

LITERACY CULTURE IN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FREE TIME AND THE READING AND WRITING MOTIVATION OF STUDENTS AT THE HIDAYATUS SHOLIHIN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL IN WRINGINJAJAR, MRANGGEN, DEMAK

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Abstract

Literacy culture is an essential element in developing the intellectual tradition within Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). The productive use of leisure time is considered to contribute to strengthening literacy culture while enhancing students' reading and writing motivation. This study aims to describe the literacy culture developed at Pondok Pesantren Hidayatus Sholihin Wringinjajar Mranggen Demak, analyze how students utilize their leisure time for literacy activities, and examine the impact of leisure time utilization on students' reading and writing motivation. This study employed a qualitative field research approach. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving the boarding school leader, teachers, library manager, and students. Data were analyzed using an interactive analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that literacy culture is fostered through habitual reading of classical Islamic texts, supporting books, group discussions, lesson reviews, and note-taking activities within a conducive learning environment. Students productively utilize their leisure time for various literacy activities, making it an integral part of their independent learning strategies. The productive use of leisure time positively influences students' reading and writing motivation, as reflected in increased reading interest, improved writing skills, active participation in discussions, and stronger independent learning habits. This study concludes that optimizing students' leisure time is a significant factor in strengthening literacy culture and enhancing reading and writing motivation in Islamic boarding schools.

Keywords : *Literacy Culture, Leisure Time, Reading and Writing Motivation.*

Abstrak

Budaya literasi merupakan salah satu unsur penting dalam membangun tradisi keilmuan di lingkungan pesantren. Pemanfaatan waktu senggang secara produktif dipandang memiliki peran dalam mendukung berkembangnya budaya literasi sekaligus meningkatkan motivasi baca-tulis santri. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan budaya literasi yang berkembang di Pondok Pesantren Hidayatus Sholihin Wringinjajar Mranggen Demak, menganalisis pemanfaatan waktu senggang santri dalam kegiatan literasi, serta mengkaji dampak pemanfaatan waktu senggang terhadap motivasi baca-tulis santri. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian lapangan. Data diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi terhadap pengasuh pesantren, ustaz,

pengelola perpustakaan, dan santri. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model interaktif yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan, sedangkan keabsahan data diperoleh melalui triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa budaya literasi di pesantren dikembangkan melalui pembiasaan membaca kitab, membaca buku penunjang, berdiskusi, mengulang materi, dan menulis catatan pembelajaran yang didukung oleh lingkungan belajar yang kondusif. Waktu senggang dimanfaatkan secara produktif untuk berbagai aktivitas literasi sehingga menjadi bagian dari strategi belajar mandiri santri. Pemanfaatan waktu senggang memberikan dampak positif terhadap meningkatnya motivasi baca-tulis, yang ditunjukkan melalui meningkatnya minat membaca, kemampuan menulis, keaktifan berdiskusi, serta kemandirian belajar santri. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa optimalisasi pemanfaatan waktu senggang menjadi salah satu faktor penting dalam memperkuat budaya literasi dan membangun motivasi baca-tulis santri di lingkungan pesantren.

Kata Kunci: *Budaya Literasi, Waktu Senggang, Motivasi Baca-Tulis.*

INTRODUCTION

A culture of literacy is a crucial foundation for building the quality of human resources, as it plays a role in developing critical, analytical, and creative thinking skills, as well as the ability to solve various life challenges. In the modern era, literacy is no longer understood merely as the ability to read and write, but also encompasses the ability to acquire, understand, process, evaluate, and produce information responsibly (Abidin 2022). Therefore, strengthening a culture of literacy has become a strategic priority in the field of education as an effort to prepare students who can adapt to advancements in science, technology, and social change (Ministry of Education, Research, and Technology 2023).

From the perspective of Islamic education, a culture of literacy holds a fundamental position. The first commandment revealed by Allah SWT through Surah Al-'Alaq, verses 1–5, emphasizes that reading is the primary gateway to acquiring knowledge. This tradition subsequently evolved into an Islamic scholarly culture manifested through activities such as reading, memorization, study, discussion, and the writing of various scholarly works. History records that the development of Islamic civilization is inseparable from a strong culture of literacy that gave rise to many scholars, scientists, and writers who produced monumental works. This intellectual tradition was subsequently passed down and preserved by pesantren—the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia—through activities such as the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), *muthāla'ah*, *baḥs al-masā'il*, scholarly discussions, and the writing of various forms of scholarly and religious works (Sangid and Muhdi 2020).

