



The Principal's Example in Developing Students' Responsible Character

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ABSTRACT:

This study aims to determine the role of the principal's exemplary behavior in fostering a character of responsibility in students at Muhammadiyah Masbagik High School. Leadership in education is one of the key factors in achieving educational goals, especially in developing student character. The role of the principal is very important in fostering a character of responsibility in students, because character education cannot be separated from the leadership of the principal. This study uses a qualitative approach, a case study type with data collection procedures, namely observation, interviews, and documentation. While the data analysis technique uses the Milles and Hubberman data analysis model, namely: (1) Data Reduction, (2) Data Presentation, (3) Data Verification to test the validity of data obtained from the field using several techniques of extended participation, persistent observation, and triangulation. The results of the study show that the principal's exemplary leadership in fostering a character of responsibility in students: 1 the principal shows good behavior in front of students, 2 respects teachers and staff, 3 appreciates students and 4 inspires students. Theoretically, this research serves as a reference for principal leadership in developing students' responsible character. Practically, this research serves as a guideline and reference for implementing principal leadership in realizing students' responsible character in schools.

Keywords: Role Model; Principal; Responsibility.

ABSTRAK:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui peran perilaku teladan kepala sekolah dalam menumbuhkan karakter tanggung jawab pada siswa di SMA Muhammadiyah Masbagik. Kepemimpinan dalam pendidikan merupakan salah satu faktor kunci dalam mencapai tujuan pendidikan, terutama dalam mengembangkan karakter siswa. Peran kepala sekolah sangat penting dalam menumbuhkan karakter tanggung jawab pada siswa, karena pendidikan karakter tidak dapat dipisahkan dari kepemimpinan kepala sekolah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, jenis studi kasus dengan prosedur pengumpulan data, yaitu observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Sedangkan teknik analisis data menggunakan model analisis data Milles dan Hubberman, yaitu: (1) Reduksi Data, (2) Penyajian Data, (3) Verifikasi Data untuk menguji validitas data yang diperoleh dari lapangan menggunakan beberapa teknik partisipasi yang diperluas, observasi yang berkelanjutan, dan triangulasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan teladan kepala sekolah dalam menumbuhkan karakter tanggung jawab pada siswa: 1. kepala sekolah menunjukkan perilaku baik di hadapan siswa, 2. menghormati guru dan staf, 3. menghargai siswa dan 4. menginspirasi siswa. Secara teoritis, penelitian ini berfungsi sebagai acuan bagi kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dalam mengembangkan karakter bertanggung jawab siswa. Secara praktis, penelitian ini berfungsi sebagai pedoman dan acuan untuk menerapkan kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dalam mewujudkan karakter bertanggung jawab siswa di sekolah.

Kata kunci: Teladan; Kepala Sekolah; Tanggung Jawab

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INTRODUCTION

Principal leadership is a key determinant in student character development. Principals are responsible for formulating the school's vision and mission, designing character education programs, and establishing open and participatory communication with all stakeholders, such as teachers, students, and parents. Nur Wasilah et al. emphasized that effective principal leadership includes intensive information dissemination—both in meetings, flag ceremonies, and daily communication—to support the ongoing internalization of the school's character values.¹ Furthermore, Tiara Fathulmila Matiala et al. explained that principals should lead the complete cycle of character education—from planning and implementation to monitoring the values of honesty, creativity, and responsibility embedded through various school activities and school community collaboration.² Concrete strategies are evident in the research of Yossiantoni et al., which describes steps such as long-term planning, religious and cultural activities, and external collaboration as effective ways to build student character, despite challenges faced by facilities and human resources.³

The principal plays a strategic role in shaping students' responsible character, as the success of character education is closely linked to the quality of leadership demonstrated by the principal. In addition to establishing policies, the principal also serves as a role model and mentor, instilling positive values in

¹ Nur Wasilah, Samsul Susilawati, and Muh Hambali, "School Principle Leadership In Developing Character Education," *Managere: Indonesian Journal of Educational Management* 4, no. 2 (August 21, 2022): 180–87.

² Tiara Fathulmila Matiala et al., "The Role Of The Principal Leadership In Developing Sustainable Students Character Education," *Mudir: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 5, no. 2 (2023): 431–36.

