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EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING STUDENTS' INTERESTS AND TALENTS AT SMA NEGERI 1 BARUMUN: AN ISLAMIC EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACTS

This study examines the strategies employed by the school principal of SMA Negeri 1 Barumun, North Sumatra Province, Indonesia, to develop students' interests and talents, and situates these strategies within the broader objectives of Islamic education. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through observation, structured interviews, and document analysis involving the principal, the vice-principal for student affairs, extracurricular supervisors, and students. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), and validity was established through source, technique, and time triangulation. The findings indicate that the principal implements five interconnected strategies: early identification of students' potential, the creation of a conducive school climate, the strengthening of extracurricular and academic competition programs, the provision of humanistic and personalized guidance, and collaborative engagement with teachers, parents, and external institutions. During the implementation of these strategies, active student participation in extracurricular activities increased from 64% in 2022 to 82% in 2025, and the number of award-winning students rose from 10 to 26 over the same period. Supporting factors include visionary leadership and strong external partnerships, whereas inhibiting factors consist of limited funding, inadequate facilities, and a shortage of specialist supervisors. Read together, the five strategies are interpreted as a holistic model of student development consistent with the objectives of Islamic education, in which academic achievement is integrated with character formation (akhlaq), the actualization of individual potential (fitrah), and social responsibility.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a critical foundation for developing high-quality, creative, and competitive human resources in the era of globalisation. Senior secondary schools occupy a central role in nurturing students' potential across both academic and non-academic dimensions. As mandated by the national education system, the ultimate goal of education is to develop students into individuals who are faithful, pious, noble in character, healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent, and responsible as democratic citizens (Wahono, 2018). In pursuit of this goal, schools bear responsibility not only for academic achievement but also for the non-academic development of students, including the cultivation of their interests and talents.

In the 21st century, education must shift away from a narrow model that overemphasises cognitive aspects towards a comprehensive learning approach capable of nurturing creativity, teamwork, communication skills, and strong character formation. Students are complex human beings endowed with cognitive, affective, psychomotor, social, and emotional potentials that require a conducive space to grow and flourish (Sulaiman et al., 2024). This shift is particularly relevant at the secondary level, where students are in a developmental phase transitioning towards adulthood. During adolescence, students begin to explore personal identity, develop individual potential, and examine various fields of interest, both academic and non-academic. Schools, as formal educational institutions, serve as the primary arena for assisting students in identifying, nurturing, and channelling their talents in a structured manner (Addzaky, 2024).

Interests and talents constitute an inseparable part of individual development. Interest functions as an internal driver that encourages students' engagement in learning and other supportive activities, whilst talent refers to a specific ability that, when developed, yields achievement and meaningful contribution to social and professional life. Effective education does not merely evaluate academic learning outcomes; it also supports students in identifying, expressing, and developing their interests and talents through relevant and sustained activities (Suriani et al., 2025).

The holistic view of student potential outlined above resonates closely with the objectives of Islamic education. Within Islamic education, the cultivation of interests and talents cannot be separated from the development of character (*akhlaq*), the actualisation of *fitrah* the innate potential with which every individual is understood to be endowed and the fulfilment of social responsibility. Islamic education thus conceives student development not merely as cognitive and psychomotor training, but as a holistic process oriented towards producing a well-rounded human being (*insan kamil*) who is academically capable, spiritually grounded, and socially responsible, in line with the national education goal of forming individuals who are "faithful, pious, and noble in character" (Wahono, 2018). Positioning the principal's strategies within this Islamic education framework is essential, since a school's approach to non-academic development reflects its broader educational philosophy and its contribution to producing morally and spiritually mature graduates a positioning that this revised study makes explicit throughout the analysis.

SMA Negeri 1 Barumon is a state senior secondary school located in Padang Lawas Regency, North Sumatra Province, holding an A-grade accreditation for the 2020–2025 period. The school serves as a primary educational reference for the Barumon Raya region and accommodates students from diverse socio-economic and cultural

backgrounds. Based on initial observations and interviews conducted in December 2025, the school runs a range of extracurricular activities, including Scouting (Pramuka), Paskibra, the student council (OSIS), the Youth Scientific Group (KIR), Youth Red Cross (PMR), sports clubs, and arts activities such as music, dance, and theatre. The school also actively participates in district-level academic competitions, including science olympiads, Indonesian debate contests, and scientific writing competitions.

However, findings from initial field observations and interviews with the school principal, Mr Syuaib Akbar Rambe, revealed several significant challenges. One of the primary problems confronting the school is the density of the academic schedule, which frequently restricts time available for interest and talent development activities. Many schools continue to prioritise attainment of the national curriculum, thereby limiting the allocation of time for non-academic endeavours. This condition indicates a tendency to focus disproportionately on academic value achievement, causing talent development activities to be perceived as secondary and insufficiently supported within the daily instructional structure (Rohma & Hakim, 2025).

