

# Building Literacy of Early Age Students' Language; Teacher Managerial Competence and Legal-Rational Authority of Boarding School Leaders

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**ABSTRACT.** This article aims to analyze and find the authority of boarding school leaders and the managerial competence of teachers in constructing language literacy awareness in the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School, Jember Regency. This research uses a qualitative type with a descriptive exploratory approach—data collection techniques using in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. The data were then analyzed using the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and concluding with the validity of the data, the credibility of the triangulation method and sources, and confirmability. Based on the research findings, it was concluded that STDI teacher Imam Syafi'i carries out his role as the authority in compiling programs, organizing language literacy teams, mobilizing teaching staff and staff, optimizing Islamic boarding schools' resources, and controlling activities through monitoring activity processes and achievement of religious literacy programs and utilizing monitoring results in increasing progress quality of students with sustainable language literacy programs.

**Keywords:** *Managerial Competence, Teachers, Competence, Language Literacy, Awareness.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's literacy level, according to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report organized by the OECD, 2022, Indonesia will be part of the 10 countries that have low literacy levels, ranking 62 out of 70 countries (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022). Strengthened by the Reading Literacy Activity Index (IKLM) report, which explains that out of 34 provinces in Indonesia, 9 provinces (26%) fall into the category of moderate literacy activity (index score between 40.01 – 60.00); 24 provinces (71%) are in the low category (20.01 – 40.00); and 1 province (3%) is in the deficient category (0 – 20.00) (Agustina, 2022). This means most provinces have a low literacy activity level, and none are included in the high and very high literacy activity levels (index values between 60.01 – 80.00 and 80.01 – 100.00) (Luna, Solsken, & Kutz, 2020).

Literacy is understood as an activity of reading and writing a sich and requires critical thinking skills in assessing sources of knowledge from print, visual, digital, and auditory (Keefe & Copeland, 2011), literacy skills are expected to be able to develop a positive attitude (Arif, Munfa'ati, & Kalimatusyaroh, 2021; Fatimah, Supangat, & Sinensis, 2022; Suriagiri, 2022). Literacy has a very complex and broad meaning, such as basic, financial, digital, scientific, and religious (Zua, 2021).

The latest definition of literacy refers to understanding, engaging, using, analyzing, and transforming knowledge. However, literacy in children is interpreted as the child's ability to read and write according to the child's stage of language development. Based on this definition, language literacy in early childhood is carried out differently depending on the stage of child development (Nur Haliza, Eko Kuntarto, 2020). The development of early childhood language literacy aims to build an early literacy foundation in children which serves to become the basis for children's reading skills at a later stage and prepares children to be able to adapt to learning in formal schools and develop other abilities in children (Hapsari, Sugito, & Fauziah, 2020; Yantoro et al., 2022; Yapandi & Jayanti, 2023).

The description of the concepts and literacy goals developed by Gallagher aligns with the objectives of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, namely Islamic boarding schools (Zuhdi & Sarwenda, 2020). Islamic boarding schools with formal education and madrasah have their characteristics in the development of religious literacy, especially in the leadership dimension, which is based on the personal characteristics and authority of the kiai, the structural elements of the pesantren, as well as material from certain religious schools or beliefs (Aisyah, Ilmi, Rosyid, Wulandari, & Akhmad, 2022; Ma'arif & Nabila, 2020; Rozaq, Basri, & Indah, 2022). Research on Kiai authority also has a role in developing the quality of education in Islamic boarding schools as the results of research (Fanani, 2022) and (R. M. Fauzi, 2018) that Kiai authority in making decisions uses a collective-collegial and situational approach, namely instructive, supportive leadership and participatory. Another policy by Kiai is the leadership regeneration policy which is carried out through the delegation of authority, delegation of tasks, and changing positions (Zarkasyi, 2021).

Weber argues that authority is the ability to make others willing to accept and do what they want, even though this may not be approved or even opposed (Porfirio et al., 2021). Kiai, as pesantren leaders, have authority with policy outputs that are adhered to by the entire organizational structure because they are seen as individuals who have competence with their functions as mediators, dynamists, as well as motivators for the community they lead (Safi'i, 2020). The authority of the Kiai is a fundamental part so that the policies and implementation of religious literacy set by the Kiai run effectively and are oriented towards sustainable quality (Fanani, 2022).

