School Leadership Practices and Identity Politics in a Multicultural Society: The Case of Indonesia

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Abstract

This article aims to explore school leadership practices in the context of the multicultural society of Indonesia. Effective school leaders in a diverse context demonstrate a type of moral leadership characterized by high awareness and sensitivity to cultural diversity and act accordingly to enable everyone in school to pursue his or her goals. This study used a qualitative case study approach by selecting three different schools and interviewing the principals, teachers, and students. The findings suggest that while in rhetoric school leaders convey a commitment to recognize and respect diversity, they exercise covertly some discriminative policies towards powerless groups. In these schools, both cultural and religious identities were used to maintain domination in school. Consequently, the schools have hardly become a venue for social justice and multicultural citizenship. By doing so, this article contributes to a better understanding of the nuance of school leadership in multicultural societies like Indonesia.

Key Words

Introduction

This article aims to explore the practices of school leadership in the context of the multicultural society in Indonesia. Leadership is a pivotal element of school which provides vision and directions, manages and develops human resources, and (re)designs school organization through the creation of culture and structure supportive of school improvement (Leithwood 2005; Mulford and Johns 2004). Leadership is highly contingent on the context where it is exercised, and one style of leadership cannot fit all contexts

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(Fiedler 1993). Therefore, school leadership in a diverse society deals with more complex requirements and tasks to accomplish.

The evolving body of literature suggests convincing evidence that school leadership in multicultural societies demonstrates an awareness of, and pays appropriate respect to, the home culture of students (Banks 2011; Bezzina 2018; Hansuvadha and Slater 2012). School leaders orchestrate other elements of school to establish communication with parents and the community to understand each home's cultural expectations of schooling. Multicultural school leaders set directions and take corresponding actions to meet such expectations. The literature also indicates that they strive to balance between meeting such cultural expectations and creating social justice among students of different backgrounds in terms of school services and, hence, student outcomes. Student outcomes are the goals of every school education. In essence, multicultural leaders aspire to create a school to become a place where every student regardless of cultural background develops to achieve his or her maximum potential (Banks 2011).

Indonesia is home to around 1300 ethnic groups and 650 local languages. The population of this archipelagic country is currently composed of around 275 million people of which Muslims constitute the majority followed by Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, Buddhists and Confucians. There is also a handful amount of people of traditional beliefs and faiths portraying a complete picture of diverse Indonesia. In general, people live in harmony, indicating a positive reputation of this democratic Muslim-majority country. However, cultural and religious frictions have occurred throughout the modern history of Indonesia including relatively recent bloody incidents such as ethnic conflicts in Kalimantan in 1998 and 2001 and religious conflict in Ambon in 1999 (Jonge and Nooteboom 2006; Klinken 2007; Smith 2005). The evolving political contexts where the use of religious identity to gain power and voters have also been alarming. Religious symbols and jargon have been largely and brutally employed to attack and weaken political rivalries in the contexts of presidential elections in 2014 and 2019 (Brooks 2019). This suggests that the country has undergone a more complex and dynamic relationship among religious groups and could become worse when the politics of identity continues to go beyond control. This also suggests that in the Indonesian context cultural diversity does not only refer to the state of being diverse in terms of ethnicity-based cultures but also encompasses religious plurality.

The above dynamic and complex portrayal of a cultural and religious relationship in Indonesia has implications for education policies and practices. Much has been done by the government to advocate multicultural

policies including the issuance of the current national education law in 2003 outlining the new national education objectives, which emphasizes developing students' personalities as religiously devout, democratic, and responsible citizens. Previous research found that this education law was translated into subsequent policies like curriculum, but no convincing evidence was found to have suggested consistent practices across different schools in how to translate such policies into school and classroom daily routines (Hoon 2013; Raihani 2014, 2018b). Many schools were not concerned with the teaching of cultural diversity, but a few demonstrated an awareness of the importance of multicultural education. This contrasting implementation depended heavily on the principals' and teachers' understanding of diversity, initiatives, and even personal and political interests (Raihani 2014).