As boarding schools, pesantren have learning characteristics that differ from those of formal educational institutions in general. Students' activities take place almost all day long, beginning before dawn and continuing into the evening, and

include worship, formal instruction, madrasah diniyah, religious text study, student organizations, and various character-building activities. The intensity of these activities makes the pesantren a learning environment rich in educational processes; however, at the same time, it presents a challenge in providing sufficient space for students to develop independent reading and writing habits. Changes in the lifestyle of the younger generation, the increasing use of digital media, and a variety of non-academic activities are also factors that influence the dynamics of literacy culture within the pesantren environment (Prastyo and Inayati 2022).

Amid this busy schedule, free time is actually a resource that can be harnessed to strengthen the students' culture of literacy. Free time should not be viewed merely as leisure time after completing routine activities, but also as an opportunity for students to engage in productive activities, such as reading religious texts or general knowledge books, visiting the library, participating in discussions, writing study notes, drafting articles, or producing other written works. Productive use of free time is believed to foster independent learning habits while broadening students' intellectual horizons. Conversely, if free time is primarily spent on less productive activities, the likelihood of a reading and writing culture developing diminishes (Torkildsen 2022). A culture of literacy is not determined solely by the availability of learning facilities but is also influenced by an individual's motivation to read and write. Motivation for reading and writing is an internal or external drive that encourages a person to engage in literacy activities voluntarily, consistently, and with a focus on self-development. Students with high motivation for reading and writing tend to be more active in seeking references, documenting their learning outcomes in writing, participating in discussion forums, and producing scholarly or creative works. Conversely, low literacy motivation results in reading and writing activities being undertaken only when there are academic requirements (Schunk 2023).

Various studies indicate that strengthening a culture of literacy in Islamic boarding schools can be achieved through the provision of library facilities, the formation of literacy communities, writing workshops, the development of reading corners, and policy support from school administrators. (Karim, Rofiqi, and Bahri 2024) report that a program to develop a culture of literacy at the Mambaul Ulum Bata-Bata Islamic boarding school successfully increased reading interest, library visits, and students' participation in literacy activities. (Ahmadi 2023) found that the policies of religious leaders play a strategic role in building a culture of literacy through exemplary behavior, regulations, and the cultivation of academic habits. Research by Farahiba (2022) also shows that boarding school literacy movements can increase students' participation in reading and writing activities through the establishment of structured literacy programs. Meanwhile, Haryanti, Siswati, and Saputra (2024) emphasize that continuous literacy development can foster a passion for reading and writing while strengthening the academic culture within the boarding school environment.

Although various studies have examined the culture of literacy in Islamic boarding schools from the perspectives of literacy development strategies, institutional policies, library management, writing training, and literacy program mentoring, studies that specifically examine the use of free time as a space for fostering students' motivation to read and write remain relatively limited. In fact, free time is an integral part of students' daily lives and has the potential to serve as a medium for fostering a culture of literacy through habits such as reading, writing, discussing, and independent learning. Given these circumstances, the novelty of this study lies in its effort to reveal that a culture of literacy in Islamic boarding schools is not only built through institutional policies and formal literacy programs but also through the utilization of free time, which naturally evolves into students' learning habits, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation for reading and writing. Thus, this study is expected to provide a new perspective on the importance of optimizing free time as part of strengthening a culture of literacy within the pesantren environment.

Based on these circumstances, this study focuses on answering three research questions: How has a culture of literacy developed at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak? how students utilize their free time for literacy activities at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak, and what impact the use of free time has on students' motivation to read and write at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak. Based on these research questions, this study aims to describe the literacy culture developing at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak; analyze how students utilize their free time in literacy activities; and examine the impact of this use of free time on students' motivation to read and write as an effort to strengthen the literacy culture within the boarding school environment.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the culture of literacy in Islamic boarding schools, particularly regarding the use of free time to foster students' motivation to read and write. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study seeks to uncover the meanings, experiences, and dynamics of the culture of literacy that develops naturally in the lives of students within the boarding school environment. Through this approach, the researcher can obtain a comprehensive picture of how free time is utilized as a space for developing reading and writing habits and how these activities influence students' literacy motivation (Creswell and Poth 2022).

The research was conducted at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak. The location was selected through purposive sampling, considering that this boarding school offers a variety of literacy activities, such as library management, reading religious texts and general books,

writing workshops, wall newspapers, academic discussion forums, and other literacy programs that actively involve the students.