³ Sofyan Tsauri, Lailatul Usriyah Oki Satria Yossiantoni, "Principal's Leadership Strategy in Improving Character Education," *EDUTECH: Journal of Education And Technology* 6, no. 3 (2023): 988–94.

students through school programs⁴ and providing education or knowledge transfer to teachers and students through exemplary leadership and communication.⁵

One of the ongoing challenges facing the world of education is the low level of responsibility in students. This is reflected in the increasing number of juvenile delinquency cases among students, which has recently received increasing public attention. This situation demonstrates the need for more serious attention in character development efforts for students so they grow into responsible and ethical individuals.⁶

Although many school and college graduates are intellectually successful, the primary goal of education, which is to develop a generation that is resilient, character-driven, and virtuous, has not been fully achieved. This situation shows that academic success alone is insufficient without being accompanied by strong character qualities.⁷ Therefore, character development in the world of education is very important and must be pursued systematically and continuously. One important character that needs to be instilled in students is responsibility. Instilling the value of responsibility in schools aims to create a generation that is aware of carrying out its duties and obligations as part of social life. Character education integrated into the learning process is an effective approach to developing responsible students.⁸

⁴ Apri Eka Budiyono, "Peran Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Pendidikan Karakter Peserta Didik Di Era Digital," *NUSRA: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Ilmu Pendidikan* 4, no. 3 (August 30, 2023): 755–65.

⁵ Sopian Ansori, *Manajemen Sekolah dan Madrasah*, ed. oleh Khaeruddin (Penerbit PT. Adab Indonesia, 2024).

⁶ Miyono, Noor, Erny Ratna Savitri, "Peran Kepala Sekolah Dalam Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter Di SMP Negeri 1 Blora," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Konseling* 4, no. 6 (December 2, 2022): 8050–57.

⁷ Rahmawati, D., & Safitri, M "Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter Di Sekolah Dalam Membentuk Generasi Berakhlak Mulia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter Indonesia* 5, no. 1 (2022).

⁸ Kurniawan, H., & Yuliana, S "Integrasi Nilai Karakter Dalam Proses Pembelajaran Sebagai Upaya Menanamkan Tanggung Jawab Siswa," *Jurnal Pendidikan Humaniora* 9, no. 3 (2021): 219–28.

Character is one of the fundamental elements in the goals of national education, as stated in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which emphasizes the importance of forming people who are faithful, pious, have noble morals, and have a noble personality. Therefore, the instillation and development of character education needs to be carried out from an early age to become a moral foundation in the social life of students in the future.⁹ Character education must be implemented at all levels of education, from Kindergarten to higher education. Strengthening character can be done by integrating character values into various subjects, such as Islamic Religious Education, Pancasila and Citizenship Education (PPKn), Indonesian Language, and History.

However, various academic studies and empirical findings indicate a decline in students' sense of responsibility, characterized by low awareness of academic tasks, violations of rules, and a lack of commitment to their obligations as students.¹⁰ This condition raises serious concerns in the world of education, because the failure to develop character during school can have long-term impacts on the quality of human resources. In the school context, the principal plays a strategic role as an educational leader, policy maker, and role model. Various studies have concluded that the principal's leadership has a significant influence on the formation of student character, both through policies, school culture, and exemplary attitudes and behaviors displayed in daily life at school.¹¹

⁹ Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Jakarta: Pusat Kurikulum dan Pembelajaran, 2021).

¹⁰ Soni Adi Saputra and Syahrullah Syahrullah, "Pengaruh Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Terhadap Pembentukan Karakter Peserta Didik (Studi Survei Di Sekolah SMA Muhammadiyah 12 Jakarta Timur)," *Jurnal Review Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran* 8, no. 3 (September 10, 2025): 7552–61, <https://doi.org/10.31004/jrpp.v8i3.50322>.

¹¹ Yulius Rustan Effendi and Pieter Sahertian, "Principals' Transformational Leadership in Strengthening Character Education at Senior

However, most previous research has focused more on general principal leadership, such as transformational, managerial, or collegial leadership, in strengthening character education.¹² Research specifically examining principal role models as a strategy for fostering responsible character in high school students is still relatively limited, particularly those examining concrete practices of role models in the daily context of school life. This research gap highlights the need to delve deeper into how principal role models are manifested, internalized, and perceived by students in shaping responsible character. This research is novel because it focuses on the personal role model of principals, rather than solely on structural aspects of leadership or formal policies.