Student participation in interest and talent development activities remains uneven. Whilst activities such as Pramuka and OSIS function actively owing to strong leadership structures and consistent guidance, certain activities including traditional arts and specific academic competitions exhibit low participation rates due to inadequate motivation and inconsistent mentoring. Students with academic inclinations tend to receive greater developmental opportunities through olympiad competitions, whilst those with non-academic interests in arts and sports sometimes lack consistent guidance. This imbalance reflects a disparity in student potential development, influenced by the implementation strategies adopted at school level.

Several observable symptoms compound this problem: participation is uneven, with only a fraction of students actively engaging in extracurricular activities; some programmes operate as mere administrative routines without cultivation grounded in individual student potential; and there is a shortage of qualified supervisors and supporting facilities. Furthermore, the absence of a formal recognition system for non-academic achievements diminishes enthusiasm amongst students. The school principal has made efforts to identify these challenges strategically, yet a comprehensive, data-driven mapping of individual student potential has not been fully realised.

According to Handayani and Putra (2023), sustained extracurricular activities effectively facilitate the development of discipline, collaboration, accountability, and leadership among students, particularly through direct practice and meaningful social exchange beyond the classroom. These activities hold a crucial role in meeting the comprehensive developmental needs of students and must not be regarded as mere supplements to the curriculum (Sulyani, 2023). Participation in extracurricular activities also builds students' resilience when confronting academic, social, and emotional challenges. Non-academic activities offer practical experience in managing competition, failure, deadlines, group conflict, and physical exhaustion, ultimately strengthening mental tenacity, adaptability, and emotional maturity (Ramadhani, 2024).

Well-designed strategies positively influence the overall school culture. Schools with well-managed extracurricular programmes tend to cultivate a positive learning atmosphere in which students feel valued, motivated, and given space to express themselves. This strengthens participation across various activities and reinforces the

school's image as an institution committed to holistic development (Karatte, 2024). The Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System further underscores that education is not solely directed towards academic achievement, but towards the formation of complete human beings who are spiritually, morally, intellectually, physically, and socially mature.

Research Gap

Several studies have examined the role of principal leadership and extracurricular management in student development. Priyanto (2024) documented that principals in remote or resource-constrained schools rely on creativity and principled leadership to compensate for facility limitations. Handayani and Putra (2023) demonstrated that sustained extracurricular activities cultivate discipline, collaboration, and leadership among students, while Karatte (2024) showed that well-managed extracurricular programmes shape a positive school climate. Badaruddin (2023) proposed that an effective principal's strategy for developing student potential should be grounded in role modelling, personal guidance, and empowerment, and Pradipta et al. (2025) linked this framework to the humanistic theories of Maslow and Rogers.

Collectively, these studies establish that principal leadership and extracurricular management matter for student development. However, most of this literature is either conceptual, focused on urban or well-resourced school contexts, or does not explicitly connect principal strategies to the objectives of Islamic education. Empirical qualitative studies that examine, within a single regional school with documented resource constraints, how a principal's strategies are enacted, sustained, and connected to holistic educational aims including the aims of Islamic education remain limited. This gap justifies the focus of the present study on SMA Negeri 1 Barumon, North Sumatra, a school where facility and funding limitations coexist with measurable improvements in student participation and achievement, and where the connection between principal strategy and Islamic education has not previously been made explicit.

The novelty of this research therefore lies in its specific focus on the principal's strategies for developing student interests and talents based on empirical realities in a regional school setting, interpreted through an explicitly Islamic education lens. This research also carries social significance by encouraging the formation of a school culture that values the diversity of student potential, demonstrating that through an open and inspirational principal's strategy one consistent with the Islamic educational aim of nurturing *fitrah* and *akhlaq* students can develop in a more balanced manner: not only academically distinguished, but also characterful, creative, and accomplished in their respective fields of interest.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by two interconnected theoretical strands humanistic leadership theory and the concept of student talent development interpreted through the lens of Islamic education. Establishing this framework prior to data collection, rather than applying it only in the discussion of findings, allowed the framework to directly inform the construction of the interview guide and the coding categories used in analysis.