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the consideration that they possessed knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the implementation of literacy culture at Islamic boarding schools. The informants consisted of boarding school supervisors, heads of educational institutions, library managers, literacy activity coordinators, and students who actively participated in reading and writing activities. To obtain a wider range of information, the researcher also involved several students with varying levels of literacy participation, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of how free time is utilized and the motivations for reading and writing within the pesantren environment (Patton 2015).

Research data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation (Sugiyono 2022). Observations were conducted directly on the students' daily activities, particularly during their free time outside of formal learning and boarding school activities. The aspects observed included reading habits, writing activities, library visits, scholarly discussions, and the use of available literacy facilities. In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach to gather information on the informants' perceptions of literacy culture, how they spend their free time, factors that encourage or hinder their motivation to read and write, and the pesantren's efforts to foster a culture of literacy. Meanwhile, documentation was used to supplement the research data through various documents, such as the pesantren's activity schedule, literacy programs, library collections, students' written works, photos of activities, and other supporting documents.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and temporal triangulation (Moleong 2021). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from pesantren supervisors, library managers, literacy coordinators, and students. Methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, while temporal triangulation was carried out by collecting data at different times to ensure the consistency of the information. In addition, the researcher also conducted member checking with several informants to ensure that the interpretation of the data was consistent with the informants' experiences and perspectives.

Data analysis utilized the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The analysis process was conducted continuously from data collection until the study was completed, enabling the researcher to identify patterns, themes, and relationships among findings related to literacy culture, the use of free time, and the reading and writing motivations of santri.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Growing Culture of Literacy at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak

Based on the researcher's observations at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak, a culture of literacy has become an integral part of the students' daily activities. Literacy activities are evident in the students' habit of reading religious texts before classes begin, reviewing material after religious study sessions, utilizing the library as a learning resource, and discussing the material with peers. Additionally, some students were observed taking brief notes as part of their independent study. These conditions indicate that reading and writing have become a growing learning culture within the boarding school.

The research findings indicate that a culture of literacy is a key element in building a tradition of scholarship within the pesantren environment. Based on the study, the culture of literacy at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak, is fostered through the practice of reading, studying religious texts, engaging in discussions, and writing—all of which are integrated into the students' learning activities and daily life in the dormitory. These practices are not limited to formal teaching and learning sessions but are also part of the students' daily routines, allowing literacy activities to evolve into a learning culture rather than merely the fulfillment of academic assignments.

To gain insight into the implementation of a culture of literacy, interviews were conducted with five informants, including a pesantren director, a religious instructor, a library manager, and two students. A summary of the interview results is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Results on Literacy Culture

Question:	How is a culture of literacy fostered at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak?
Interviewer 1 (EF):	In my opinion, a culture of literacy is built by making it a habit to read religious texts before classes begin and by encouraging students to read materials beyond the curriculum. We also guide students to use their free time for meaningful activities, such as reading or discussing.
Interviewer 2 (TN):	During the learning process, we encourage students to take notes on key points, review the material independently, and discuss it after class. These activities are expected to gradually foster a habit of reading and writing.
Interviewer 3 (SNA):	The library provides religious texts, Islamic books, and general knowledge books that students can borrow. We also encourage students to use their free time to read so that the library isn't

	only busy when there are assignments from the teachers.
Interviewer 4 (N):	Usually after class or during breaks, I review the material we've covered or borrow books from the library. This habit helps me better understand the lessons and expand my knowledge.
Interviewer 5 (G):	My friends and I often discuss the material we're currently studying. Sometimes we also make summaries of the material so it's easier to understand when we review the lessons.

Source: Researcher's interview findings, 2026

The results of these interviews were corroborated by the researcher's observations during learning sessions and the students' activities within the dormitory. The researcher observed that before the religious study sessions began, most students had already prepared their textbooks and reviewed the material to be studied. During breaks and after study sessions, some students used the library to read books on Islam and general knowledge. In addition, discussions among students appeared to occur spontaneously as a way to reinforce their understanding of the learning material.

Based on the documentation obtained by the researcher—including the boarding school's activity schedule, photos of the library, a list of book collections, and documentation of students' reading activities—it is evident that the development of a culture of literacy has become an integral part of the academic development program. This documentation shows activities such as reading religious texts before classes, borrowing books from the library, and group discussions held by students outside of class hours. This indicates consistency between the results of observations, interviews, and research documentation.