This research gap indicates a need to delve deeper into how the principal's exemplary role model is manifested, internalized, and perceived by students in shaping responsible character. This research is novel because it focuses on the personal exemplary dimension of the principal (role modeling), rather than solely on the structural aspects of leadership or formal policies. This research is expected to provide a comprehensive empirical picture of the role of the principal's exemplary role model as an effective strategy in strengthening character education, while also serving as a reference for developing educational leadership practices oriented toward the sustainable formation of student character.

This study aims to describe the principal's exemplary role in fostering students' sense of responsibility in high school, analyze the role of the principal's exemplary role in fostering students' sense of responsibility, and identify factors that support and hinder the principal's exemplary role in fostering students' sense of responsibility. This research is urgent because it addresses the

High School Level (SMA) in Indonesia," *South African Journal of Education* 42, no. 2 (May 31, 2022): 1–11.

¹² Rani Nurul Mardiyah, Siti Halimah, Dyah Ayu Samahita, Mariatul Akhadiyah, Nur Alfiyah, "Peran Kepemimpinan Kologial Kepala Sekolah Dalam Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter Di SMA Negeri 4 Pasuruan," *Jurnal Wibawa* 5, no. 1 (2025).

issue of declining sense of responsibility in high school students, supports the implementation of the Character Education Strengthening (PPK) policy in schools, and provides an empirical basis for principals in developing exemplary leadership. Based on this context, this study focuses on examining the principal's leadership in fostering students' sense of responsibility at Muhammadiyah Masbagik High School, East Lombok Regency.

METHODS

The approach used in this research is a qualitative case study. A case study is a qualitative research method that aims to explore and understand in-depth a specific event, individual, group, or program within a real-life context, clearly and systematically defined by time, place, and activity.¹³ Through this approach, researchers seek to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of a case by examining the various perspectives of the subjects involved, thereby providing a comprehensive and in-depth description of the phenomenon being studied.

The data sources in this study consisted of the principal, the vice principal for curriculum, the vice principal for student affairs, and the teaching staff. The research procedure began with the planning stage, which involved determining the focus and formulation of the research problem, determining the research location, and selecting informants relevant to the case under study. The next stage was data collection, conducted through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation to obtain rich and diverse data.¹⁴

Data analysis in this study uses the interactive analysis model from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes three main stages,¹⁵ namely: (1) data reduction is the initial process in data

¹³ R. K Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (SAGE Publications: SAGE Publications, 2017).

¹⁴ C. N Creswell, J. W., & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2018).

¹⁵ J Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2020).

analysis carried out by selecting, focusing, simplifying, and grouping raw data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation according to the focus and formulation of research problems. At this stage, researchers re-record important data, code, group based on certain themes or categories, and eliminate irrelevant data so that the resulting data becomes more structured, concise, and meaningful; (2) data presentation (data display) is carried out after the data has been reduced with the aim of displaying the data systematically so that it is easy to understand and analyze further. Organized data is presented in the form of narrative descriptions, tables, matrices, or charts that describe the relationships between categories and research themes. Then researchers can see patterns, trends, and relationships between data, thereby facilitating the process of interpreting and drawing meaning from research findings; and (3) conclusion drawing/verification is the final stage of data analysis which is carried out by interpreting the data that has been presented to find meaning, patterns and relationships that answer the research problem formulation. The conclusions obtained at this stage are not provisional, but are continuously verified through data rechecking, triangulation of sources and techniques, and comparison with theories or previous research results. This ensures that the final conclusions are valid, consistent, and scientifically sound.

These three stages are carried out simultaneously and interconnected throughout the data collection and analysis process to ensure data validity. Researchers also employ several data validation techniques, including extended field participation, diligent observation, and triangulation. Triangulation involves comparing data from various sources, techniques, and time periods to enhance the credibility of the research findings.¹⁶

¹⁶ Sutopo, H. B., & Arifin, I, "Validitas Dan Reliabilitas Data Dalam Penelitian Kualitatif," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Pendidikan* 4, no. 4 (2020): 702–710.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

3.1 The Principal's Exemplary Role in Fostering Responsible Character in Students

3.1.1. The Principal Demonstrates Good Behavior in Front of Students

The principal demonstrates good behavior in his daily life by consistently being polite to teachers, students, and the entire school community. He is also known for being honest in his words and actions, thus serving as a good role model for the school community. Furthermore, the principal carries out his duties and responsibilities responsibly, both in decision-making and in leading the school to improve. He demonstrates good values such as courtesy, honesty, and responsibility.

