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Instructional Leadership in School Literacy: A Systematic Literature Review Based on Scopus and Google Scholar Data (2020–2025)

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ABSTRACT

Research on instructional leadership and school literacy has increased significantly; however, prior studies often examine leadership practices, collaboration, or literacy outcomes separately, resulting in limited integrative understanding of how these elements function as a coherent school-wide system. This study aims to systematically analyze how instructional leadership contributes to strengthening primary school literacy through organizational, collaborative, and instructional processes. A Systematic Literature Review was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 protocol. Forty-five open-access studies published between 2020 and 2025 were retrieved from Scopus and Google Scholar. The data were analyzed using thematic synthesis and bibliometric mapping with VOSviewer to identify dominant patterns, research clusters, and conceptual relationships. The findings indicate that instructional leadership positions literacy as a strategic school agenda through policy direction and supervision, effective implementation depends on structured collaboration among principals, teachers, and librarians, and systematic literacy management is consistently associated with improved student academic achievement. This study concludes that school literacy operates as a collaborative instructional ecosystem governed by leadership processes, offering a conceptual contribution to instructional leadership theory and guidance for coherent literacy policy and practice.

1. Introduction

Instructional leadership has become a dominant construct in contemporary educational leadership discourse due to its consistent association with instructional quality and student learning outcomes. A substantial body of empirical evidence confirms that principals' instructional leadership practices influence teachers'

instructional behaviors, professional learning, and students' academic achievement across varied educational settings (Leithwood et al., 2020; Bush, 2021; Cox & Mullen, 2023). In accountability-oriented education systems, instructional leadership is no longer perceived as an auxiliary administrative task but as a strategic approach for aligning teaching practices, curriculum implementation, and assessment processes with institutional goals and performance standards.

Scholarly work explains that instructional leadership operates through several interconnected pathways, including instructional supervision, support for teachers' professional development, and the creation of organizational conditions that enable effective teaching and learning (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Ma & Marion, 2021; Shaked, 2023). Teachers' perceptions of principals' instructional leadership are frequently linked to higher levels of teacher efficacy, instructional improvement, and organizational commitment. These findings position instructional leadership as a mediating mechanism that translates policy expectations into classroom-level practices. As a result, instructional leadership is increasingly understood not merely as a set of supervisory actions, but as a process that shapes how instructional priorities are organized, supported, and sustained within schools.

In recent years, researchers have also emphasized the importance of collaboration and shared responsibility in sustaining instructional improvement. Studies on distributed and collaborative leadership suggest that instructional leadership becomes more effective when embedded within professional interaction, trust, and collective responsibility among school actors (Liu et al., 2021; Stosich, 2020). Within this perspective, teachers, librarians, and instructional teams are not passive recipients of leadership direction but active participants in shaping instructional practices. However, despite this theoretical emphasis, many empirical studies continue to treat collaboration as a contextual or supporting factor rather than as an integral component of a systematically managed instructional agenda. Consequently, the relationship between leadership actions and collaborative instructional processes is often underexplored.

At the same time, instructional leadership research increasingly acknowledges contextual and structural constraints that influence leadership enactment. Policy compliance requirements, administrative workload, inspection pressures, and equity challenges often shape how principals prioritize their instructional responsibilities (Colman, 2021; Abonyi et al., 2024). During periods of systemic disruption such as the COVID-19 pandemic, principals' roles expanded to include crisis management alongside instructional oversight (Dare & Saleem, 2022; Wharton-Beck et al., 2024). While these studies enrich understanding of leadership complexity, they are frequently conducted within specific contexts and analyzed independently, limiting broader conceptual integration of how leadership, collaboration, and instructional processes function together as part of a coherent school system.

Despite the rapid growth of literature, instructional leadership research remains theoretically fragmented in several important ways. A large number of studies examine the direct relationship between instructional leadership and instructional

quality or student achievement without explaining how leadership practices are translated into specific school-wide instructional domains or maintained over time (Tan et al., 2022; Özdemir et al., 2024). Other studies focus narrowly on leadership behaviors, teacher perceptions, or contextual constraints, offering valuable but partial insights into leadership dynamics (Gaol, 2023; Cansoy et al., 2025). As a result, instructional leadership is often conceptualized as a collection of discrete practices rather than as an interconnected system linking leadership roles, collaborative mechanisms, and learning outcomes.