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, it is evident that a culture of literacy in Islamic boarding schools develops through continuous practice. These practices are not only aimed at improving reading skills but are also designed to foster habits of critical thinking, discussion, and the ability to reflect on and document learning outcomes. Thus, the culture of literacy in Islamic boarding schools serves not only as an academic activity but also as a process for shaping students' learning character.

The existence of libraries also supports the development of a culture of literacy. Although their primary function is as providers of learning resources, the libraries in this study are also used as independent study spaces for santri. This indicates that a culture of literacy is built not only through interactions in the classroom or religious study circles but also through the provision of a learning environment that enables santri to develop independent reading habits. This finding aligns with the view (Abidin 2022) that a culture of literacy is not only related to reading and writing skills but also encompasses critical thinking, information processing, and the ability to communicate ideas. The findings of this study show that this process has developed within the pesantren environment through activities such as reading religious texts, discussions, and the preparation of study

notes. Thus, the developing culture of literacy not only enhances students' academic abilities but also fosters reflective thinking in understanding Islamic studies. From the students' perspective, this culture of literacy develops through the habits of reviewing lessons, reading supplementary materials, and discussing topics with peers. These activities not only help deepen understanding of the studied material but also cultivate curiosity and the habit of independent learning. The tradition of discussion and summarizing material demonstrates that literacy in pesantren does not stop at the act of reading, but extends to the process of understanding, processing, and re-communicating the knowledge gained

This finding is consistent with (Sangid and Muhdi 2020), who explain that the culture of literacy in pesantren develops through the traditions of muthāla'ah, baḥṣ al-masā'il, the reading of classical texts, and the writing of scholarly works as part of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Research by (Karim et al. 2024) also indicates that the culture of literacy in pesantren is influenced by the synergy between institutional policies, the exemplary behavior of teachers, the availability of facilities, and the active participation of students. Furthermore, (Ahmadi 2023) emphasizes that the policies of the kiai play a strategic role in building a culture of literacy through the cultivation of academic habits and the creation of a supportive learning environment. (Haryanti et al. 2024) add that sustained guidance can boost students' enthusiasm for reading and writing, thereby transforming these reading activities into an integral part of pesantren life.

The findings of this study also reinforce the research (Farahiba 2022), which states that the literacy movement in Islamic boarding schools develops through the habit of reading and ongoing guidance. Research (Junaris 2023) shows that a culture of literacy among students will develop if supported by a conducive learning environment and the active involvement of the entire boarding school community. Meanwhile, a study (Saharudin 2025) confirms that regular writing instruction can improve students' literacy productivity. In contrast to these studies, the results of this study indicate that the culture of literacy at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School develops not only through structured programs but also through habits of reading and discussion that grow naturally in the students' daily lives.

Although the findings of this study align with several previous studies on the importance of fostering reading habits, a supportive learning environment, and the role of educators in building a culture of literacy, this study identified distinct characteristics. The culture of literacy at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School is not only developed through literacy programs formally designed by the institution but also grows through academic interactions that occur naturally in the daily lives of the students in the dormitories. The habit of reading religious texts before lessons, reviewing material after study sessions, discussing with peers, and using free time for reading and writing are literacy practices carried out

continuously without always relying on instructions from teachers or caregivers. These findings indicate that a culture of literacy develops as part of the pesantren's learning culture, shaped through collective habits and the active involvement of the entire pesantren community. Thus, this study offers the perspective that strengthening a culture of literacy in pesantren depends not only on institutional policies but also on the creation of a learning ecosystem capable of fostering literacy initiatives that originate from the students themselves.

The research findings indicate that the culture of literacy at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School is built through four main components: fostering a reading habit, providing a conducive learning environment, support from educators, and active participation by students. These four components complement one another, creating a literacy ecosystem that encourages students to learn independently while also improving the quality of learning within the boarding school environment.

Overall, this study demonstrates that a culture of literacy is the result of the interaction between the boarding school's policies, the role of educators, the availability of facilities, and the active participation of students. These four aspects complement one another in shaping a literacy ecosystem that supports the growth of a tradition of reading and writing as part of strengthening the students' academic character.