As the highest leader in the school environment, the principal plays a strategic role in shaping the school culture through exemplary behavior. His daily behavior, established policies, and leadership style serve as primary references for the entire school community. Therefore, the principal is required to be wise, consistent, and responsible in every action and decision he makes.¹⁷

The researchers' observations at Muhammadiyah Masbagik High School showed that the principal consistently exemplifies his responsibilities. The principal consistently arrives early, oversees the implementation of rules, and carries out his duties with discipline. In an interview, Principal Taufiqurrahman stated, Responsibility naturally begins with us as educators, so that we can be good examples for the students in carrying out our responsibilities. We always strive to be exemplary in front of the school community, both in terms of speech and behavior.

¹⁷ Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan dan Teknologi, Riset, *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*. Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal GTK. (2022).

Therefore, the school has full responsibility for educating, protecting, and guiding its students.¹⁸

In this case, the principal carries out his leadership function by leading by example before inviting teachers and students to follow the policies or programs being implemented. This reflects the principle of participatory leadership, namely leading by example, not simply by giving orders.¹⁹ As emphasized by Yukl, true leaders are those who guide and direct their subordinates to act responsibly and consciously.²⁰

A similar sentiment was expressed by the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, Mr. Muslim Hayat, who stated: "He is a responsible leader in carrying out his leadership duties. For example, in terms of discipline, he always arrives early, is gentle with all members of the school community, but remains firm in carrying out his role as a leader."²¹ This statement was also supported by Ms. Huzaevah, a PAI teacher, who said: "The principal is a role model for us. He is like a parent at school, guiding, directing, and protecting us. He has strived to carry out his duties as principal well".²²

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the principal's exemplary behavior is highly influential in the process of developing student character, particularly in instilling the value of responsibility. The principal is not only present as a manager, but also as a moral figure who provides inspiration through concrete actions and behavior in the school environment.

¹⁸ Wawancara dengan bapak Taufiqurrahman selaku Kepala Sekolah SMA Muhammadiyah.

¹⁹ Sari, F. M., & Nurlela, E, "Keteladanan Kepala Sekolah Sebagai Strategi Kepemimpinan Transformatif," *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 8, no. 1 (2023): 112–21.

²⁰ Yukl, GLeadership in Organizations (9th ed.). New York: Pearson Education. (2020).

²¹ Wawancara dengan bapak Muslim Hayat selaku Wakasis SMA Muhammadiyah

²² Wawancara dengan Ibu Huzaevah selaku Guru PAI SMA Muhammadiyah

3.1.2. Respecting Students

Respecting students can be done by providing them with opportunities to express themselves and participate in various activities. Through these opportunities, students can develop their talents, interests, and potential. Student involvement in both academic and non-academic activities also helps build self-confidence and responsibility, enabling them to develop optimally in both their education and personal development.²³

The principal's respect for students is an important foundation for establishing a positive and inclusive school culture. In humanistic leadership theory, students are viewed as the primary subjects of education, possessing potential, dignity, and the right to be respected. A principal who values students will create school policies and practices that are fair, safe, and supportive of students' academic and character development.

3.1.3. Inspiring Students

Inspiring students can be done by providing motivation to encourage them to strive to become better individuals. Motivation helps students believe in their own abilities and persevere in the face of challenges. With encouragement and positive role models, students will be more enthusiastic about learning, achieving, and developing positive attitudes and character in their daily lives.

As explained by the principal in an interview, students must have role models who can inspire them. Therefore, in addition to their duties as educators, principals must also be motivators for their students, hoping they will become useful individuals in the future. An inspiring principal is a key characteristic of transformational and visionary leadership. Inspiring students means the principal is able to serve as a role model, instill positive values, and foster a spirit of learning and achievement. Inspiration is not only conveyed through words, but primarily through consistent attitudes and daily actions.

²³ Wawancara dengan bapak Muslim Hayat selaku Wakasis SMA Muhammadiyah

3.2 The Effectiveness of the Principal's Exemplary Behavior in Fostering Student Character and Responsibility

3.2.1 Realizing Responsibility in Students

The principal of Muhammadiyah Masbagik High School has strived to carry out his duties and responsibilities well. Various school rules and regulations have been issued to foster students who are capable of taking responsibility for their education. This has ultimately resulted in achieving the goal of students with character and achievement in their education.