1. Humanistic Leadership

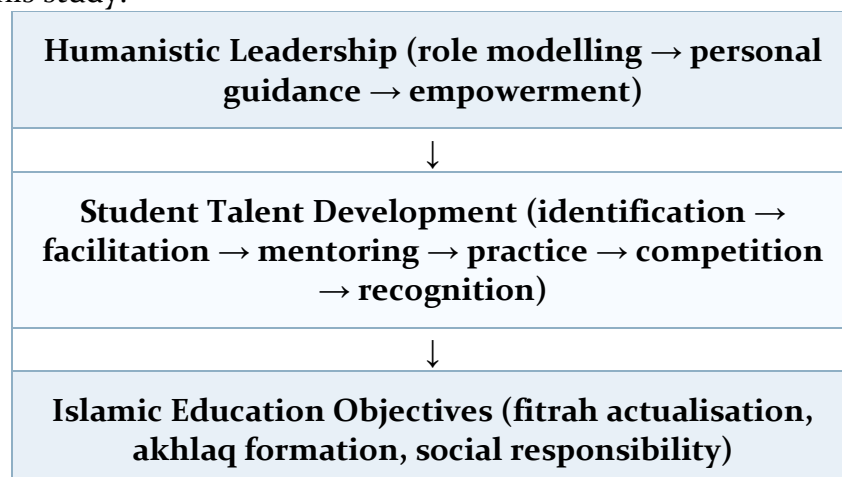
Humanistic leadership theory, rooted in the work of Maslow and Rogers, holds that every individual possesses an innate drive towards self-actualisation, and that leadership grounded in empathy, personal recognition, and empowerment creates the conditions necessary for that drive to be realised (Pradipta et al., 2025). Badaruddin (2023) operationalises this theory for school leadership by proposing that an effective principal's strategy must be grounded in three principles: role modelling, personal guidance and mentoring, and empowerment. In this study, these three principles were used as the initial analytical categories for constructing the interview guide and for coding field data: interview questions addressed how the principal models desired behaviour, how personal guidance is delivered to individual students, and how students and staff are empowered to take ownership of talent-development activities.

2. Students Talent Development

The second strand, student talent development, is conceived as a sequential process comprising identification, facilitation, mentoring, practice, competition, and recognition. This sequence was likewise used as a coding framework, allowing the five strategies reported in Section D to be traced back to specific stages of this process rather than treated as an unstructured list of practices.

3. Integration with Islamic Education

Humanistic leadership is considered an appropriate lens for this study for two reasons. First, the object of study the development of interests and talents is inherently concerned with individual difference and self-actualisation, which is the central concern of humanistic theory. Second, the humanistic emphasis on empathy and the recognition of individual potential resonates closely with the Islamic education concept of *fitrah*, the innate potential that every individual is understood to possess and that education is responsible for nurturing (Wahono, 2018). Read together, humanistic leadership theory and the Islamic education concept of *fitrah* suggest that a principal's strategy for developing student interests and talents should be evaluated not only by measurable outcomes such as participation rates and competition results, but also by the extent to which it enables students to recognise, express, and actualise their individual potential in a manner consistent with character formation (*akhlaq*) and social responsibility. Figure 1 summarises the conceptual framework used to structure data collection and analysis in this study.



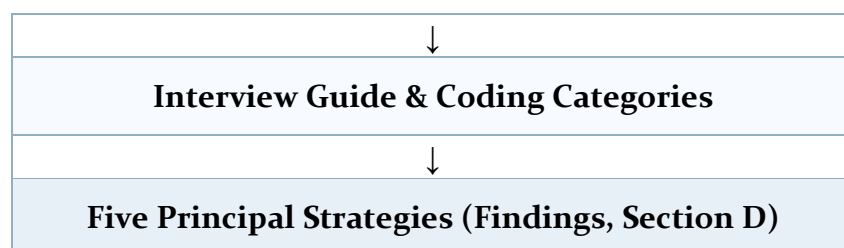


Figure 1. Conceptual framework linking humanistic leadership, student talent development, and Islamic education objectives.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a descriptive method, aimed at explaining how the school principal utilises extracurricular programmes to cultivate students' interests and talents at SMA Negeri 1 Barumon, North Sumatra Province, and how these strategies relate to the theoretical framework outlined in Section B. The descriptive qualitative method makes use of words and narratives rather than numerical data; information obtained through in-depth interviews is used to construct more comprehensible descriptions (Sarosa, 2021). Given the close relationship between the researcher and the research subjects, active participation in the field is a necessary component of this study (Waruwu, 2023). In accordance with Sugiyono (2020), this study adopts a naturalistic approach, examining the condition of the research object in its natural setting, with the researcher functioning as the primary instrument collecting data through a combination of observation, interviews, and documentation. The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Barumon, located at Jalan KH. Dewantara No. 43, Kelurahan Pasar Sibuhuan, Kecamatan Barumon, Kabupaten Padang Lawas, North Sumatra Province.

1. Research Period

Preliminary observations and initial interviews were conducted in December 2025. The main data collection was carried out over a period of one month, from 1 April 2026 to 5 May 2026.

2. Research Subjects and Sampling Procedure

Research subjects were selected using purposive sampling, based on the criterion that each participant held a role directly relevant to the planning, implementation, or experience of the principal's strategies for developing students' interests and talents. Table 1 presents the composition of research participants together with the selection criteria applied to each category.

Table 1. Research Participants and Selection Criteria

Participant Category	Number	Selection Criteria
Principal	1	Principal of SMA Negeri 1 Barumun; responsible for formulating and directing the overall strategy
Vice-Principal for Student Affairs	1	Directly responsible for coordinating student affairs and extracurricular programmes
Extracurricular Supervisors	1	Directly involved in mentoring and implementing talent-development activities
Students	30	Active participants in extracurricular programmes; selected to represent variation across academic and non-academic activities
Total	33	

3. Data Sources

This study utilises two types of data: primary and secondary. Primary data constitute essential information collected directly by the researcher during the research process, obtained through observation, interviews, and field notes (Sujarweni, 2014). Secondary data, by contrast, refer to data previously gathered by other parties, including documents, administrative records, and institutional reports that have been processed and published prior to the commencement of this study (Nashrullah et al., 2023). Data sources encompass both human informants namely the school principal, vice-principal for student affairs, extracurricular supervisors, and students and non-human sources such as documents, photographs, and statistical materials (Emzir, 2014).

4. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out through three principal techniques. Observation was employed by directly examining objects, individuals, or events in the field without alteration, enabling the researcher to obtain accurate and in-depth information about real behaviours, interactions, and conditions (Ramdhan, 2021). A total of six interviews were conducted, with each session lasting an average of 10–20 minutes. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian, audio-recorded, and transcribed in written form. Documentation was utilised as a complementary technique, incorporating school profiles, vision and mission statements, meeting minutes, activity reports, photographs, and other supporting data related to the principal's approach to developing students' interests and talents (Zuchri Abdussamad, 2017).

5. Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis followed the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) interactive model, operationalised in this study as a five-step coding procedure. First, raw data from interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were organised and read repeatedly. Second, open coding was applied to identify recurring practices and statements. Third, codes were grouped into categories corresponding to the theoretical framework established in Section B role modelling, personal guidance, and empowerment, together with the stages of identification, facilitation, mentoring, practice, competition, and recognition. Fourth, categories were consolidated into themes through constant comparison across participants and data sources. Fifth, the five strategies reported in

Section D were derived directly from this thematic consolidation, rather than being determined prior to data collection.

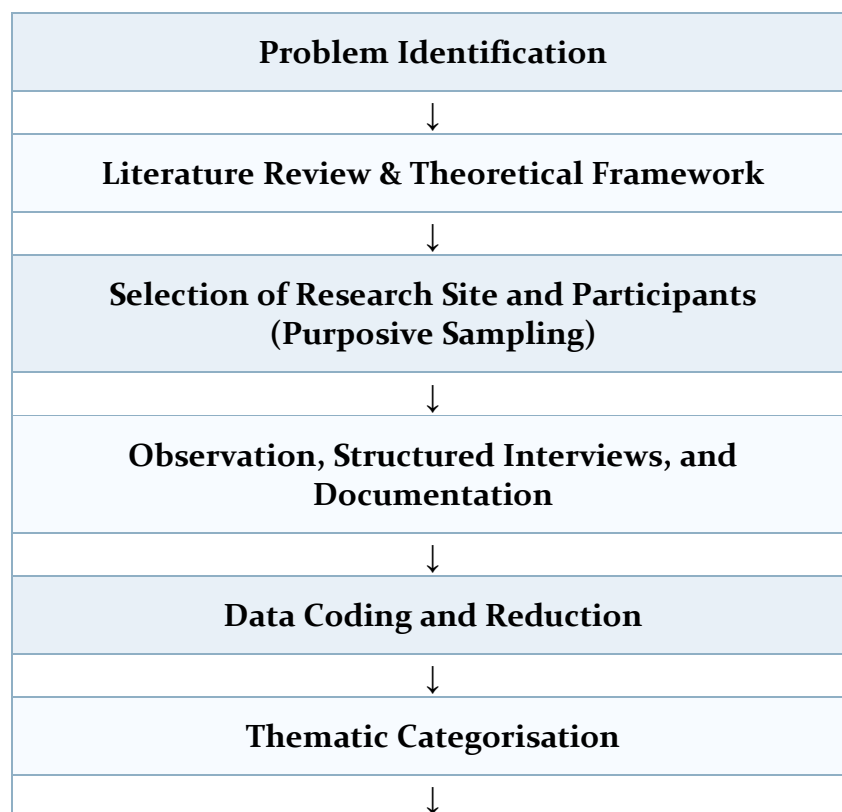
Data reduction involved selecting, simplifying, and transforming raw data into information relevant to the research focus (Kusumajanti et al., 2025). Data display presented findings systematically through descriptive narratives, thematic matrices, and relational diagrams connecting leadership factors, teacher support, and student talent development (Nurhaswinda et al., 2025). Conclusion drawing and verification constituted the final analytical stage, aimed at identifying meaning within the collected data by seeking relationships and similarities across occurrences to formulate sound conclusions (Mezmir, 2020).

6. Data Validaty

To ensure the validity of the findings, credibility was assessed through triangulation employing three forms: source triangulation, which compared data from interviews with the principal, teachers, and students to test consistency of information (Nurfajriani et al., 2024); technique triangulation, which cross-referenced findings from interviews, observations, and documentation to mutually reinforce a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon (Sari et al., 2025); and time triangulation, which involved data collection at different points in time, both before and after extracurricular activities, to verify the consistency and sustainability of information from participants over time (Kaharuddin, 2021).

7. Research Procedure

Figure 2 presents the overall procedure followed in this study, from problem identification to the formulation of findings and conclusions.