Furthermore, although several review studies on school leadership exist, systematic mapping of instructional leadership research using structured synthesis methods remains limited. Systematic Literature Reviews and bibliometric analyses are still underutilized in identifying dominant research trends, thematic concentrations, and conceptual blind spots within instructional leadership scholarship (Gaol, 2023; Özdemir et al., 2024). The absence of such synthesis restricts cumulative knowledge development and risks perpetuating descriptive narratives rather than advancing integrative theoretical understanding. Without systematic mapping, it remains difficult to determine how leadership roles, collaboration patterns, and instructional processes are interconnected across different studies and contexts.

Another important unresolved issue concerns the limited examination of instructional leadership as a sustained organizational process. While many studies confirm positive associations between instructional leadership and educational outcomes, fewer studies explore how leadership practices are institutionalized, coordinated, and maintained through collaborative structures within schools over time (Shaked & Benoliel, 2020; Shaked, 2023). This gap indicates the need to move beyond viewing instructional leadership as the actions of individual principals toward understanding it as a managed instructional system shaped by organizational conditions, professional interactions, and shared responsibilities.

These limitations highlight a critical research gap. Existing studies have not systematically synthesized how instructional leadership, collaborative practices, and instructional management operate together as a coherent organizational system that supports sustained instructional improvement and student learning. The literature remains dispersed across themes of leadership behavior, teacher response, collaboration, and contextual challenges without integrative explanation of how these elements are interrelated. As a result, theoretical development in instructional leadership risks remaining fragmented and insufficiently responsive to contemporary educational demands.

To address this gap, synthesis-oriented research is required to integrate fragmented empirical findings into a coherent conceptual framework. Systematic mapping through structured review procedures allows researchers to identify dominant perspectives, underexplored themes, and conceptual patterns that are not visible in individual studies. Combining systematic review with bibliometric analysis further enables visualization of thematic clusters and research trends, providing a comprehensive overview of how the field has developed over time. Such an approach is particularly important for clarifying how instructional leadership

contributes not only to instructional quality but also to collaborative practices and student learning outcomes within school organizations. Accordingly, this study aims to systematically map and synthesize recent research on instructional leadership in school literacy by identifying dominant leadership roles, collaborative mechanisms, and research patterns, in order to clarify how instructional leadership contributes to instructional coherence and student academic achievement in primary education.

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to comprehensively identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical findings related to the role of leadership in strengthening literacy in primary schools. The SLR method was selected to ensure a rigorous and evidence-based understanding of existing research trends, theoretical perspectives, and practical implications within the field. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines, which provide a transparent, replicable, and bias-reducing procedure for systematically searching, screening, and reporting scientific literature (Page et al., 2021). Adherence to these guidelines enabled the structured identification of relevant studies through clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the review process. Furthermore, the PRISMA framework supported methodological consistency in documenting each stage of the review, from database searching to final article selection, ensuring that the synthesis of findings was grounded in robust and accountable research practices.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using Publish or Perish (PoP) software to retrieve peer-reviewed publications from the Scopus and Google Scholar databases. Scopus was selected as the primary data source due to its rigorous indexing standards and strong quality control mechanisms, which ensure access to high-impact and methodologically sound studies. Google Scholar was included as a complementary database to broaden the scope of the review by capturing relevant studies published in regional or emerging journals that may not yet be indexed in Scopus but contribute substantively to discussions on instructional leadership and school literacy, particularly in diverse and non-Western educational contexts. To address the heterogeneity of publication quality associated with Google Scholar, several methodological controls were implemented. These included restricting the search to peer-reviewed journal articles and academic book chapters, limiting the publication period to 2020–2025, including only open-access full-text publications, and excluding theses, dissertations, conference proceedings, and non-scholarly sources. Identical inclusion, exclusion, and quality appraisal criteria were applied to studies retrieved from both databases to ensure consistency and reduce selection bias. The search strategy employed combinations of keywords such as leadership,

school leadership, principal, literacy, and primary school. The initial search yielded 300 records, consisting of 200 articles from Scopus and 100 articles from Google Scholar. After removing 28 duplicate records, 272 articles proceeded to title and abstract screening.