This article is based on research conducted from 2009 to 2012 in Yogyakarta, Palangka Raya and in 2016 in Batam. Although the research may sound outdated, the findings remain relevant to the Indonesian educational context which has increasingly been more diverse and exists in a political context where cultural identity is used as a way to gain political benefits. The research was focused partly on school leadership in areas where cultural and religious diversity is strongly existent. In this article, I argue that school leaders in Indonesia's multicultural society cannot be divorced from personal beliefs and broader contextual factors including the nationally mainstreaming politics of identity while realizing the importance of maintaining social harmony in school. I will review relevant literature on school leadership in multicultural contexts and describe briefly Indonesian education to provide a contextual basis for this article. I will explain the methodology used in both research, present findings, and draw on conclusive remarks on how school principals exercise leadership in such a context.

School Leadership in a Diverse Society
People's migration has contributed to the construction of a society where different races and ethnicities live together. There is almost no part of the world now which has not been impacted by people's mobility. In the context of Indonesia, the type of migration might be significantly different from that in other contexts. In this country, internal migration – very few transnational migrations – has been the main characteristic of people's movement, whether it is a deliberate government policy of transmigration or natural/voluntary migration (Drake 1989; Taylor 2003). In either one, Indonesia is an inherently diverse society.

In education, as indicated previously, a diverse society contributes to the composition of diverse student and teacher populations in school. For this diversely populated school, to say the least, culturally responsive pedagogical, leadership and managerial practices are required to ensure that every student of different cultural backgrounds develops to the maximum of their potential. In pedagogy, Banks (1986, 1997) proposed equity pedagogy as teaching strategies and classroom environment to help students from diverse cultural backgrounds to live and contribute to a democratic society. Equity pedagogy does not only aim at equipping students with necessary literacy and numeracy skills but also assists them to become effective agents for social change. Adopting critical theory and radical philosophies, other scholars (Freire 1970; Shokouhi and Pashaie 2015) go beyond the notion of regular pedagogical practices by promoting critical pedagogy which attempts to provoke students to question and challenge existing domination due to, perhaps, the majority status and possessed power. Students are invited to ponder upon deprived groups of the community by scrutinizing the majority domination.

In leadership, no single style works effectively in the context of a multicultural school, and, therefore, I would like to discuss some elements of various styles of leadership, which correspond squarely to the circumstances of a school with cultural diversity. First*,* echoing Fiedler's (1993) theory of contingency, Dimmock and Walker (2005) argues that leadership is a socially bounded and constructed process. It does not exist in empty space and time, meaning that different contexts may require different leadership styles. In other words, to be an effective leader, a principal of a school with diverse populations should be culturally responsive. Contingent leadership focuses on how leaders respond to the unique community and organizational circumstances, including the increasing diversity of cultures, in society (Leithwood 1999, 2005; Leithwood and Duke 1999).

Second, if school leaders understand the cultural diversity of school populations, they develop a vision of multicultural education and set appropriate strategies to realize such a vision. This specific characteristic is the main element of strategic leadership. Dimmock and Walker (2005) argue that visionary cultural leadership demonstrates a capacity to develop student learning as the main objective of school education. By so doing, every student's cultural interest is well accommodated in school programs, and different cultural backgrounds do not handicap children from equally performing.

Third, another element of leadership which I consider important for multicultural schools is a particular emphasis on social justice practices since schools with multicultural students are vulnerable to the practices of social injustice (Banks 2010, 2011). This is moral leadership (Sergiovanni

1992), which is in line with the concept of social justice leadership that makes themes of social inclusion and multiculturalism central to leadership vision and practice (Theoharis 2007).

Lastly, a strong participative style of leadership is a key to success in leading a school with diverse cultural characteristics (Mulford and Johns 2004). Diverse ideas and interests, often underpinned by beliefs and cultures, are an everyday feature of multicultural schools. Participative school leaders acknowledge, respect, and engage with these interests in a way that ensures equal benefits for all and set up a democratic mechanism of making decisions, involving school stakeholders of different cultural backgrounds.