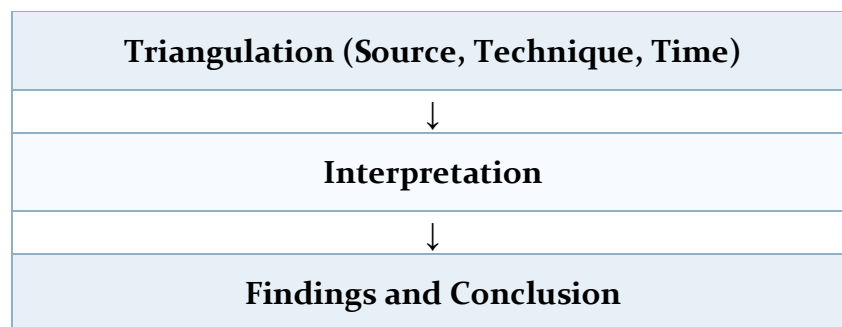


Figure 2. Research procedure diagram.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Principal's Strategies in Developing Students' Interests and Talents at SMA Negeri 1 Barumun

a. Early Identification of Student Character and Potential

The first strategy is the systematic early identification of each student's character and potential. The principal instructs every homeroom teacher and extracurricular supervisor to conduct structured observations, interest and talent questionnaires, learning-outcome records, and participatory behaviour assessments, ensuring that every student's potential is mapped comprehensively and no talent goes unrecognised. This process is carried out at the start of each academic year, allowing the school to align its direction for interest and talent development with students' developmental needs and the school's existing capacity. The practice is consistent with Badaruddin (2023), who argues that an effective principal's strategy must be grounded in role modelling, personal guidance and mentoring, and empowerment; early identification constitutes the foundational step within the personal guidance dimension.

Interview excerpts illustrate how this strategy is experienced across roles. The principal described the overall approach as built step by step, from recognising students' potential early on to creating a supportive atmosphere and building outside partnerships, so that every child has room to grow (Principal, Interview, 2026). The vice-principal for student affairs explained that the One Student One Activity programme ensures no student is left without an activity, with participation monitored directly and responses improving year after year (Vice-Principal for Student Affairs, Interview, 2026). The traditional dance supervisor reported that Tortor training, held twice weekly, began with only a few interested students but grew once the group won at district level and became part of the school's identity (Traditional Dance Supervisor, Interview, 2026). Students likewise described how initial encouragement from teachers grew into genuine interest, whether in science olympiad preparation, weekly debate practice that built their confidence in presenting, or Paskibra training that taught discipline and teamwork (Students, Interview, 2026). One student linked traditional dance to cultural pride, noting how success at district level raised the school's profile, while another described the responsibility learned from leading the Barumun Art Festival under the principal's guidance. A further student noted that limited equipment in the music laboratory means students must take turns or bring their own instruments (Students, Interview, 2026).

This finding aligns with the humanistic theory of Maslow and Rogers, which holds that individuals possess a natural drive towards self-actualisation; systematic

identification creates the conditions for students to progress towards their fullest potential cognitively, emotionally, and morally (Pradipta et al., 2025). Data gathered through identification activities are used to direct students towards extracurricular activities suited to their potential, whether in the sciences, sports, or the arts. Within an Islamic education perspective, this process may be understood as the school's attempt to recognise each student's *fitrah* the innate potential that education is responsible for nurturing rather than imposing from outside.

b. Creation of a School Climate Conducive to Self-Development

The second strategy is the deliberate creation of a conducive, inspirational school climate oriented towards student potential, encompassing culture, values, and social relationships alongside the physical environment. This is promoted through programmes such as Hari Bakat dan Kreativitas (Talent and Creativity Day), Pekan Seni dan Sains (Arts and Science Week), and the Gerakan Satu Siswa Satu Kegiatan (One Student One Activity Movement) policy in effect since the 2023/2024 academic year. The period of this policy's implementation coincided with active extracurricular participation rising from 64 per cent in 2022 to 82 per cent in 2025 (see Table 3), consistent with Karatte (2024), who found that well-managed extracurricular programmes cultivate a positive learning atmosphere that enhances motivation for both academic and non-academic learning.

The principal's role in shaping this climate is also motivational: attending training sessions and competitions in person, and conducting motivation sessions, character-development activities, and award ceremonies for high-achieving students. According to Patrick and Nordin (2025), leadership oriented towards humanistic values creates a school atmosphere that is safe and supportive for students' self-development. Taken together, these programmes suggest that climate-building at SMA Negeri 1 Barumon is treated not as a background condition but as an active strategy in its own right, deliberately paired with the identification work described above so that recognised potential has a supportive environment in which to develop.

c. Strengthening Extracurricular Programmes and Competitive Academic Activities

The third strategy is the active development of superior extracurricular programmes, structured around activities including the National Science Olympiad (OSN), traditional music and dance, Pramuka, and Paskibra. SMA Negeri 1 Barumon routinely succeeds in academic and non-academic competitions at district and provincial levels; the number of award-winning students rose from 10 in 2022 to 26 in 2025 across science olympiads, Indonesian debate, traditional dance, and athletics (see Table 3). The traditional dance extracurricular (Tortor and creative dance) stands out as a particularly notable example, having become the school's cultural identity and earning first place at the 2024 district-level traditional dance competition, reflecting the principal's contextual strategy of aligning talent development with local potential. Activities also follow structured schedules Paskibra training twice weekly, scientific writing coaching every Saturday, and cultural arts practice every Wednesday afternoon demonstrating a systematically designed rather than incidental programme, and corroborating Rohma and Hakim (2025), who argue that without adequate supervisory coordination, extracurricular effectiveness is severely limited.