As explained by Mr. Taufiqurrahman, the principal of Muhammadiyah Masbagik High School, "Alhamdulillah, to date, we have not encountered any serious problems. Students' character has improved, with a decrease in the number of violations of school rules and regulations, and they are able to carry out their responsibilities as students. This is evidenced by their discipline in attending school, participating in class, and completing assignments given by teachers for each lesson".²⁴

All school policies and programs are inseparable from the shared hopes and aspirations of developing students who are capable of carrying out responsibilities both while at school and upon returning to their respective families. Most importantly, students are able to maintain and be responsible for upholding their faith and Islam. This is the goal the school seeks to achieve, as a tangible result that can be witnessed by the community in the form of students' daily behavior upon returning to their families and communities. This is what the community hopes for, that the school has been able and successful in producing students with character, responsibility, and noble morals, who are brave enough to assume social responsibility in the community.

According to Mr. Muslim Hayat, the student affairs representative, "The students have met our expectations: a) they are able to take responsibility for themselves. This is evident in

²⁴ Wawancara dengan bapak Taufiqurrahman selaku Kepala Sekolah SMA Muhammadiyah

their achievements at school, and b) the school provides rewards for high-achieving students".²⁵ Similarly, Ust. Zul, the guidance and counseling teacher, explained that there is a link between student character and educational quality. This means that those who are able to maintain good behavior at school will certainly be more serious about learning and ultimately, their ability to achieve at school.²⁶

By realizing students who are able to assume responsibility while at school, this will also have a significant impact on improving their achievements. If they are able to take responsibility for their presence as students at school, they will certainly carry it out with full sincerity and will increase their commitment to participating in school activities and learning activities held both inside and outside the classroom.

As motivation for the learning outcomes achieved by students, the school certainly needs to pay attention to these efforts, such as providing awards and moral support to continuously increase students' enthusiasm for learning. This indicates that the development and education of responsible character for students at SMA Muhammadiyah Masbagik has proven that the school has been able to achieve this, thanks to the cooperation of all parties and the presence of a school leader who is able to guide, direct, and protect members of the school community, thus realizing a school community that is responsible in carrying out their respective duties and functions.

As explained by Mrs. Huzaivah, "Thanks to the coaching methods we have implemented, they have left an impression on the children. They are more diligent and able to contribute to the community. So, when they graduate from school and continue

²⁵ Wawancara dengan bapak Muslim Hayat selaku Wakasis SMA Muhammadiyah

²⁶ Wawancara dengan bapak Zulkarnain selaku Guru BK SMA Muhammadiyah

their education, they don't forget to visit us, expressing their gratitude for the coaching we have provided".²⁷

Table 1.
Description of the Effectiveness of the Principal's Exemplary Behavior in Fostering Students' Responsible Character

No.	Indicator	Aspect	Change
	School Principal's Policy and Leadership	Role of the school principal	The principal carries out duties and responsibilities optimally as a leader and policy maker.
		School policies	The implementation of clear school rules and regulations to shape students' sense of responsibility.
		Vision and mission	The school's vision and mission are directed toward developing students with strong character, responsibility, academic achievement, and noble moral values.
		Leadership style	Leadership that guides, directs, protects, and involves all members of the school community.
	Changes in Students' Sense of Responsibility	Discipline	A decrease in the number of violations of school rules.
		Learning responsibility	Students become more disciplined in attending school, participating in learning activities, and completing assignments.
		Attitudes and behavior	Students demonstrate mutual respect and greater focus on their roles as learners.
		Self-awareness	Students are able to take responsibility for themselves and the school environment.

²⁷ Wawancara dengan Ibu Huzaivah selaku gurui PAI SMA Muhammadiyah

Impact of Character Development on Achievement	Relationship between character and achievement	Responsible students show greater seriousness in learning and achieve better academic performance
	Learning motivation	The provision of rewards and moral support increases students' learning motivation
	Student achievement	There is an improvement in academic achievement as a result of discipline and responsibility
Social and Religious Impact	Social behavior	Students are willing to take on social responsibilities within the community
	Religious values	Students are able to maintain their faith and Islamic values both at school and within the family environment
	School image	The community perceives the school as successful in developing students with strong character and noble moral conduct.