Screening and Eligibility Assessment

Title and abstract screening was conducted to assess the relevance of retrieved records to the focus of school leadership and literacy. At this stage, 177 articles were excluded due to insufficient relevance. The remaining 95 articles underwent full-text assessment. During full-text screening, 36 articles were excluded due to inaccessible full texts. The remaining 59 articles were evaluated based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria related to publication language (Indonesian and English), publication year (2020–2025), publication type, open-access availability, and direct relevance to leadership in school literacy. This process resulted in 45 articles being included in the final synthesis. The overall identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion process was conducted systematically following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, as illustrated in Figure 1.

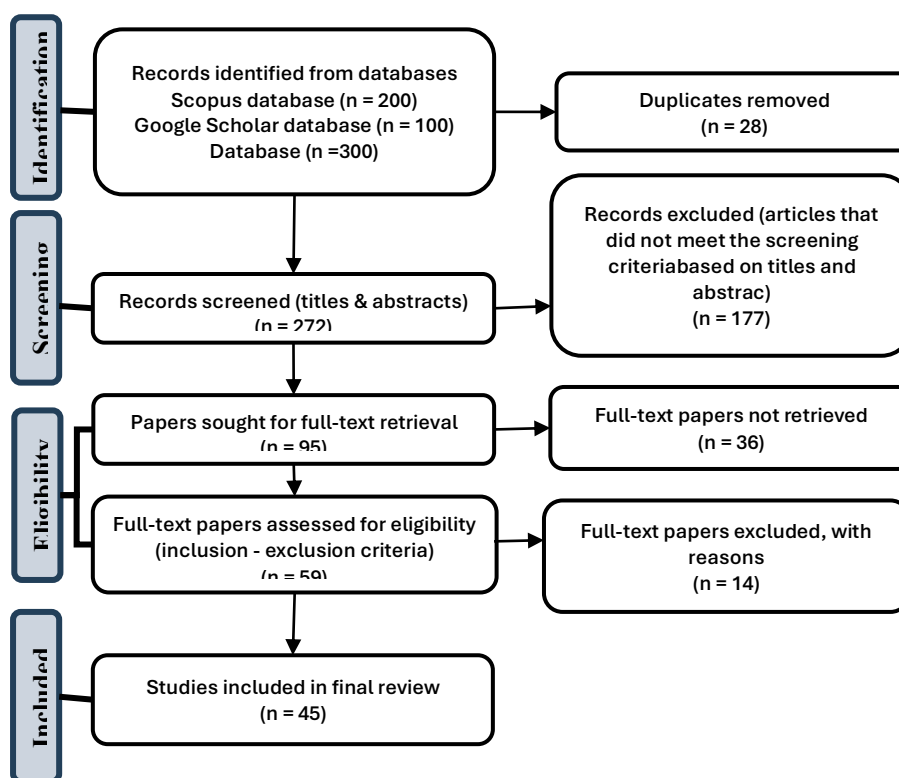


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure that only high-quality and relevant literature contributed meaningfully to the analysis, clear and systematic inclusion and exclusion criteria were established during the study selection process. These criteria were carefully designed to

enhance the credibility of the review by prioritizing peer-reviewed studies, ensuring topical relevance to school literacy and instructional leadership, and requiring sufficient empirical or conceptual contribution to support robust synthesis. In addition, the criteria functioned to minimize selection bias and maintain methodological rigor by excluding studies that lacked clear research designs, insufficient data, or alignment with the review objectives. Through the consistent application of these criteria, the review was able to focus on studies that offered substantive insights into the management and implementation of literacy initiatives in educational settings. A detailed summary of the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in this review is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	Indonesian and English	Other languages
Publication Year	2020–2025	Before 2020
Full-text Availability	Open access	Closed access
Publication Type	Indexed journal articles, academic books and book chapters	Proceedings, dissertations, theses, unpublished literature
Relevance	Direct contribution to studies on leadership in school literacy	Not relevant to leadership in school literacy