d. Humanistic Leadership and Personal Guidance

The fourth strategy is the application of humanistic leadership and personal guidance, prioritising empathy, emotional support, recognition, and personal motivation. The principal routinely holds coaching sessions with supervisors and homeroom teachers to map student talents through observation, questionnaires, and interviews, directing students towards activities aligned with their potential. The principal simultaneously acts as facilitator providing music rooms, laboratories, and sports equipment; motivator encouraging competition participation through the "One Student One Achievement" programme; and innovator integrating Barumun's local wisdom into activities such as traditional dance. According to Khusnah (2025), an inspirational educational leader builds a positive school culture that facilitates both academic and non-academic growth.

This humanistic leadership is also evidenced by the Forum Pelajar Berbakat Barumun (FPBB), which gives students space to independently organise activities such as the Barumun Art Festival, a Science Innovation Competition, and a Traditional Music Creative Class, supported by the principal through funding and external mentors. This empowerment fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility among students entrusted with leadership. Read within the Islamic education framework, it can be understood as an expression of *amanah* (entrusted responsibility), through which students gain genuine ownership as part of their character formation.

e. Collaboration with Teachers, Parents, and External Parties

The fifth strategy is a collaborative approach ensuring the sustainability of talent-development programmes, involving teachers, students, and parents, consistent with humanistic leadership's emphasis on empathy and support for individual potential (Huda & Istofa, 2021). Teachers are trained in project-based learning and authentic assessment; supervisory teachers identify potential and provide regular mentoring, such as physical education teachers selecting athletes for district competitions and arts teachers supervising music and dance groups, creating a collective working system for every student's development.

The principal also maintains partnerships with the Padang Lawas District Education Office, Universitas Negeri Medan, and local creative communities such as Sanggar Seni Barumun Raya, producing training and competitions that broaden students' horizons. Through the parent-teacher forum programme, the school strengthens communication with parents, reinforcing support for children's development. This collaborative strategy has proven effective in broadening access to quality mentoring and addressing resource limitations – most directly, the shortage of specialist supervisors is offset through the partnership with Universitas Negeri Medan and local creative communities.

Table 2. Five Principal Strategies and Their Implementation

Strategy	Key Implementation	Corresponding Stage(s)
1. Early identification	Structured observation, questionnaires, learning-outcome records	Identification
2. Conducive school climate	Hari Bakat dan Kreativitas; Gerakan Satu Siswa Satu Kegiatan	Facilitation
3. Extracurricular & competition strengthening	OSN, Tortor/creative dance, Pramuka, Paskibra; structured schedules	Facilitation, Practice, Competition
4. Humanistic leadership & personal guidance	Coaching sessions; Forum Pelajar Berbakat Barumun (FPBB)	Mentoring, Recognition
5. Collaboration with teachers, parents, external parties	Partnerships with district education office, Universitas Negeri Medan, Sanggar Seni Barumun Raya	Facilitation, Mentoring

Table 2 summarises the five strategies together with their key implementation and the corresponding stage of the student talent-development process introduced in Section B, showing how each strategy maps onto a distinct point in the identification-to-recognition sequence rather than duplicating the others' functions.

Table 3. Student Participation and Achievement, 2022–2025

Year	Total Students	Active Extracurricular Participants	Participation Rate	Award-Winning Students
2022	40	15	37.5%	10
2023	35	20	57.1%	12
2024	30	12	40.0%	8
2025	30	15	50.0%	26

The increase in active extracurricular participation, from 37.5% in 2022 to 50.0% in 2025, alongside the increase in award-winning students from 10 to 26, represents a central empirical finding of this study. Table 3 disaggregates these figures on a year-by-year basis.

2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Principal's Strategy for Developing Students' Interests and Talents

a. Supporting Factors

Several supporting factors underpin implementation. Most prominent is the principal's visionary, participatory leadership, which creates an environment conducive to exploring interests and talents; field observations indicate a substantial majority of students actively engaged in extracurricular activities such as Pramuka, Paskibra, traditional music, regional dance, science club, and school literacy, demonstrating high enthusiasm for self-development beyond academics. Teacher and supervisor support is

a further enabling factor, with teachers actively recognising student potential and following up through regular mentoring, creating a collective working system oriented towards each student's development. The availability of basic facilities sports fields, multipurpose halls, laboratory rooms, and arts and music spaces provides important capital for interest activities even though these have not yet reached modern standards; the principal further innovates by using open spaces such as the school garden as outdoor learning areas. Collaboration with external parties has yielded concrete results in expanding training and competition opportunities, aligning with Tanjung and Chaniago (2025), who argue that success in student talent development depends on synergy between supporting factors and effective management of inhibiting ones.

