show that the principal involved teachers and the literacy team in participatory planning and integrated literacy into daily learning. This practice aligns with the concept of planning as a process of selecting and organizing actions to achieve goals efficiently and effectively.

From the theoretical perspective, the planning activities correspond to (Hallinger, 2011) model of *instructional leadership*, in which principals establish clear instructional goals, manage the curriculum, and coordinate teaching activities. The participatory planning at SD Negeri 3 Gedong also resonates with School-Based Management (Depdiknas, 2008) that emphasizes decision-making autonomy and community involvement. Similar findings were reported by (Hasanah & Pramono, 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2022) who found that strategic planning in literacy programs fosters teacher participation and program continuity. Likewise, (Anam et al., 2025) emphasized the

importance of contextualized and needs-based planning in improving school performance. The present study extends these insights by showing how planning in a high-performing school not only responds to existing needs but also anticipates sustainability through reflection and innovation.

The novelty of this study lies in identifying *planning as a shared leadership process* where the principal acts not as the sole decision-maker but as a facilitator who empowers teachers to co-design the literacy agenda. This approach transforms planning from an administrative task into a collaborative professional culture. The organizing process revealed that the principal successfully established a clear, functional, and collaborative structure through the formation of the School Literacy Team. Each member had well-defined duties, and coordination was maintained through regular meetings and supervision. This aligns with (Robbins & Judge, 2016) who assert that effective organizational structure clarifies authority, responsibility, and communication flow to achieve institutional goals. Furthermore, the organization of literacy activities at SD Negeri 3 Gedong demonstrated characteristics of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), where the principal motivates, empowers, and inspires teachers to take ownership of the literacy movement. Teachers were not merely executors of instructions but active collaborators in achieving literacy targets.

Supporting studies by (Silaen et al., 2022) and (Candrasari et al., 2023) also emphasize that collaborative structures enhance teacher commitment and accountability. However, unlike previous research conducted in average-performing schools, this study provides empirical evidence from a high-achieving context where organizational clarity directly contributes to program sustainability. The researcher argues that the principal's organizational leadership at SD Negeri 3 Gedong represents a *hybrid model*: combining managerial order (through clear task delegation) and pedagogical flexibility (through open collaboration). This duality ensures that literacy activities are both systematic and adaptive to changing needs. In the implementation phase, the principal functioned as a facilitator, motivator, and instructional leader who consistently ensured that literacy activities became an integral part of school culture. Daily reading sessions, journal writing, and storytelling were implemented under continuous guidance and supervision. This is in line with (Hallinger, 2011) assertion that effective instructional leadership involves coordinating teaching and learning activities to enhance student achievement.

The study also found that the principal promoted contextual and thematic literacy, connecting reading materials to students' local environment. This finding reinforces (Glynn &

Winter, 2004) concept of contextual learning, which states that learning becomes meaningful when linked to real-life experiences. Previous research by (Suryati & Sulistiyo, 2025) and similarly reported that (Hatimah et al., 2025) literacy programs succeed when principals integrate them into thematic learning and provide ongoing motivation for teachers and students. However, the present study adds a new dimension by highlighting how the principal institutionalized these practices into a *routine school system*, transforming literacy from a temporary campaign into a sustainable learning culture.

This transformation shows the principal's mastery of instructional leadership at the operational level, ensuring that every classroom becomes a literacy-rich environment. The researcher concludes that literacy implementation at SD Negeri 3 Gedong represents not just programmatic execution but cultural assimilation where reading and writing become shared habits of the entire school community. Evaluation in this study was found to be systematic, participatory, and reflective, involving teachers, students, and parents. The principal's evaluation process included regular observation, data collection, and follow-up meetings that emphasized improvement rather than inspection. This reflects Sergiovanni's concept of moral leadership, where evaluation serves as a means of professional growth instead of control. From a managerial standpoint, the principal's evaluation process aligns with the interactive evaluation model described by Miles et al. (2014), which involves data collection, reflection, and continuous feedback. Evaluation at SD Negeri 3 Gedong also embodies the principles of data-driven decision making (Schildkamp, 2019; Liansari et al., 2021; Kartikasari & Nuryasana, 2022) as results were used to revise strategies, update resources, and refine literacy schedules.

Comparable findings were presented by (Mustaqim & Satriah, 2024), who emphasized reflective supervision as an effective form of evaluation to enhance teacher performance. However, the distinct contribution of this study lies in showing how evaluation outcomes were openly shared with parents and used as learning evidence, fostering a transparent culture of accountability. The researcher interprets that the evaluation process at SD Negeri 3 Gedong transformed into a collective reflection forum, enabling continuous innovation and ensuring that literacy progress remained measurable, transparent, and sustainable. This demonstrates how instructional supervision, when applied reflectively, strengthens both teacher professionalism and student achievement.

Synthesizing the four stages—planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating—it can be concluded that the principal at SD Negeri 3 Gedong demonstrates holistic instructional

leadership characterized by collaboration, reflection, and sustainability. This leadership aligns with (Prasetia & Adlan, 2022) and (Prasetia & Adlan, 2022) that integrates curriculum management, teacher development, and continuous monitoring. The results also reaffirm (Bush, 2018), (Rahman et al., 2020), (Mustajab et al., 2023) frameworks emphasizing that effective leadership transforms literacy from an isolated program into a core element of learning culture. The integration of teacher empowerment, community participation, and continuous supervision forms a self-sustaining literacy ecosystem. The novelty of this research lies in presenting a model of *literacy-oriented instructional leadership* in a high-performing school context. While previous studies often emphasized challenges in low-performing schools, this study reveals how strategic leadership, supported by collaboration and reflection, ensures literacy excellence and cultural continuity. Thus, the discussion highlights that the principal's role extends beyond administrative management it represents transformative educational leadership that empowers all stakeholders to make literacy a shared identity of the school community.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that effective instructional leadership plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of the literacy program at SDN 3 Gedong. The principal's leadership was evident through systematic planning, continuous supervision, and the creation of a supportive school culture that prioritizes literacy as a shared responsibility among all stakeholders. The integration of literacy activities into daily routines, such as the 15-minute reading program, the provision of class reading corners, and collaboration with teachers and parents, reflects a well-structured and sustainable approach to improving students' reading habits. Moreover, the principal's ability to communicate the school's literacy vision, motivate teachers, and allocate resources strategically contributed significantly to the program's effectiveness. The principal not only acted as a manager and supervisor but also as a motivator and role model, ensuring that literacy activities became an integral part of school culture. In conclusion, instructional leadership at SDN 3 Gedong has successfully transformed the literacy program into a collaborative and meaningful movement. Through strategic planning, effective communication, and consistent monitoring, the school community has built a strong foundation for fostering students' literacy skills and promoting a culture of lifelong learning. These findings reinforce the importance of visionary and participatory leadership in enhancing the quality of education, particularly in literacy development at the

elementary school level.

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