3.2.2 The Creation of a Religious Atmosphere in the School Environment

SMA Muhammadiyah Masbagik is a formal educational institution that consistently maintains the distinctive characteristics of Muhammadiyah schools, which are strongly imbued with religious values. In preserving the identity of an Islamic educational environment, the school principal makes every effort to sustain the religious traditions inherent in the Muhammadiyah organization.

In realizing a school institution with a religious atmosphere, in addition to the measures described above, the principal of SMA Muhammadiyah Masbagik also provides various religious extracurricular activities, such as Islamic Spirituality (Rohani Islam), which serves as an organizational platform for students to

study religious knowledge and deepen their understanding of Islam. Furthermore, routine activities are carried out every morning before formal lessons begin, including collective Qur'an recitation at the school mosque, Duha prayer, short religious sermons (kultum), Friday prayers, and congregational prayers at school. The principal also organizes regular religious studies or public sermons for the entire school community of SMA Muhammadiyah Masbagik, held once a week and delivered by ustaz and religious scholars (tuan guru).

Islamic education is an educational approach implemented by the institution based on Islamic principles, in which instruction is conducted according to Islamic teachings and integrated with the academic subjects taught by each teacher, both inside and outside the classroom. This approach aims to enhance students' Islamic understanding, strengthen their faith and devotion to God Almighty, and foster character development and noble moral conduct (akhlak al-karimah) as taught by Allah and His Messenger. Therefore, SMA Muhammadiyah Masbagik implements an integrated Islamic education system.

In fostering students' sense of responsibility at SMA Muhammadiyah Masbagik, character development is accompanied by continuous guidance and supervision. As explained by Taufiqurrahman, the principal of SMA Muhammadiyah Masbagik, character formation and development are carried out through daily habituation activities every morning, such as Qur'an recitation, Duha prayer, and short religious sermons, as well as the implementation of Friday prayer regulations at school. All members of the school community are required to perform Friday prayers at school. This practice aims to train students' mental readiness and social responsibility for community life by preparing them to serve as khatib and other Friday prayer officers.²⁸

²⁸ Wawancara dengan Ibu Huzaiwah selaku Kepala Sekolah SMA Muhammadiyah

Based on this explanation, it can be understood that the education and development of students' sense of responsibility, in addition to classroom instruction, must be supported by daily religious habituation and reinforced through school rules and regulations that have been mutually agreed upon. A similar view was expressed by Muslim Hayat, the Vice Principal for Student Affairs at SMA Muhammadiyah Masbagik, who stated that fostering students' sense of responsibility requires an approach that touches their hearts, with a strong emphasis on religious values. Moreover, as the institution is faith-based, a spiritual approach is also applied by providing more intensive religious education and teaching good moral conduct in interactions with teachers and fellow students.

The purpose of these habituation activities is to broaden students' religious insight and to serve as an internal self-control mechanism when they are inclined to engage in deviant behavior. Because students are accustomed to a religious atmosphere at school, they gradually develop self-awareness that any intention or action contradicting religious teachings should be avoided. This was also emphasized by Huzaivah, an Islamic Education teacher, who stated that students' character development is carried out through daily religious activities every morning, such as Qur'an recitation, tahfiz, and Duha prayer before entering the classroom. These activities are not enforced through coercion but are implemented through role modeling and a persuasive approach. The habituation aims to instill discipline, good morals, and self-awareness, particularly for students from broken-home backgrounds and economically disadvantaged families. The process of character development is conducted with patience, gentleness, and consistency, both in the musolla environment and in the classroom. Teachers avoid harsh approaches and prioritize guidance, positive role modeling, and a comfortable learning

atmosphere so that students can internalize positive values and gradually experience character transformation.²⁹

In essence, in educating and fostering students' sense of responsibility, educators must serve as role models and carry out their duties with sincerity and patience. Not all students can immediately understand or accept the methods used in the character development process, as students come from diverse backgrounds in terms of economic conditions, social environments, and levels of religious understanding.