Quality Appraisal of Included Studies

Following eligibility assessment, a structured quality appraisal procedure was conducted to strengthen the validity and credibility of the synthesis findings. Quality appraisal was applied to ensure that only studies with adequate methodological rigor and conceptual clarity contributed to the final synthesis. Each included study was assessed using adapted quality appraisal criteria commonly employed in educational systematic reviews. The appraisal focused on four key dimensions: clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of research design and methodology, transparency of data collection and analysis procedures, and relevance and coherence of findings in relation to school leadership and literacy. Studies that demonstrated unclear research procedures, insufficient methodological transparency, or weak alignment between findings and research objectives were excluded during this stage. Only studies meeting minimum quality thresholds across these criteria were retained. This appraisal process reduced the risk of biased or weak evidence influencing the synthesis and enhanced the robustness of the review outcomes.

Data Analysis Techniques

Two complementary analytical techniques were employed. First, thematic synthesis was used to identify recurring patterns, themes, and conceptual relationships related to how school leadership influences literacy culture, policy, and instructional practices. The thematic interpretation was guided by contemporary research on instructional leadership that conceptualizes how principals' behaviors such as defining academic visions, coordinating curriculum, supervising instruction, and

fostering collaborative professional environments affect teaching quality and learning outcomes in schools (Suseno et al., 2025). Second, bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer software to examine keyword co-occurrence networks and visualize dominant research clusters. This analysis supported the identification of research trends, thematic concentrations, and gaps within the field of school literacy leadership. The combination of thematic synthesis and bibliometric mapping allowed for a comprehensive view of both substantive theoretical foundations in instructional leadership and the evolving research landscape on how leadership practices influence instructional quality and school improvement.

Time Frame Selection

The 2020–2025 publication period was deliberately selected to capture the most recent developments and evolving scholarly discourse on instructional leadership and literacy management in primary schools, a period marked by substantial transformation in educational policy and practice. This time frame reflects significant shifts toward systemic and collaborative models of literacy leadership, the increasing integration of digital and multimodal literacy practices, and the pedagogical and organizational changes that emerged in response to post-pandemic educational disruption. By focusing on this five-year span, the review is able to account for how schools and instructional leaders have adapted literacy strategies to address learning loss, equity concerns, and the growing demands of technology-enhanced learning environments. Limiting the scope to recent publications also aligns with PRISMA recommendations to ensure the novelty, relevance, and analytical validity of systematic reviews, while still providing a sufficiently robust evidence base to represent contemporary research trends and theoretical advancements in primary school literacy leadership.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

This section reports the main findings derived from the thematic synthesis and bibliometric analysis of 45 selected articles published between 2020 and 2025. The results are presented to describe observable patterns, distributions, and thematic groupings related to instructional leadership in primary school literacy. The presentation of findings focuses on reporting how instructional leadership, collaboration, literacy management, and research characteristics are described in the reviewed literature. Consistent with the principles of systematic reporting, this section does not include interpretative, evaluative, or explanatory analysis, which is addressed separately in the Discussion section.

Instructional Leadership in School Literacy

The thematic synthesis shows that all reviewed studies explicitly address the involvement of school principals in literacy-related activities. Across the 45

articles, instructional leadership in school literacy is reported in four main forms: formulation of literacy-related policies, supervision of instructional practices, management of human resources, and allocation of literacy resources. These forms of leadership are documented in relation to school programs, instructional planning documents, supervision records, and literacy initiatives described in the reviewed studies. The distribution of instructional leadership contributions across these four aspects is summarized in Table 2, which presents how leadership roles are represented in the literature based on recurring descriptions and reported practices.