Students' Use of Free Time in Literacy Activities

Based on observations conducted by the researcher at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak, students have some free time in between their learning activities. This free time generally occurs before religious study sessions begin, after formal learning activities, during the midday break, and after Isha prayer before evening activities conclude. During these times, most students use their free time to read religious texts, read general knowledge books, review course material, engage in discussions, and take notes on what they have learned. To gain a deeper understanding of how students utilize their free time for literacy activities, the researcher conducted interviews with five informants, including a boarding school supervisor, a mentor, a library manager, and two students. A summary of the interview results is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Interview Results on Students' Use of Free Time for Literacy Activities

Question:	How do students at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak use their free time for literacy activities?
Interviewer 1 (EF):	We encourage our students not to waste their free time. Usually, after religious study sessions or before activities begin, they use this time to read religious texts, review their lessons, or read books available in the boarding school library.
Interviewer 2 (TN):	We always remind them that free time is a good opportunity to

	review material, take notes, and read additional references so that the students' understanding improves.
Interviewer 3 (SNA):	The library is quite busy during breaks and after study sessions. The students use this time to borrow books, read, or work on assignments with their friends.
Interviewer 4 (N):	When I have free time, I usually review material I've just studied or look for books related to the lessons to gain a better understanding.
Interviewer 5 (G):	I usually spend my free time discussing topics with friends, reading religious texts together, and taking brief notes so that studying later becomes easier.

Source: Researcher's interview findings, 2026

The interview results show that all informants share relatively similar views on the importance of utilizing free time as part of the learning process. The only difference lies in the types of activities undertaken. Caregivers and religious instructors place greater emphasis on fostering habits and providing guidance, while students tend to use their free time primarily for reading, discussing, and reviewing course material. These findings indicate that the use of free time has become a learning culture that is mutually understood by the entire boarding school community.

These interview results are supported by the researcher's observations during the study. The researcher observed that before religious study sessions began, a number of students had already prepared their textbooks and were reading the material to be covered. During breaks and after study sessions, some students were seen using the library as a place to read or discuss. In addition, there were also students who chose to study independently on the dormitory terrace by taking brief notes or reviewing material that had been presented by the ustaz. These activities demonstrate that free time is used productively as part of fostering a culture of independent learning.

Research documentation also reveals the presence of a collection of classical Islamic texts, Islamic books, and general knowledge books, as well as a library space used by the students as a hub for literacy activities. In addition, activity documentation reveals that students regularly engage in group reading sessions, group discussions, and the preparation of summaries of course materials. This documentation reinforces the findings from observations and interviews that the use of free time has become a well-established learning habit at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School. Based on the research findings, several factors support the use of free time for literacy activities, namely the cultivation of this habit by caregivers, the availability of a library, support from the ustadz, and the students' awareness of the importance of independent learning. On the other hand, the study also identified several obstacles, such as time constraints due to the boarding

school's busy schedule, variations in reading interests among students, and the still-limited collection of general reading materials that meet the students' needs.

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, it is evident that the use of free time is not only aimed at improving reading skills but also serves as a means of developing critical thinking, discussion, and writing skills. This practice indicates that free time is perceived as an opportunity to broaden one's horizons and deepen one's understanding of the learning material. According to Torkildsen (2022), free time is the time an individual has outside of primary activities that can be voluntarily utilized for activities that benefit personal development—whether in intellectual, social, or personal aspects. In the context of this study, students at the Islamic boarding school use their free time to read religious texts, review course material, engage in discussions, and utilize the library as a learning resource. These findings indicate that free time within the pesantren environment has transformed into a learning space that supports the growth of a culture of literacy. This aligns with the view expressed by (Abidin 2022), who states that literacy is the process of understanding, processing, and communicating information through activities such as reading, writing, listening, and discussing. In line with this, (Muhaimin 2023) explains that a conducive Islamic educational environment fosters independent learning habits and cultivates a tradition of scholarship among students. Meanwhile, (Schunk 2023) emphasizes that student engagement in independent learning activities is a form of self-regulated learning that can enhance learning motivation and academic success.

The findings of this study also reinforce the research by (Farahiba 2022), which shows that the literacy movement in Islamic boarding schools develops through the habit of reading and ongoing guidance. The study by (Junaris 2023) states that a culture of literacy among students will develop if supported by a conducive learning environment and opportunities to use free time productively. (Karim et al. 2024) explain that the success of a literacy culture in Islamic boarding schools is influenced by students' active engagement in utilizing available literacy facilities. A study (Ahmadi 2023) also shows that the policies of the *kiai* play a crucial role in fostering students' awareness of the need to make optimal use of their study time through the habit of reading and writing. These findings are consistent with those of (Haryanti et al. 2024), who explain that the sustained cultivation of a culture of literacy can enhance students' enthusiasm for reading and writing through habits integrated into daily life. Furthermore, (Saharudin 2025) emphasizes that regular reading and writing activities not only improve literacy skills but also encourage students to produce written works as a form of applying their knowledge. These findings further reinforce the idea that productive use of free time contributes to the development of a culture of literacy within the pesantren environment.