Based on the above review, I argue that school leaders for multicultural education are required to exercise various styles for the complex roles they have to play in transforming schools into supportive places for diverse students. Yet, social justice leadership which is based on moral imperatives plays a more significant role in the success of a multicultural school. School leaders exercising this style seem to be able to create a culture of respect, tolerance, equality, and cohesiveness among school members. They are critical of any practices and traditions of injustice, prejudice, and discrimination, and make efforts to combat such negative attitudes. They are able to question, for example, the status quo in which the majority enjoys privileges to dominate the minority and restore the confidence to perform in every teacher and student. In essence, they create schools as comfort zones for everyone to learn and maximize their potential.

Indonesian Education and Identity Politics
Like in most other countries, schooling in Indonesia consists of three levels, i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary education has early childhood and 6-year elementary schooling, whereas secondary education encompasses junior and secondary schooling, each of which is a 3-year program. Those graduating from senior secondary education may continue to tertiary education for the duration of normally four to five years. Graduate degree education is also available for those who continue further.

Unlike in most other countries, however, Indonesian education has been characterized by an administrative dichotomy, namely general schools affiliated with the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) and religious (mostly Islamic) schools or *madrasah* under the Ministry of Religion (MoR). Previously, this dichotomy went deeply into the curricula of education, i.e. one was predominantly general or secular subjects with a small proportion of religious subjects, and the other was dominated by religious subjects with a significant proportion of secular ones (Mujiburrahman 2006; Raihani 2018a). After a long political and

ideological debate throughout the history of post-independence (1945) education, the tension between the two sectors has faded and left the dichotomy remaining primarily in the affairs of administration. This administrative dichotomy, however, does not go without problems. One of the problems has been that Islamic education remains under the central authority as mandated by the autonomy laws, whilst general education is decentralized into local governments. Consequently, there is a great variation in local government support to general schools depending on the budgets, while Islamic schools across the archipelago generally receive similar support from the central government (Kingham 2008).

Apart from the above picture of dichotomy, Indonesian education has undergone major reforms in both management and curriculum. Decentralization of education from the central authority to local governments in 1999 marked the efforts to improve the provision of education services by engaging communities to participate in education affairs. Although the outcomes of this decentralization are not entirely satisfactory due to the structural and cultural reluctance and corruption, it has promoted more equality of access to education as the local governments are enabled to manage and oversight education (Bjork 2006). In terms of the curriculum, since the reform era in 1998, the government has issued two subsequent curricula for schools across primary to secondary levels, namely the 2006 and 2013 curricula. Generally, both curricula adopt the constructivist approach in designing the learning process, whilst the difference lies in the stronger emphasis of the 2013 curriculum on character education in responding to the current challenges of the moral decadence of students (Bjork and Raihani 2018).

With regards to diversity, in Indonesia, in general, cultural differences do not really matter to students (Parker and Hoon 2013), even though there are some trivial issues that one student makes a joke about the language or tradition of another. Yet, Chinese ethnicity remains problematic in the minds and social interactions of most Indonesians largely due to prejudices (Hoon 2008; Suryadinata 2004). In another scene, religious differences are considered importantly fundamental to many students and even teachers. This means that religious interactions are practised in a quite cautious manner. A survey about youth interaction from different religious backgrounds indicates that most respondents are reluctant to develop an intimate relationship with someone of different religions or faiths merely because of their faith (Parker, Hoon, Raihani 2014).