Table 2. Synthesis of Instructional Leadership Contributions to School Literacy

Leadership Aspect	Form of Contribution	Key Findings from the Literature	Implications
Vision and Policy	Formulation of school literacy policies	Literacy positioned as a managerial agenda	Literacy integrated into school planning and lesson plans
Instructional Supervision	Monitoring of literacy practices	Increased consistency in literacy implementation	Improved instructional quality
Human Resource Management	Strengthening teachers' capacity	Enhanced teacher professionalism	Higher-quality literacy practices
Resource Allocation	Provision of facilities and books	More equitable access to literacy resources	Program sustainability ensured

Research Clusters and Trends in Leadership and Literacy (2020–2025)

Bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer identified three main research clusters based on keyword co-occurrence patterns across the 45 selected articles. The clusters were generated from author-provided keywords and indexed terms, enabling the identification of thematic concentrations within the literature. The characteristics of each cluster are presented in Table 3. Cluster 1 focuses on leadership and literacy management, capturing studies that examine principals, instructional leadership roles, and school-level literacy policies. Cluster 2 centers on teachers and instructional practices, including pedagogical approaches, classroom literacy instruction, and professional development activities. Cluster 3 addresses students and academic achievement, encompassing studies that report literacy outcomes, learning performance, and student engagement.

Table 3. Thematic Clusters Identified in Bibliometric Analysis of Leadership in School Literacy

Cluster	Dominant Nodes (Keywords)	Research Focus	Thematic Meaning
Cluster 1	leadership, principal	Literacy policy and management	Literacy positioned as a strategic and managerial school agenda led by instructional leadership
Cluster 2	teacher, educator	Literacy instructional practices	Teachers as primary implementers integrating literacy into instruction
Cluster 3	student, achievement	Literacy outcomes	Literacy directly contributes to students' academic achievement

The relationships among these clusters are further illustrated through keyword co-occurrence visualization, as shown in Figure 2.

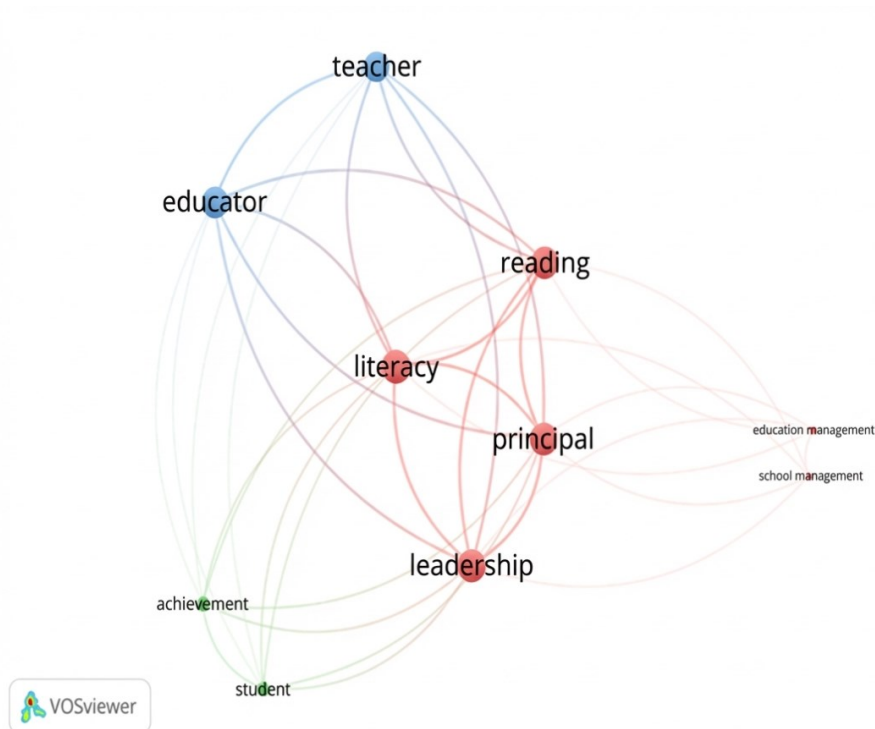


Figure 2. Visualization of Keyword Co-occurrence in Literacy Leadership Research (processed using VOSviewer, 2025)

Overlay visualization analysis was also conducted to examine the temporal distribution of research focus across the publication period. A summary of the observed trends based on overlay visualization is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Research Trends Based on Overlay Visualization