Although it shares similarities with previous studies, this research found that the use of free time at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School does not occur solely because of literacy programs designed by the institution but also grows out

of the students' personal awareness of using their free time as a learning opportunity. Habits such as reading religious texts before classes, reviewing material after religious study sessions, discussing topics with peers, utilizing the library, and taking study notes are practiced repeatedly until they become an integral part of the boarding school's academic culture. These findings indicate that a culture of literacy is shaped not only by institutional policies but also by collective learning habits that develop within the students' daily lives.

These findings indicate that the use of free time at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School is not merely a way to pass the time, but has become part of an educational strategy that supports the development of a culture of lifelong learning. The more productively students utilize their free time, the greater the opportunity for the development of habits such as reading, discussing, and writing, which ultimately strengthen the culture of literacy within the pesantren environment. The research results show that the utilization of free time at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School is supported by three main factors: individual awareness, a conducive learning environment, and support from caregivers and teachers. These three factors complement one another so that free time is not only used for rest but also serves as a learning space capable of strengthening the culture of literacy and improving the quality of students' learning. Thus, the utilization of free time becomes one of the important foundations for building a sustainable tradition of independent learning within the pesantren environment.

The Impact of Leisure Time Utilization on Students' Motivation to Read and Write

Based on observations conducted during the study at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak, it was found that the utilization of leisure time has a positive impact on students' motivation to read and write. Students who consistently used their free time to read religious texts, review course material, visit the library, and discuss topics with peers demonstrated higher enthusiasm for learning compared to students who did not make full use of their free time for literacy activities. In addition to having better reading habits, they also appeared more active in taking notes, asking questions of their teachers, and showing a desire to broaden their knowledge through various reading materials. These findings indicate that the use of free time contributes to the growth of students' motivation to read and write as part of the learning culture within the pesantren environment.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of leisure time utilization on students' reading and writing motivation, the researcher conducted interviews with five informants, including a boarding school supervisor, a mentor, a

library manager, and two students. A summary of the interview results is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Interview Findings on the Impact of Leisure Time Utilization on Students' Motivation to Read and Write

Question:	How does the use of free time affect the motivation to read and write among students at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak?
Interviewer 1 (EF):	Students who are accustomed to using their free time to read usually have a higher enthusiasm for learning. They ask questions more actively, understand lessons more easily, and are more confident when asked to share what they have read.
Interviewer 2 (TN):	We've observed that students who read diligently during their free time find it easier to develop their writing skills. Their notes are more thorough, their way of expressing opinions is more structured, and they're more active when given assignments to write summaries or simple essays.
Interviewer 3 (SNA):	The frequency of library visits increases when students have free time. The more often they read, the greater their interest in seeking out other books that align with their learning needs.
Interviewer 4 (N):	After I got into the habit of reading in my free time, I found it easier to understand lessons and became more motivated to take my own notes so I could review them later.
Interviewer 5 (G):	I feel that reading in my free time makes me more confident when discussing topics with friends. Reading also motivates me to write summaries so I don't forget what I've learned.

Source: Researcher's interview findings, 2026

The interview results show that all informants shared relatively similar views regarding the positive impact of utilizing free time on the students' motivation to read and write. The boarding school supervisors believe that the habit of reading during free time can boost the students' enthusiasm for learning, while the supervising teachers emphasized that consistent reading activities contribute to the development of writing skills and the ability to express ideas. Library staff also observed that an increase in the frequency of students' visits to the library was accompanied by a growing interest in various reading materials. Meanwhile, the experiences shared by Nurul and Ghoni indicate that the use of free time has a direct impact on their understanding of the material, their confidence in participating in discussions, and their writing habits as part of the learning process.

The results of these interviews were corroborated by the researcher's observations during learning activities. The researcher observed that students who used their free time to read and review material tended to participate more actively in class than those who did not make full use of their free time. They asked questions more frequently, were able to restate the material they had studied, and kept more comprehensive study notes. In addition, the researchers also found that discussions among students often stemmed from readings they had done in their free time,

making reading a catalyst for the development of academic interaction within the pesantren environment.