DISCUSSION

3.1 The Principal's Exemplary Role in Fostering Responsible Character in Students

One of the important character values that must be exemplified by the principal is responsibility. The principal serves not only as an administrator but also as a role model, reflecting moral values and positive character in school life.³⁰ The value of responsibility must be internalized by the entire school community, starting with the principal as a leader, down to the students as implementers of these values in their daily lives.³¹

This is in line with the results of previous research which confirmed that a principal who is friendly, responsible, and actively guides and directly monitors school programs, tends to be successful in creating a school climate that supports the formation of positive character in students.³² Furthermore, Lickona emphasized that the creation of positive morals in schools can be achieved through several strategies, including: the principal's

²⁹ Wawancara dengan Ibu Huzaivah selaku guru PAI SMA Muhammadiyah

³⁰ A, Sudrajat, "Peran Kepala Sekolah Dalam Membentuk Budaya Tanggung Jawab," *Jurnal Kepemimpinan Pendidikan* 6, no. 2 (2020): 75–78.

³¹ Hasanah, U., & Hidayat, S., "Pendidikan Karakter Tanggung Jawab Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Islam," *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter* 11, no. 1 (2021): 23–32.

³² M, Salam, "Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Pembentukan Karakter Siswa," *Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Pembentukan Karakter Siswa. Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 2 (2019).

moral leadership, exemplary discipline, active participation of all school members, student organizations that encourage responsibility, and providing special time for strengthening moral values in schools.³³

Principals also act as teachers outside the classroom, providing informal character education through behavioral examples. According to Lickona, good educational leaders are those who demonstrate respect, ethics, and responsibility in real life, thus becoming a direct source of learning for students.³⁴ The principal's exemplary behavior is an effective medium for shaping students' responsible character because it is carried out in a concrete manner, directly involved in daily interactions, and able to touch the affective aspects of students. Mustofa stated that exemplary behavior is the most powerful form of character education because it is direct and easy to imitate.³⁵ Therefore, principals must be able to demonstrate responsibility in all dimensions of their leadership duties, from assigning tasks, providing direction, to fostering harmonious relationships with all school members.³⁶

The principal's exemplary behavior in fostering a sense of responsibility in students is demonstrated through the leader's attitude and behavior, enabling him to serve as a role model for the entire school community. All of his words, behavior, and actions will always be in the spotlight and imitated by students. This exemplary leadership aligns with the behavioral theory of leadership, which explains how a leader can influence the

³³ Lickona, T. *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (Updated Ed.). New York: Bantam Books. (2021).

³⁴ Lickona, T. *Character Matters: How to Help Our Children Develop Good Judgment, Integrity, and Other Essential Virtues*. Simon & Schuster. (2021).

³⁵ M. Mustofa, "Teladan sebagai strategi utama pembentukan karakter di sekolah," *Tarbawi: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 1 (2020).

³⁶ H Basri, "Kepemimpinan pendidikan: Studi tentang praktik kepemimpinan kepala sekolah," *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan dan Kependidikan* 4, no. 3 (2021): 101–15.

performance of an individual or group based on the behavior displayed by the leader.³⁷

Respect for students is reflected in the principal's attitude of upholding student voices, providing opportunities for participation in school activities, and treating students fairly without discrimination. Research shows that when students feel valued by school leaders, they tend to have higher learning motivation, positive behavior, and a strong emotional attachment to the school.³⁸ Furthermore, a principal who values students also plays a role in building a school climate that respects diversity. A school environment that respects students' differences in background, abilities, and character will support the creation of meaningful learning and oriented towards the holistic development of students.

Inspirational leadership theory explains that a principal with a clear vision, high integrity, and empathy will be able to positively influence students' attitudes and behavior. The principal's exemplary behavior in discipline, responsibility, and work ethic is a powerful source of character learning for students. Recent research shows that inspirational principals contribute to increased student self-confidence, intrinsic motivation, and academic and non-academic aspirations. By creating a hopeful and meaningful school atmosphere, principals help students develop their full potential and prepare them to become lifelong learners.³⁹ Principals who are able to inspire their students will always be used as role models who will be remembered forever by their students when they leave school and continue their respective careers.

³⁷ Ahmad Azmy, *Teori Dasar Kepemimpinan* (Makasar: Mitra Ilmu, 2021).

³⁸ Fathir Naufal Ar Rizqi Hasyim Asy' ari, Salsabila Azahra, "Pengaruh Peran Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Terhadap Efektivitas Sekolah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai* 7, no. 2 (2022).