Period	Dominant Focus	Overlay Color	Description
2020–2022	Teachers’ pedagogical practices	Blue	Focus on reading instruction and teachers’ roles
2023–2025	Leadership and literacy management	Yellow	Literacy positioned as a systemic school policy

Collaboration among Principals, Teachers, and Librarians

The thematic synthesis identifies recurring descriptions of collaboration among principals, teachers, and librarians in the implementation of school literacy programs. Across the reviewed studies, principals are described as being involved in coordination, policy direction, and supervision related to literacy initiatives. Teachers are reported as implementing literacy instruction through classroom-based activities, while librarians are described as supporting literacy programs through resource management and literacy-related activities beyond classroom instruction. The distribution of roles and forms of collaboration among these actors

is summarized in Table 5, which presents the primary responsibilities and collaborative functions reported in the literature.

Table 5. Patterns of Actor Collaboration in Literacy Implementation

Actor	Primary Role	Form of Collaboration	Impact
Principal	Policy direction	Supervision and coordination	Program consistency
Teacher	Instructional implementation	Literacy integration in lesson plans	Improved instructional quality
Librarian	Pedagogical partner	Leveled books and assessment	Increased student engagement

Literacy Management and Student Academic Achievement

The reviewed literature reports relationships between literacy-related practices and student academic outcomes across diverse educational contexts. These studies describe literacy management components such as school literacy policies, instructional practices, assessment activities, and reading culture initiatives in relation to student learning outcomes. The reported mechanisms linking literacy management components and academic outcomes are summarized in Table 6, which categorizes the types of literacy practices and associated academic indicators described in the reviewed studies.

Table 6. Relationship between Literacy Management and Academic Achievement

Literacy Component	Mechanism	Academic Impact
Literacy policy	Standardization of practices	Consistent instructional quality
Literacy instruction	Improved text comprehension	Cross-subject achievement
Literacy assessment	Monitoring student progress	More targeted interventions
Literacy ecosystem	Reading culture	Long-term academic performance

Research Method Distribution

Analysis of research methods indicates that qualitative approaches account for the majority of the reviewed studies. Quantitative and mixed-methods designs are also represented, while synthesis-oriented studies such as systematic reviews and bibliometric analyses appear less frequently. The proportional distribution of research methods used in leadership and school literacy studies published between 2020 and 2025 is illustrated in Figure 3.