Among the characteristics of religious literacy in Islamic Education are (1) the focus of study on texts, both sacred texts such as the Koran, hadiths, and religious texts which are the result of religious thought or contemplation known as the yellow book, (2) Texts the text is studied and taught intergenerationally with sanad from teacher to teacher, (3) Sacred religious texts (scriptures) become part of religious rituals and activities, (4) Religious texts, both sacred and profane, become part of collective and individual identity (Hatika, 2021). So that through the characteristics of religious literacy, it becomes more evident the position of Islamic boarding schools as traditional Islamic educational institutions in which they study religious knowledge (*Tamaqua fi al-din*) and emphasize the formation of morals or morals of students that are in line with the goals of religious literacy (Jafar, 2022).

One of the Islamic boarding schools that have characteristics in developing language awareness and literacy for students aged 7 to 9 years is the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School, Jember. This pesantren was chosen as a research locus because it has creations and innovations in developing its students' science through a language literacy culture. The caretaker of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School realizes the importance of religious literacy in honing the skills of students, considering that religious literacy is very much needed to build a critical and creative attitude in seeing various existing phenomena, both in the internal and external environment of the pesantren. Through the religious literacy program that is implemented at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School, it is hoped that it will be able to graduate students who are sensitive to the development of science and technology so that the students can survive and contribute to the development of the scientific world at the pesantren and outside the pesantren (Observation, 2022)

Research on language literacy has been carried out by many previous researchers, including research (Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022) and (Nurpratiwi, Effendi, & Amaliyah, 2021) concluded that language literacy strategies in learning can form critical thinking skills in understanding various religious contents that impact quality. Students' language literacy on the dimensions of knowledge and practice is getting more vital for students. Research (Zuhdi & Sarwenda, 2020) on religious literacy of 23 religious education teachers from DKI Jakarta, Banten, and West Java concluded that not only religious education teachers but also other subject teachers must be able to become role models to increase students' religious literacy so that become seeds in maintaining harmonious social interaction between religious communities. Meanwhile, specific efforts to increase the spirit of religious literacy at Islamic boarding schools, according to research results (Badruzzaman, Najamuddin, & Miharja, 2023) and (Baharun & Rizqiyah, 2020) are regular reading activities, the existence of study groups, the provision of library and e-library facilities and the existence of evaluation of learning outcomes.

Based on the descriptions of some of these studies, the focus of previous research is how an organization (universities and schools) is in increasing religious literacy for students and students and its impact on attitudes toward religious moderation, gap research, and novelty. This research is to continue and develop the role of teacher managerial competence. Furthermore, the authority of the Kiai in constructing awareness of religious literacy in the Imam Syafi'i Islamic boarding school, Jember Regency.

## **METHOD**

This study used a qualitative research method with an exploratory description pattern (WILLIAMS, 2015). The research focus is the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School which is located at Jalan Summersari, Jember Regency, East Java 68126; the research focus is on the role of teacher competence and Kiai authority in constructing awareness of language literacy for early-age students in the Islamic boarding school environment. The time of research was carried out from February 2023 to May 2023.

Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews, observation, and documentation of informants who supported this study (AGUINIS, HILL, & BAILEY, 2021), namely the Leaders (Kiai), teaching staff, and education staff of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic boarding school students. Participatory observation is also carried out on activities and activities that can be observed and visible phenomena by emphasizing meaning, reasoning, and definitions of certain situations (HAMILTON & FINLEY, 2020)). Data collection techniques are also carried out by collecting and analyzing written documents, images, and electronics. The documentation that has been obtained is then described (analyzed), compared, and combined (synthesized) to form a systematic, coherent, and complete study result (ÖSTLUND, KIDD, WENGSTRÖM, & ROWA-DEWAR, 2011).

Spradley divides qualitative data analysis based on the stages of qualitative research (GARRIDO, 2017). The steps taken were domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and cultural theme analysis (TAGUCHI, 2018). Four stages of data analysis were carried out while in the field and after in the field. Analysis while in the field was carried out to build a substantial study focus by developing analytical questions. Furthermore, at the end of the analysis, while in the field, the researcher reflects on the research focus (EIDE & SHOWALTER, 2012).