Research documentation reveals the existence of various study notes, summaries of material, students' personal notebooks, as well as records of reading and group discussion activities. These documents demonstrate that reading does not end with the acquisition of information but is followed by writing as a means of reinforcing understanding. Thus, the research documentation reinforces the finding that the use of free time contributes to the growth of students' motivation to read and write.

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, it is evident that the use of free time is not only aimed at improving reading skills but also serves as a means of developing critical thinking, discussion, and writing skills. This practice indicates that free time is perceived as an opportunity to broaden one's horizons and deepen one's understanding of the learning material. According to (Torkildsen 2022), leisure time is the time a person has outside of their primary activities that can be voluntarily used for activities that benefit intellectual, social, and personal development. In the context of this study, leisure time is not interpreted as time for rest alone, but as a learning space that students utilize to improve themselves through various literacy activities.

This view aligns with (Abidin 2022), who explains that literacy is not only related to the ability to read and write but also to the ability to understand, process, and communicate information through various learning activities. From the perspective of (Street, 1984), literacy is a social practice that develops through an individual's interaction with their cultural environment. Thus, the habit of santri to use their free time for reading, discussing, and writing demonstrates that a culture of literacy has become an integral part of the vibrant social practices within pesantren life, rather than merely a formal academic activity.

In line with this, (Muhaimin 2023) explains that a conducive Islamic educational environment fosters the habit of independent learning and cultivates a tradition of scholarship among students. This view is reinforced by (Nata 2022), who states that the Islamic scholarly tradition is built through the continuous practice of reading, studying, discussing, and writing, so that students develop the character of lifelong learners. Therefore, the use of free time at Islamic boarding schools serves not only as a way to fill spare time but also as part of the process of internalizing Islamic scholarly values.

From the perspective of educational psychology (Schunk 2023), student engagement in independent learning activities is part of self-regulated learning, which can enhance learning motivation and academic success. This view is reinforced by (Barry J. Zimmerman 2000), who states that students who are able to manage their time effectively, set learning goals, choose appropriate strategies, and

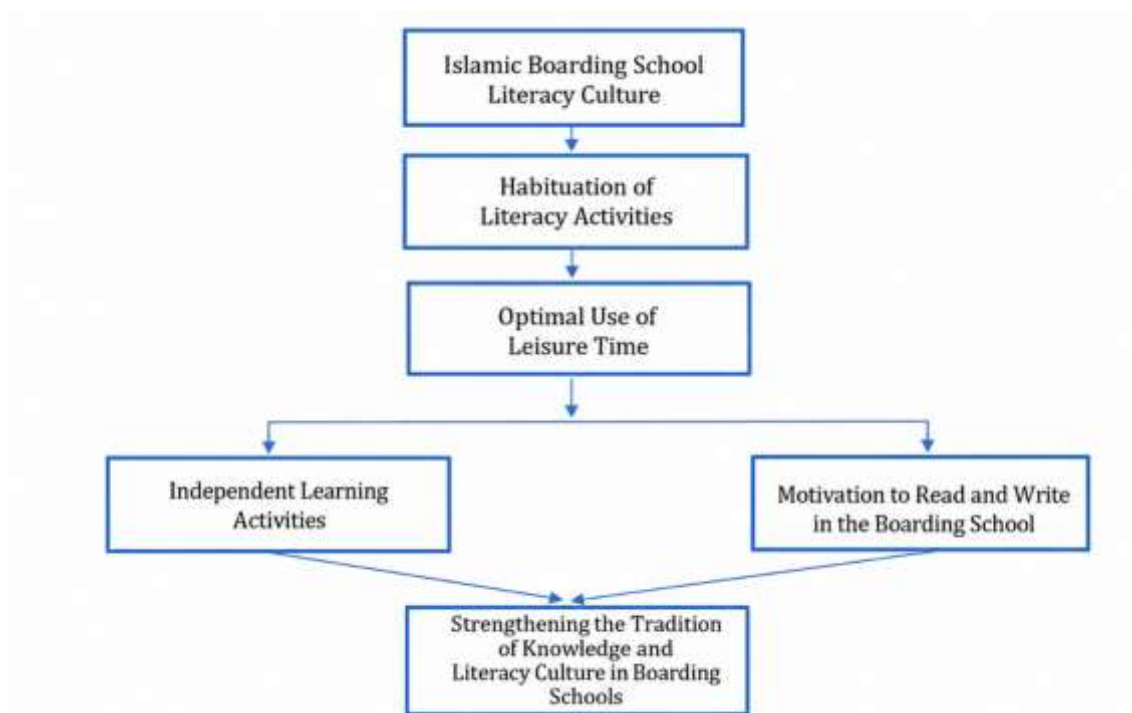
engage in self-evaluation will have higher learning motivation. Furthermore, (Deci and Ryan 2000)'s Self-Determination Theory explains that intrinsic motivation develops when individuals gain autonomy in determining their learning activities. In this study, the freedom of boarding school students to use their free time for reading, discussing, and writing emerged as a form of learning autonomy that naturally fosters the growth of reading and writing motivation.