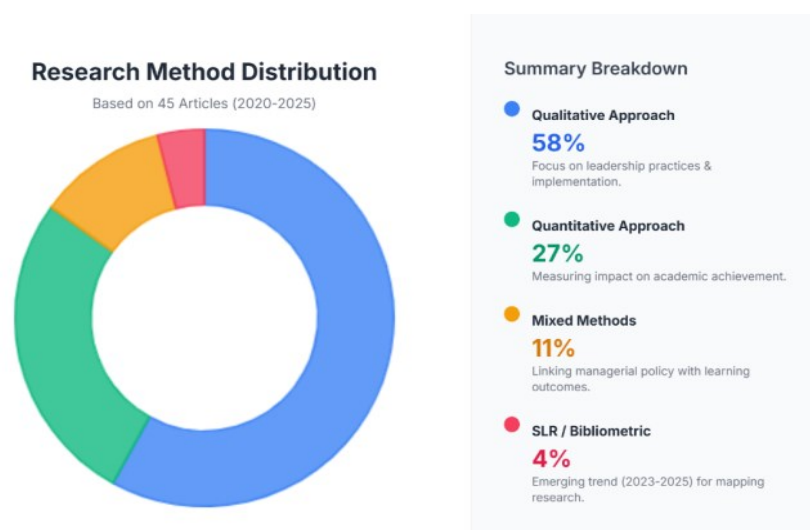


Figure 3. Research Method Distribution

Discussion

While the findings of this Systematic Literature Review confirm the prominence of instructional leadership in shaping school literacy practices, they also reveal important analytical tensions that complicate linear assumptions about leadership effectiveness. Rather than functioning as a direct and uniform driver of literacy improvement, instructional leadership emerges as a contextually mediated practice whose influence depends on organizational capacity, collaborative alignment, and systemic constraints. This indicates that the relationship between instructional leadership and literacy outcomes cannot be fully understood through outcome-based associations alone, but must be interpreted through the conditions under which leadership practices are enacted, distributed, and sustained within schools. The findings of this Systematic Literature Review reaffirm the central role of instructional leadership in shaping literacy practices in primary schools, while simultaneously revealing important complexities and contextual contingencies that challenge overly linear or normative leadership models. Across the reviewed studies, principals are consistently positioned as key actors in setting literacy direction, coordinating instructional practices, and facilitating professional learning (Bush, 2021; Maponya, 2020). However, the synthesis of recent empirical evidence suggests that instructional leadership in literacy should not be interpreted as a universally effective or context-neutral mechanism. Instead, its influence is mediated by organizational conditions, professional cultures, and systemic constraints that shape how leadership practices are enacted and sustained.

Instructional Leadership as a Contextually Mediated Practice

The findings of this Systematic Literature Review reaffirm the central role of instructional leadership in shaping school literacy practices, while simultaneously revealing significant contextual and structural complexities that challenge linear interpretations of leadership effectiveness. Across the reviewed studies, principals are consistently positioned as key actors in setting instructional direction,

coordinating literacy-oriented teaching practices, and fostering professional learning communities (Rohyadi et al., 2025; Yenita & Andriani, 2025). Prior research synthesized in the Journal of Educational Sciences confirms that instructional leadership contributes to instructional coherence and school-wide literacy planning when pedagogical goals are clearly articulated and aligned with school culture and data-based decision making (Gaol, 2023; Tan et al., 2022; Fibrianti et al., 2025).

However, this review demonstrates that the influence of instructional leadership on literacy outcomes is neither automatic nor context-neutral. Several JES studies emphasize that leadership effectiveness is mediated by organizational conditions such as administrative workload, policy pressures, and institutional support structures, which may constrain principals' capacity to sustain literacy-focused instructional supervision (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Özdemir et al., 2024; Yenita & Andriani, 2025). These findings suggest that instructional leadership should not be conceptualized merely as a set of technical supervisory practices, but rather as a contextually embedded process shaped by systemic constraints and local school dynamics.

Furthermore, recent empirical evidence indicates that accountability regimes and compliance-oriented school inspections may narrow principals' instructional focus, thereby limiting sustained engagement with literacy improvement initiatives (Kemethofer et al., 2025). This challenge is further reflected in JES-based literacy studies, which show that effective literacy and numeracy programs require not only leadership commitment but also coherent implementation, teacher collaboration, and continuous monitoring of learning outcomes (Pujiningsih et al., 2026; Komalasari et al., 2025). Empirical evidence from Indonesian elementary schools further illustrates that structured School Literacy Movement (GLS) programs and adequate literacy facilities significantly influence students' reading interest, indicating that instructional leadership must be translated into concrete school-wide literacy planning and resource support (Apriani et al., 2025). At the classroom level, teacher-led literacy strategies and routine literacy activities have been shown to directly increase students' reading engagement, suggesting that the success of instructional leadership in literacy depends on how principals enable and support teachers' literacy practices in daily instruction (Fadhilah & Kasrman, 2026). Taken together, these findings challenge normative assumptions that strengthening instructional leadership capacity alone is sufficient to improve literacy outcomes, highlighting the need to balance managerial responsibilities with pedagogical leadership and instructional support.