While data analysis after leaving the field is carried out to organize and review the results of the analysis and whether the researcher has found complete and optimal data to describe the focus of the final research report (DJAFAR, YUNUS, DJ POMALATO, & RASID, 2021). The implementation of checking the validity of the data in this study was based on four criteria, namely

the degree of trust (credibility), transferability (transferability), dependability (dependability), and certainty (confirmability) (ALAMRI, 2019).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Several stages of the study findings were carried out by the leadership of the Imam Syafi'i Jember Islamic Boarding School in constructing the students' language literacy awareness so that it became a literacy-based pilot institution, as detailed below:

### **Determination of the Vision and Mission of Islamic Boarding Schools Based on Language Literacy**

The policy set by Dr. Muhamad Arifin, M.A as the leader of the Jember Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School, related to religious culture is carried out in the following stages; First by rolling out the issue of Indonesia's low literacy culture to strengthen and insert awareness of a reading culture into the vision of Islamic boarding schools, then implicitly including it into the mission of Islamic boarding schools. Dr. Muhamad Arifin, M.A gave an explanation that:

I once read a comparative research article on the activity of world students in reading books. The average high school graduate in Germany reads 32 books per year; in the Netherlands, 30 books; in Russia, 12 books; in Japan, 15 books; in Singapore, 6 books; in Malaysia, 6 books; in Brunei, 7 books; while in Indonesia, zero books per year. This condition made him aware that the development of Jember Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School as a forum for early childhood education institutions to produce superior human resources, it is necessary to establish a vision and mission in the management of pesantren which are based on language literacy from the age of seven (Interview. Dr. Muhamad Arifin, M.A , 04 February 2023).

Dr. Muhamad Arifin, M.A explained that the preparation of the pesantren's vision and mission was utilizing; selection of individuals who are appropriate in the placement of their functions and duties in the pesantren, as much as possible, stakeholders should be involved in the process of developing this vision and mission statement because, through involvement, people become committed to the pesantren, followed by forming a team that is relevant to the vision and mission to be achieved by the organization. The team then determines a language literacy program tailored to the function of each component in the pesantren and the solidity of personnel who can play their functions in establishing and implementing policies and activities developed by the pesantren.

When making policies, the leadership of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School requires the involvement of the pesantren community to express ideas and ideas to reach a mutual agreement so that the implementation of plans can be carried out with enthusiasm and can achieve goals effectively. After brainstorming with all stakeholders, the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School established a vision with the statement: as an institution for the transmission and transformation of Islamic sciences, become a source of Islamic disciplines and traditions. Meanwhile, the mission of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School is to form a superior and accomplished generation towards the formation of a sincere ummah, educating and developing a generation of Muslim women who have spiritual depth, Islamic character, are disciplined, have scientific insight, and are beneficial to their families, society, state, and religion. (Documentation. Profile of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School, 2023).

Based on the description of the results of this study, it can be concluded that the leadership of the Islamic boarding school with their authority can formulate policies through the vision of language literacy as one of the objectives of developing the quality of students at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic boarding school. This leader's behavior is briefly referred to as the authority of the Kiai (leadership authority). The Kiai is responsible for everything at the Islamic boarding school (Fauzi, 2018).

The effectiveness of the educational process in Islamic boarding schools will be optimal if Kiai can organize and guide the teaching staff appropriately so that the teachers can carry out their duties with full responsibility (Fauzi, 2018). According to Weber, the status of legitimate authority occurs when the power applied is considered valid with indicators that the people under the authority voluntarily obey. Based on this relationship between rulers and those who are governed, Weber classifies three sources along with the types of legitimate authority, namely: (1) Traditional Authority; (2) Charismatic Authority; and (3) Legal-Rational Authority (Fanani, 2022).

In this context, Kiai's leadership in Pondok Pesantren can be categorized as a Legal-Rational Authority because of the Kiai's ability to inspire others to temporarily suspend their everyday lives and join the "power of change" from 0 Literacy to being human beings who have language literacy foundations (Musaropah, 2018). This strength comes from a leader's authority, competence, and religious maturity, which is the basis of Kiai's charismatic authority and its messages based on the Indonesian people's low literacy condition (Bashori, 2019).