b. Inhibiting Factors

Several significant inhibiting factors have also been identified. The most prominent is limited dedicated funding: a substantial portion of activities still relies on regular School Operational Assistance (BOS) funding with restricted allocation, so some training, competitions, and contests cannot proceed on a sustained basis. Second is the shortage of modern facilities and infrastructure the music laboratory lacks complete equipment, computer rooms are limited, and sports equipment does not fully meet competition standards, particularly affecting students talented in technology, modern music, or multimedia. Third is the limited availability of specialist supervisory teachers; for instance, the debate club supervisor has not attended provincial-level argumentation training, limiting guidance quality. As noted in Section D.1.e, the principal addresses this shortage through external partnerships with Universitas Negeri Medan and local creative communities. Fourth, the density of the academic schedule remains a persistent challenge: although the principal has designated Friday afternoons for extracurricular activities, conflicts with remedial sessions and examination preparation still arise. A fifth factor is limited parental support some parents remain oriented towards academic achievement alone, creating psychological pressure on students active in arts or sports, consistent with Sulyani (2023), who notes that without consistent stakeholder support, potential development through extracurricular activities cannot run optimally; the principal's parent-teacher forum programme (Section D.1.e) functions as a direct response to this factor.

Table 4. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors	Principal's Response
Visionary, participatory leadership	Limited dedicated funding	Prioritisation within BOS allocation; pursuit of external partnerships
Teacher and supervisor support	Shortage of modern facilities	Use of available spaces (e.g., school garden) as substitute learning areas
Basic facilities (fields, halls, labs)	Shortage of specialist supervisors	Collaboration with Universitas Negeri Medan and local creative communities
External partnerships	Density of academic schedule	Designated Friday-afternoon extracurricular slot
Student motivation	Limited parental support	Parent-teacher forum programme

Table 4 summarises the supporting and inhibiting factors together with the principal's corresponding response to each inhibiting factor, illustrating that most inhibiting factors are met with a specific, identifiable adaptation rather than left unaddressed.

3. Discussion

The principal's strategies at SMA Negeri 1 Barumon are varied and adaptive, combining participatory, motivational, contextual, and facilitative approaches tailored to students' needs. This is consistent with Badaruddin's (2023) framework, which holds that effective principal strategy must be grounded in role modelling, personal guidance, and empowerment each dimension observable here, from early identification through to external collaboration.

The rise in participation from 64 to 82 per cent, and in award-winning students from 10 to 26, occurred during the period in which these strategies were implemented (see Table 3). Because this study is qualitative and non-experimental, these figures should be read as descriptive evidence of change associated with implementation, not as evidence of a causal effect. With this caveat, the findings broadly align with Alfin Pratama (2024), who found extracurricular activities function effectively when student management is well executed and the principal's strategic role is clearly defined, and with Ainul Nidaul Khasanah (2025), who found that extracurricular implementation develops students' interests, talents, and non-academic skills when supported by sound planning, competent supervisors, and principal oversight.

Persistent challenges limited funding, inadequate modern facilities, and insufficient specialist supervisors confirm that the strategy must continue to evolve, requiring an adaptive, innovative approach for extracurricular activities to operate sustainably (Tanjung & Chaniago, 2025). Collaboration with universities, arts organisations, and the district education office remains a key solution for bridging these resource gaps, and the consistency with which the principal pairs each inhibiting factor

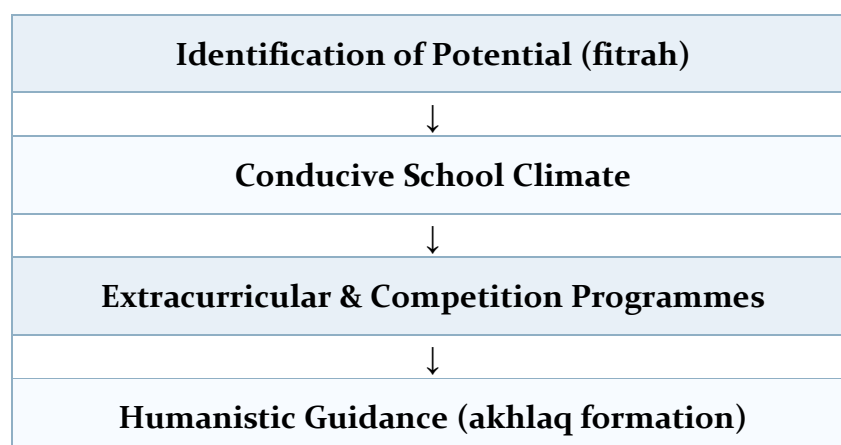
with a specific response (Table 4) suggests that this adaptiveness is a deliberate feature of the strategy rather than an incidental coping mechanism.