Religious presence through its symbols in schools in Indonesia has been increasingly stronger partly due to various factors including the penetration of transnational religious ideologies like Salafism and Hizbut

Tahrir, and the side effects of democratization starting from 1998 that open up spaces for people to display more visible religiosity (Crouch 2009; Fealy 2008; Fealy and White 2008). This has made the student social demography more dynamic and brought about changes in relationships among students of different religious backgrounds and intensified religious programs and activities. In many schools, the competition between student religious groups and organizations is strongly but manageably visible. Often, teachers invisibly play a role in helping this competition more tense and hence lead to latent segregation among students (Raihani 2014). Latent segregation here means that on the surface students look to have fluid interactions but there is a hidden tension in such a relationship. In summary, religious symbols and discourse have been taking an increasingly central place in contemporary Indonesian schools in general, which requires leaders to become more aware of and competent in managing such a complex relationship.

In a broader context, the above factors of the penetrating transnational ideologies and the side effect of democratization have led to the conservative turn of the Islamic face in Indonesia. Bruinessen (2013) and Hasyim (2019) argue that Indonesian Islam has moved to a more conservative outlook due to, among others, the influence of returning scholars from Middle-Eastern universities particularly those of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait over the religious thought of many Indonesian Muslims. Further to this argument, the Islamic transnational movements have gradually weakened the centrality of two main moderate Islamic organizations – Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah – in guiding the moderate path of Indonesian Islam. In addition, Fealy (2007) points to the counter-productive strategy by so-called "liberal Islam" which has sparked controversies among the Muslim people, and hence, backlash from the wider Muslim community. In turn, the politics of identity – broadly defined as political intervention by targeting a group of people based on identities (Younge 2018) – has been demonstrated in both political and social practices in which people and, in this context, their interactions are categorized based on ethnic and religious affiliations. This is a kind of phenomenon in which people exaggerate differences with others and emphasize similarities with those who share (Appiah 2018).

Methods of Investigation

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore leadership practices in multicultural schools in Indonesia. The use of the qualitative approach in this study is justified. The objective of this research is to understand deeply school leadership in multicultural settings (Creswell 2002; Maxwell

1996; Miles & Huberman 1994). A quantitative approach reveals findings presented in numerical analysis and cannot be used to explore data deeply and comprehensively. It only suggests trends and patterns but does not investigate detailed exercises and practices of school leadership and the underpinning forces such as feelings, emotions, beliefs, values, traditions, cultures, and norms of school leaders. Also, numerous studies have used qualitative approaches to understand school leadership in different contexts and produced in-depth and comprehensive accounts of what school leadership looks like.

I investigated such principalship in various school settings across Indonesia. The criteria for selecting schools include that they are general (not religious) schools and located in an urban and multicultural society. General schools in urban areas of Indonesia usually have a more diverse student population in terms of both culture and religion than rural ones. This study also deliberately selected research areas which have multicultural populations, i.e., Yogyakarta, Palangka Raya, and Batam. Yogyakarta is an urban area where many students from different areas come to pursue education at various levels, particularly tertiary ones, while Palangka Raya is one of the youngest cities in Indonesia whose populations are diversely shaped by the traditional Dayak and Banjarese inhabitants and by voluntary and government-funded migrations. Batam is home to indigenous Malay and several ethnic groups coming from various parts of the archipelago for jobs. I selected one school in Yogyakarta, one in Palangka Raya and one in Batam.

In each school, I interviewed the principal, vice principals, five to seven teachers, and a group of students to explore their opinions about school leadership and its practices in the context where student populations are diverse. The questions of the in-depth and group interviews were outlined in such themes as opinions about cultural and religious diversity, principals' vision and strategies in dealing with such diverse realities, school programs to support such diversity, and supporting and impeding factors to leadership. In analyzing the data, I follow what Miles and Hubermen (1994) suggest to condense the data through checking and rechecking after each data collection process, transcription, coding and categorization. This inductive analytical practice provided grounded information and themes of school leadership practices and influential factors to leadership. The themes I developed from this analysis process will be presented in the following sections.