## 2. The role of teacher managerial competence in assisting language literacy for early-age students

To ensure the vision and mission set by the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School in increasing awareness of language literacy, what is done next is to mobilize all teaching and educational staff to develop language literacy to achieve the goals set. There are two forms of activity in developing language literacy, including the following;

First, through the management of habituation activities. At the habituation stage, the teaching staff at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic boarding school require students, educators, and education staff to read the Al-Qur'an together for 20 minutes at 06.15-06.30 WIB, then continue with reading books for 20 minutes before the first lesson begins. . as acknowledged by Ustadz Fauzi as a class I teacher at Madrasah Ibtida'iah;

The activities carried out so far to develop the reading and writing potential of the students are initiated by reading and writing questions about the reading. In addition, provide questions and answers to the questions given. This activity was then followed by implementing the compulsory reading program to read the Al-Qur'an together for 20 minutes at 06.20-06.40 WIB, then continued with reading books for 20 minutes (Interview, Ustadz Fauzi. 13 February 2023)

While the learning methods to support language literacy used by teaching staff at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School are storytelling strategies and guide reading, surveys, questions, reading, reciting, and review. Some of these methods were implemented by the teaching staff at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School to familiarize students with concentrating on reading, practice speed reading competence, train competence regarding reading content, and develop critical and comprehensive reading skills (Observation, 15 February 2023).

In addition to using a variety of learning methods, the teaching staff of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic boarding school also actively involves other Islamic boarding schools to work together to develop language literacy programs through a variety of exciting activity agendas, such as literacy competitions, for example, reading poetry, storytelling competitions, theater, debates—scientific and other programs included in the language literacy field among Islamic boarding school students in Lumajang Regency. The pesantren leadership also develops a literacy-rich madrasah physical environment, such as providing a library (Observation, 19 February 2023).

This is done to support the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum, which requires students to read non-textbooks which can be in the form of books on general knowledge, hobbies, special interests, or multimodal texts, and can also be linked to specific subjects (Utama & Sofyan, 2021).

Second, through a strategy of regular visits to the library. The library at the Pondok Pesantren includes an adequate library. This can be seen from the condition of the library, which is neat, clean, and comfortable with a well-organized collection of books. Apart from that, the teaching staff, on orders from the pesantren leadership, also provide other supporting facilities and

infrastructure such as providing reading huts and literacy canteens, bulletin boards, and exciting reading books for students.

Language literacy skills are developed through activities in Islamic boarding school libraries and visits to city/regional libraries. They provide class reading corners, reading corners, reading canteens, and watching short videos. Development of literacy skills through activities in Islamic boarding schools and city/regional libraries or classroom reading corners with various activities, including shared reading, guided reading, watching short films, and reading texts (print, visual/digital (material from the internet); students respond to text (print/visual/digital), fiction and non-fiction, through some simple activities such as drawing, making concept maps, discussing, and talking about books (Observation, 21 February 2023).

The implementation strategy for developing language literacy aligns with the five indicators of managerial competence described by Porter (Ach. & Firdianti, 2021): (1) Specific stages or activity plans to be carried out. (2) There is a person who is responsible so that each stage or action can be completed properly. (3) Schedule to carry out each stage or action. (4) Resources that need to be allocated to complete the stages or actions correctly. (5) There is a feedback mechanism to monitor each stage or action (Kinyuira, 2014; Yamin, Basri, Suhartini, & Meliani, 2023).

### 3. Control of language literacy assistance programs

Based on data and field findings, language literacy development at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School is inseparable from monitoring activities. Leaders of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School encourage the involvement of all parties, especially teaching staff (madrasah early education teachers and formal education teachers), to develop a language literacy culture at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School. The role of the leadership of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School as a policy maker and maker is an inherent part of any leadership role, including leadership in Islamic Education Institution organizations. Leadership is one factor that plays a significant role in an organization. Every leader has different behavior in leading their followers.

As explained by Dr. Muhamad Arifin, M.A. that monitoring was carried out involving senior teachers. We are monitoring in the form of program supervision and process supervision. Supervision of the process is carried out by a delegation of teachers who are on duty on the scheduled day; the form of supervision is to oversee the course of activities, use of infrastructure, and find solutions if there are obstacles (Interview. Dr. Muhamad Arifin, M.A, 04 March 2023).

Activities that must be carried out by teaching staff in the monitoring process are to monitor the active participation of students, both directly and indirectly, such as through teacher delegations or journals of literacy activities for each student provided by the Islamic boarding school. The activity journal is used as evidence that students are following the literacy program signed by the team on duty. Literacy activity journals are used for evaluating religious literacy programs, measuring the progress of students' literacy over a certain period. They can be a reference for awarding students who are most active in participating in language literacy programs (Observation, 03 March 2023).

While program supervision is carried out by the leadership of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School periodically in measuring the effectiveness of the implementation of various programs carried out by teaching staff in managing their learning classes to improve the language literacy skills of the students, in addition to weekly monitoring, the teaching staff also conducts monthly monitoring. Monthly monitoring is carried out once a month at the Pesantren office through focus group discussion (FGD) activities (Observation, 07 March 2023).