Distinctive Features of the Barumun Case

Beyond confirming general propositions in the literature, the Barumun case points to features distinctive to regional, resource-constrained settings. First, reliance on external collaboration suggests that resource limitation itself can drive partnership-based strategy rather than being merely a barrier. Second, the explicit incorporation of local cultural content, particularly Tortor dance, shows the strategy is shaped by Barumun's socio-cultural context rather than a generic urban template raising a question of transferability, since a policy such as Gerakan Satu Siswa Satu Kegiatan may travel readily to other schools whereas culturally specific programming requires local adaptation. Third, the case demonstrates that humanistic leadership principles, typically discussed in well-resourced settings, can be operationalised under funding and facility constraints, suggesting that resource constraint may reshape rather than simply weaken humanistic leadership practice.

An Islamic Education Reading of the Findings

Read through an Islamic education lens, the five strategies form a coherent model of holistic student development: early identification corresponds to recognising fitrah; a conducive climate and humanistic guidance correspond to the nurturing environment necessary for akhlaq formation; strengthened extracurricular and competitive activities correspond to the practical actualisation of potential; and collaboration with teachers, parents, and external parties corresponds to the communal responsibility (ta'awun) that Islamic education places on the wider community. Interpreted this way, the principal's strategies contribute not only to educational leadership literature generally but specifically to the objectives of Islamic education, illustrating how academic achievement, non-academic talent, and character formation can be pursued as an integrated whole. The evidence from SMA Negeri 1 Barumun affirms that principled, humanistic, contextually grounded leadership can, even under limited resources, cultivate an environment in which student interests and talents are meaningfully identified, nurtured, and celebrated, and in which academic achievement is pursued alongside rather than at the expense of character formation and social responsibility. Figure 3 presents the conceptual model derived from the five strategies identified in this study.



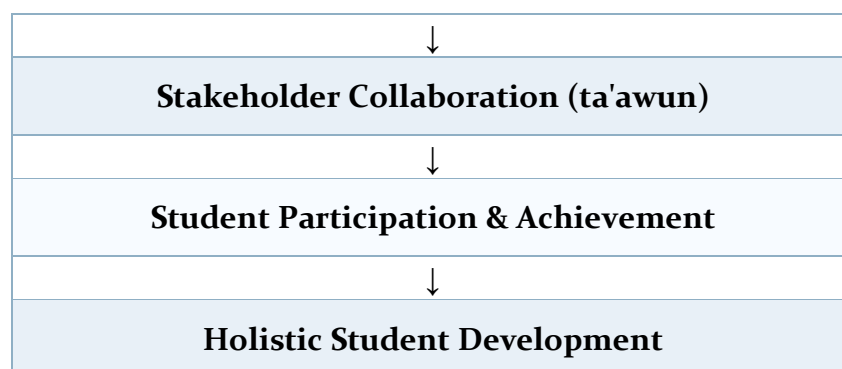


Figure 3. Conceptual model of the principal's strategy for student interest and talent development, read through an Islamic education lens.

E. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the school principal of SMA Negeri 1 Barumun, North Sumatra Province, has implemented a varied and adaptive set of strategies in developing students' interests and talents, comprising five interconnected dimensions: the early identification of student character and potential, the creation of a school climate conducive to self-development, the strengthening of extracurricular and competitive academic programmes, the application of humanistic and personal guidance leadership, and the fostering of collaboration with teachers, parents, and external parties.

The implementation of these strategies was accompanied by an increase in active student participation in extracurricular activities, from 64 per cent in 2022 to 82 per cent in 2025, and a growth in the number of award-winning students, from 10 to 26 over the same period. Given the qualitative, non-experimental design of this study, these figures should be read as descriptive evidence of change occurring alongside the strategies, rather than as evidence of a direct causal effect.

Taken together, the five strategies constitute a conceptual model in which early identification, a conducive climate, structured extracurricular practice, humanistic guidance, and external collaboration function as interdependent components of holistic student development (Figure 3). Read through the lens of Islamic education, this model illustrates how a school with limited material resources can nonetheless pursue the integration of academic achievement, non-academic talent, character formation, and social responsibility that constitutes the broader aim of Islamic education.

Supporting factors that have facilitated the effective implementation of these strategies include the principal's visionary and participatory leadership, high levels of student enthusiasm, consistent teacher and supervisor support, available basic school facilities, and productive external collaboration with the district education office and higher education institutions. Conversely, the primary inhibiting factors consist of limited dedicated funding for talent development programmes, a shortage of modern facilities and specialist supervisors, the density of the academic schedule, and insufficient parental support for non-academic activities.

The findings of this study contribute empirically to the body of knowledge on school principal leadership strategies in regional school contexts, particularly in areas characterised by resource constraints. The evidence demonstrates that even under such limitations, a principled, humanistic, and contextually grounded leadership approach is capable of creating a school culture that values the diversity of student potential. Future research is recommended to examine the long-term impact of these strategies on

student character formation and post-school achievement, to explore policy models that can provide more equitable support for interest and talent development programmes in schools beyond major urban centres, and to test the transferability of the conceptual model proposed here, specifically through an Islamic education framework, in other regional schools.

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