School Profiles

Creativity has been one of the best vocational secondary schools in Yogyakarta. In 2009, around 850 students were enrolled, the majority of whom are females with only eight male students. Gender relations were unique at this school because of this disproportion. Like other vocational schools in Indonesia, this school served students from middle to lower-income families who are from Javanese Muslim backgrounds. Three study streams were offered, i.e., marketing, office administration, and accountancy. This school was reputably one of the best vocational schools in Yogyakarta. The principal of this school was described as a man of energy and inspiration. He was aged at that time about 45 years old.

Rose Garden is located in the heart of Palangka Raya, the capital city of Central Kalimantan. Being famous as the best school in this province, in 2020 it enrolled around 900 students from various religious and ethnic backgrounds. Different from the above school, students in this school came from middle to upper-income households. At that time, it was in the process of becoming an international school. This is why entry to this school was tough as higher exam results from junior secondary schools were required to be admitted to this school. Three streams could be chosen by students in this school, namely natural sciences, social sciences and language studies. This school had a female principal aged at early fifty.

The last school is located in Batam, the Riau Islands province. One is named The Hope School. This public school was established in 1987, and in 2016 it enrolled more than 1,100 students. This can be categorized as a large school in the context of Indonesia. As one of the favourite schools in Batam, this school is home to students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds including Chinese students who were strongly present. The school community proudly explained that it is like a miniature of Indonesia where various ethnic and religious backgrounds co-exist. The majority of students are Muslims. It offers students natural sciences, social sciences and language studies. The principal was a male senior teacher aged about 50 years old and looked to lead the school in full confidence.

School Leadership in Multicultural Indonesia

Several themes were identified from the data to report how the principals exercised leadership in the areas where cultural and religious diversity is highly present in their contexts. The themes include displaying vision, developing programs supportive of multiculturalism, recruiting and evaluating students, and evaluating teachers for promotion. These themes were deliberately selected and presented here for their contents of issues relevant to school leadership in responding to diversity.

Displaying Vision

Each of the three schools had an ideal vision to achieve, but none of them was concerned explicitly with diversity. Commonly, the school's vision idealized three aspects of school objectives, namely academic achievement, piety and personality, and global insight. In Batam, however, The Hope School emphasized the catchphrase "*mencintai budayanya*" or "loving his or her (student's) culture" which can be interpreted as supporting the culture of individual students. When they were asked about their vision, the principals of the three schools always referred to the schools' vision. There was no distinction between the school's vision and their individual visions.

However, the principals had their perceptions of cultural and religious diversity. They rhetorically praised the reality of diversity that Indonesia has and stressed the importance of tolerant attitudes to respond to such diversity. The Creativity School principal said that Indonesia has a foundational capital of very rich diversity and could be used to underpin its development. Diversity, The Hope School principal conveyed, has made Indonesia a good place to live because it exposed its inhabitants to the dynamics of different cultures and made them relatively easily mature. Meanwhile, the Rose Garden principal believed that Palangka Raya has the natural wisdom to respond to the diversity, even though she realized that ethnic conflict had happened between Dayak and Madurese. She argued that it was because the migrants could not appropriate themselves to host cultures.

Vision is the central point of any organization and leadership as it comes from beliefs, values, and norms the principals and community have (Leithwood and Riehl 2003). Vision inspires programs and strategies of an organization. Vision should be explicit about what it wants to achieve including when the school wants to promote tolerance and respect for diversity. It cannot be implicitly or vaguely stated. In the above presentation of findings, in terms of diversity, the school's vision was different from the principal's individual vision. An individual vision of the principals depicted earlier may or may not work effectively as it is not a shared vision to which every stakeholder adheres. It was not "born" through discussions of ideas and collaborative thinking. Therefore, the principals' vision for respecting diversity may be opposed by other stakeholders or otherwise. On the one hand, this indicates that diversity and its consequential attitudes that follow did not come as primary concerns in the collective minds of the schools' stakeholders. On the other hand, it shows that each of the principals demonstrated a distinctive belief and attitude toward diversity, but failed to influence others in formulating the explicit vision.