Focus group discussion (FGD) activities were carried out to discover the successes and obstacles teaching staff and students faced when participating in a one-month literacy program (Welsh, 2017). The caretaker of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School and the teaching staff then look for alternative solutions together to solve the problems that have been identified.

The main concern in monitoring activities at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School is related to indicators such as teacher performance, availability and updating of student reading resources, strategies or methods used in literacy assistance, and teaching media. The results of monitoring that have been reported then become a reference for pesantren to develop sustainable programs. The ongoing program is carried out through counseling, motivation, and various problem-solving led by the leader as a manager at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School.

Based on research findings, the role of Dr. Muhamad Arifin, M.A as the holder of leadership authority at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic boarding school in constructing language literacy awareness of the students, the leader of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic boarding school carries out its role as a leader in charge of compiling programs, organizing Islamic boarding schools, mobilizing teaching staff and staff, optimizing resources Islamic boarding school resources and controlling activities through monitoring the process of activities and the achievement of language literacy programs and utilizing monitoring results in improving the quality of progress of students with a sustainable language literacy program. The research findings are described in more detail in the following table:

Table 1. Kiai Authority at Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School in Building Language Literacy Awareness

No	Research Findings	Description of Research Findings
	Determination of the Vision and Mission of Islamic Boarding Schools Based on Language Literacy	Directors of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School with authority to involve pesantren residents to express ideas and ideas to reach a mutual agreement so that the implementation of plans can be carried out with enthusiasm and can achieve goals effectively.
2	The role of teacher managerial competence in assisting language literacy for early-age students	First, through a habituation strategy. At the habituation stage, the leadership of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic boarding school establishes a policy to require students, educators, and education staff to read the Al-Qur'an together for 20 minutes before the first lesson begins. Second, through a strategy of regular visits to the library. The boarding school leadership also provides other supporting facilities and infrastructure, such as reading huts and literacy canteens, bulletin boards, and exciting reading books for students to read
3	Control of language literacy assistance programs	Process supervision is carried out by a delegation of teachers who are on pickets on the scheduled day. While program supervision is carried out by the leadership of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School periodically in measuring the effectiveness of implementing various programs carried out by teaching staff in managing their learning classes to improve the language literacy skills of the students

The findings of this study strengthen research (Sapdi & Ali, 2022), (Ali, Afwadzi, Abdullah, & Mukmin, 2021) and (Kadi, 2020) that language literacy policies implemented by higher education leaders are also able to shape student attitudes and personalities to respect differences in religious beliefs. as well as having an impact on the preventive attitude of students from hate speech. The

strategy implemented at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School is also in line with research (Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022), (Zuhdi & Sarwenda, 2020) and (Nurpratiwi et al., 2021) that a variety of strategies and learning methods are needed to increase literacy awareness motivation Santri language to form critical thinking skills in understanding various religious contents.

Meanwhile, the specific efforts made by the Imam Syafi'i Islamic boarding school to increase the spirit of language literacy reinforce research results (Badruzzaman et al., 2023) and (Baharun & Rizqiyah, 2020) that regular reading activities, study groups, provision of library facilities and e-library as well as the evaluation of learning outcomes can improve students' language literacy.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research description above, the role of Dr. Muhamad Arifin, M.A as the holder of leadership authority at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School, Lumajang Regency, in constructing language literacy awareness of early-age students, carrying out his role as the top leader in charge of compiling programs, organizing Islamic boarding school educators, mobilizing teaching staff and staff, optimizing resources Islamic boarding school resources and controlling activities through monitoring the process of activities and the achievement of language literacy programs and utilizing the results of monitoring in improving the quality progress of students with a sustainable language literacy program. The leadership of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School, with their authority, can formulate policies through a vision of language literacy as one of the objectives of developing the quality of early-age students at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic boarding school. This leader's behavior is briefly referred to as the authority of the Kiai (leadership authority); in preparing language literacy policies, the Leaders of the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School involve all pesantren residents to express ideas and ideas to reach a mutual agreement so that the implementation of plans can be carried out with enthusiasm and achieve goals effectively. In the context of this study's findings, Kiai's leadership at the Imam Syafi'i Islamic Boarding School can be categorized as a charismatic authority because of their ability of Kiai to inspire others.

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