³⁹ Cahyo Widodo, Sukatiman, Fajar Danur Isnantyo. Inspirational Leadership in Encouraging Academic Achievement In Vocational High School. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam dan Multikulturalisme*. Vol 7 Nomer 1. (2025).

3.2 The Effectiveness of the Principal's Exemplary Behavior in Fostering Student Character and Responsibility

The explanation above demonstrates that the development of responsible character in students at Muhammadiyah Masbagik High School has significantly improved their attitudes, mentality, and behavior. Initially, students who paid little attention to their daily attitudes and behavior have now gradually been able to focus on their roles and responsibilities as students at school, by adhering to school rules and respecting each other. Students are becoming more diligent in their studies and participation in class.

Responsibility is a crucial character value to be developed in students, starting from school. As an educational institution that expects students to be responsible, especially for themselves, it is crucial that the principal, as the policymaker at the school, pays attention to this aspect. This is because they have the authority to mobilize all available resources to support the development of responsible character in students at the school. Based on Thomas's explanation, the existence of a leader who provides support, guidance and coaching in schools will always be able to create students with character. This is achieved through habits that have been designed by the principal together with the teachers, both academic and non-academic habits.⁴⁰

Cultivating responsible students within the school environment is inseparable from the strong leadership role of the principal, who regulates education and fosters responsible character within the school environment. Fostering responsible character in students at school is inseparable from the role of the principal as a leader who establishes rules through the school's vision and mission. This strongly supports the principle that the principal is the highest leader in the school institution, possessing the authority to govern the educational institution, including educators, staff, and students.

⁴⁰ Lickona, *Educating For Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*, Wamaungo, (2021) 455

Achieving shared goals is also a testament to the success of a leader who has expressed his or her ideas and concepts in the school's vision and mission and who manages the educational institution wholeheartedly, mobilizing and directing all members in achieving these goals. A leader's ability to provide guidance, direction, and coordination with all members of the organization is crucial in carrying out their duties.

A school principal who consistently prioritizes religious values in fostering students' sense of responsibility is able to create a school environment with a strong religious atmosphere. A religious school environment is characterized by the consistent implementation of religious activities, the availability of religious organizations and extracurricular programs for students, and the development of students with noble moral character (*akhlaq al-karimah*). Daily religious activities such as Qur'an recitation, Duha prayer, congregational obligatory prayers, as well as the provision of an Islamic boarding program (*pesantren*) within the school environment, further strengthen religious values at school.

As explained by Asmaun Sahlan, the religious culture formed in schools cannot be separated from the ways of thinking and acting of all school members, which are grounded in religious values (religiosity). In Islamic teachings, being religious means practicing religious teachings comprehensively.⁴¹ This is based on the word of Allah in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah verse 208: "O you who believe, enter into Islam completely and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is a clear enemy to you." (Qur'an, Al-Baqarah: 208)

Religiosity can be manifested in various aspects of human life. It is not limited solely to ritual activities (acts of worship), but also includes other activities driven by spiritual awareness and belief in a higher power. Moreover, religiosity does not only relate to outward and observable actions, but also encompasses inner

⁴¹ Asmaun. Sahlan, *Mewujudkan budaya religius di sekolah: upaya mengembangkan PAI dari teori ke aksi* (UIN-Maliki Press, 2010).

dimensions that arise from the heart. Thus, religious activities in an individual's life involve multiple dimensions that influence attitudes, behavior, and daily conduct.⁴²

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the principal's exemplary leadership plays a crucial role in fostering students' sense of responsibility at Muhammadiyah Masbagik High School. Through consistent discipline, integrity, respect, and responsible behavior, the principal serves not only as an administrator but also as a moral role model for the entire school community. Leading by example, supported by clear school policies and a respectful, inspirational approach toward students, has contributed to improved student discipline, reduced rule violations, increased learning motivation, and better academic achievement. Moreover, the integration of religious values through continuous habituation activities has successfully created a religious school atmosphere that strengthens students' moral awareness, self-control, and noble character. Overall, the findings demonstrate that exemplary, value-based, and religiously grounded leadership is a key factor in shaping responsible, disciplined, and morally grounded students and in supporting the achievement of holistic educational goals.

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⁴² Nur Ali, Muhaimin, Suti'ah, *Paradigma Pendidikan Islam, Upaya Mengefektifkan Pendidikan Islam Di Sekolah* (Bandung: PT Remaja Rosda Karya, 2012).

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