Collaboration and the Redistribution of Literacy Leadership

The synthesis also highlights a growing emphasis on collaborative and distributed forms of literacy leadership. Studies published in the Journal of Educational Sciences indicate that effective instructional leadership increasingly relies on shared responsibility among principals, teachers, and instructional teams, enabling literacy to be embedded across subject areas rather than confined to isolated classroom practices (Tan et al., 2022; Özdemir et al., 2024; Yenita & Andriani,

2025). Such collaborative arrangements support the development of a whole-school literacy culture and strengthen teachers' professional ownership of literacy initiatives (Rohyadi et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, the review reveals important tensions within distributed leadership approaches. Several JES articles caution that leadership distribution without strong instructional alignment may result in fragmented literacy practices and weakened pedagogical coherence across classrooms and subject areas (Gaol, 2023; Bellibaş et al., 2021; Fibrianti et al., 2025). In such contexts, collaboration risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative. This finding challenges overly celebratory narratives surrounding distributed leadership and underscores the continued importance of principals' instructional authority in aligning collaborative efforts with shared literacy goals. Thus, instructional leadership retains a critical coordinating function, serving as an alignment mechanism to ensure that distributed literacy practices remain pedagogically focused and strategically coherent.

Instructional Leadership, Literacy Equity, and Differential Outcomes

An important contribution of this review lies in its explicit attention to equity-related dimensions of instructional leadership. Studies published in the Journal of Educational Sciences consistently demonstrate that instructional leadership is associated with improved academic outcomes when literacy is systematically embedded in curriculum planning, instructional monitoring, and school-wide assessment practices (Özdemir et al., 2024; Kemethofer et al., 2025; Fibrianti et al., 2025). However, the synthesis also reveals that these positive effects are unevenly distributed across different school contexts. Socioeconomic disparities, variations in teacher professional capacity, and unequal access to instructional resources significantly moderate the influence of instructional leadership on literacy outcomes (Tan et al., 2022; Bellibaş et al., 2021; Rohyadi et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the argument that leadership for literacy cannot be disentangled from broader issues of educational equity. Principals are therefore required not only to manage instructional processes, but also to implement compensatory and context-responsive strategies that address structural disadvantages shaping students' literacy development (Yenita & Andriani, 2025). This perspective extends the existing JES literature by foregrounding the ethical dimension of instructional leadership. Literacy-oriented leadership must be responsive to contextual inequalities, positioning literacy not merely as an academic target, but as a strategic mechanism for expanding equitable learning opportunities and reducing achievement gaps across diverse school populations.

Theoretical Implications: From Individual Leadership to Systemic Capacity

From a theoretical standpoint, this SLR contributes to the literature by reframing instructional leadership in literacy as a systemic capacity rather than an individual attribute. While earlier JES studies primarily confirm positive associations between leadership and educational outcomes, recent syntheses highlight internal contradictions, contextual variability, and implementation challenges that complicate leadership enactment (Gaol, 2023; Özdemir et al., 2024; Tan et al.,

2022). Instructional leadership emerges as an outcome of interactions among policy frameworks, organizational structures, and professional relationships rather than a standalone leadership style. This reconceptualization aligns with integrated leadership models that combine instructional, transformational, and context-responsive perspectives (Bellibaş et al., 2021). Consequently, the central theoretical question shifts from whether instructional leadership works to how, when, and under what conditions it contributes to sustainable literacy improvement.

4. Conclusion

This Systematic Literature Review provides a critical and conceptually grounded contribution to the understanding of instructional leadership in school literacy. Rather than reaffirming instructional leadership as a universally effective leadership model, this review demonstrates that its influence on literacy development is highly contingent on organizational, professional, and systemic contexts. Instructional leadership emerges not as a linear driver of literacy improvement, but as a relational and adaptive practice shaped by school culture, policy demands, and collaborative capacity. The central conceptual contribution of this study lies in repositioning instructional leadership for literacy as a system-level capability rather than an individual leadership attribute. The synthesis highlights that leadership effects are predominantly indirect, mediated through instructional coherence, professional learning, and distributed responsibility. This finding challenges dominant normative assumptions in leadership research and underscores the limitations of prescriptive leadership frameworks when applied across diverse school contexts. Additionally, this review advances the literature by foregrounding equity considerations in literacy leadership. The findings indicate that socioeconomic conditions, resource distribution, and teacher capacity significantly moderate leadership effectiveness, emphasizing the need for socially just and context-sensitive leadership approaches. Overall, this review offers a theoretically enriched framework for understanding instructional leadership in school literacy and provides a foundation for future research that examines how leadership practices interact with contextual conditions to support sustainable and equitable literacy development.

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