Although it shares similarities with previous studies, this research found that the impact of utilizing free time on students' reading and writing motivation is not only evident in increased reading and writing frequency but also in the growth of intrinsic motivation, self-confidence in expressing opinions, and academic autonomy. The habit of reading texts, reviewing material, engaging in discussions, and taking notes on an ongoing basis transforms free time into a means of shaping students' academic character. This finding suggests that strengthening students' motivation to read and write in Islamic boarding schools can begin with the consistent and optimal use of free time as part of the daily learning culture.

The research results show that the use of free time has a positive impact on students' motivation to read and write. The more productively free time is used for reading, discussing, reviewing material, and writing, the higher the students' motivation to expand their knowledge, improve their literacy skills, and develop independent learning. Thus, the utilization of free time is a key factor that supports the growth of reading and writing motivation while strengthening the culture of literacy at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak.

Based on the overall results of the observations, interviews, documentation, and analysis conducted, the researcher developed a research findings model to illustrate the relationship between literacy culture, the use of free time, and the students' motivation to read and write at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak. This model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Model of Research Findings on the Culture of Literacy at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School



Source: Researcher's analysis, 2026

Figure 1 shows that the culture of literacy at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School develops through a series of interconnected processes. The habit of engaging in literacy activities encourages students to use their free time productively for reading, discussing, reviewing material, and writing. These activities lead to increased motivation for reading and writing, which in turn strengthens independent learning and fosters a sustainable tradition of scholarship and a culture of literacy within the pesantren environment.

The findings of this study suggest that strengthening a culture of literacy in pesantrens does not always have to begin with new, formal programs. Optimizing students' free time can be a more contextual and sustainable strategy because it grows out of daily learning habits. Therefore, boarding school administrators can integrate free-time management into academic guidance as part of strengthening the culture of literacy and developing students' motivation to learn.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that a culture of literacy at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak has developed as an integral part of the students' academic life through the practice of reading religious texts, reading supplementary books, engaging in discussions, reviewing course material, and taking notes on their learning. This

culture of literacy is supported by the boarding school's policies, the exemplary behavior of the caretakers and teachers, the availability of a library, and the active participation of the students, thereby creating a learning environment conducive to the development of literacy skills. Students' use of free time has been directed toward various educational activities, such as reading, reviewing material, engaging in discussions, utilizing the library, and summarizing course material. Free time is not merely used for rest but has become an integral part of a continuous self-directed learning strategy. This practice demonstrates that free time plays a crucial role in fostering a culture of literacy within the pesantren environment. This study also shows that the use of free time has a positive impact on students' motivation to read and write. Students who use their free time productively demonstrate higher motivation to learn, are more active in reading and discussing, and have better writing habits compared to students who do not make full use of their free time for literacy activities. These findings confirm that making the most of free time is a key factor in strengthening a culture of literacy while also boosting the students' motivation to read and write at the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak.

Based on the research results, the Hidayatus Sholihin Islamic Boarding School in Wringinjajar, Mranggen, Demak is expected to continue developing a culture of literacy by strengthening programs that foster reading and writing habits, optimizing the use of the library, and providing a more diverse range of reading materials tailored to the students' needs and interests. In addition, the boarding school can organize regular literacy activities, such as book discussions, writing contests, academic seminars, and student discussion forums to strengthen the academic tradition within the boarding school environment. For teachers, the habit of using free time for literacy activities needs to be continuously encouraged through mentoring, motivation, and assignments that encourage students to read various references and produce simple written works. Educators' exemplary behavior in reading and writing activities is also a crucial factor in fostering students' sustained motivation for literacy. For future researchers, this study can be expanded by examining the impact of pesantren literacy programs on students' critical thinking abilities, scientific writing skills, or academic achievement through quantitative or mixed-methods approaches. Research on various types of Islamic boarding schools with different characteristics is also needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the development of a culture of literacy within these schools.

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