As argued above, what has been stated in the vision either in school or personal contexts should inspire actions. In this leadership praxis, it can be understood whether the above-mentioned personal vision was enacted in effective ways. In the following sub-section onwards, this aspect of school leadership is explored and discussed.

Developing Programs Supportive for Multiculturalism
All the schools were found to have developed several programs to directly or indirectly support the existing diversity of culture and religion. Most of the programs were categorized into extra-curricular programs. One that was commonly found in the three schools was sporting clubs and activities, where no segregation whatsoever occurred. Students from any background could join and be engaged in the activities. More importantly, as one student in The Hope School said during a focus group discussion "By joining sports, we learn to live in harmony with those who are different from us. We have friends who are Christians in the clubs". Other students agreed that they could work together despite the differences, even though no information was found to have indicated that they were heavily exposed to, or learned a great deal about, the religious teachings of others. Strong exposures occurred when interreligious interactions became more personalized in a closer friendship, in which religious lessons of each side were exchanged. This was acknowledged by students in all three schools.

In The Hope School, every Friday morning, students were asked to recite parts of their religious holy books. Muslims had to recite *Surah Yasin* (a chapter of the Quran) in classes, while non-Muslims went out of the classes and found their community reciting parts of their holy books. So, each of the religious groups learned about religious differences and, in terms of worship, about the rules when they could be together and segregated. As acknowledged by Tamrin, a teacher, this program has been implemented for some years, and everyone got used to it quickly. However, he admitted that the central focus of the program was how to educate children about their religious teaching and practices, although the impacts might be beyond, i.e., exposure to religious diversity.

What was uniquely practised was that in Rose Garden, which was in the preparation of any religious ceremonies, an interreligious committee was formed under the guidance and direction of a teacher responsible for student affairs. Students from any religious background learned directly about religious ceremonies of various religions, paid respects to them, and were engaged in preparation. They had a clear cut of what they may and may not do in helping other religious communities, i.e., never be involved in religious worships. Although some teachers were concerned about this

unique feature using the Islamic perspective, they realized that this was a school program for building a truer interreligious understanding.

As argued earlier, vision leads to actions. A leader's vision leads to activities, programs and strategies that correspond to such a vision. The above findings confirm that the individual vision of the principals has influenced several programs in the schools. Their personal belief in diversity, which was positive as presented before, has turned out into the development of supportive programs for religious diversity. Although these programs might not manifest their detailed personal preferences and aspirations as they never told the stories, what had been practised was under their knowledge and jurisdiction. By providing policies or even only positive gestures, their leadership revealed a strong message for supporting and strengthening religious diversity, tolerance and harmony in school. However, this message needs to be explored further for its consistency across different leadership policies and practices as in the following sub-sections.

Recruiting and Evaluating Students
Hundreds of students were enrolled every year in each of the three schools. They were selected through different schemes such as the scouting method by which students were selected from the best-performing ones in previous schools and the normal entry examination. As one of the best schools in the area, each of the studied schools always received much more applications than the accepting capacity. Therefore, as acknowledged by the principals, this made it easier for them to select new better students. The Hope School principal, however, explained that what has been difficult for a favourite (best) school was dealing with a request from big officials in the province or municipality for them to accept their children or other family members whether the future students be qualified or not. Every year the school had to accommodate a significant number of this type of student and compromise their selection criteria. This is similar to the other cases in this study. In addition, The Hope School had the policy to accommodate neighbouring children in their school with a set of lenient selection criteria. The principal said: "This is, you know, to accommodate the interests of the surrounding community to place their children here. Otherwise, we build the school in this community but failed to respect them".

Another issue about student recruitment happened in the researched schools in Palangka Raya and Batam. In Rose Garden, as the majority of teachers are Catholics, the student recruitment was often religiously biased in the sense that future students from Islamic backgrounds were crossed

out from the list even though they passed the entrance examination. As Fatih, a teacher who was involved in the selection committee recalled:

> Last year, I saw through my own eyes that many (prospective) Muslim students were crossed out and replaced by Catholic ones. This year, I tried to remind them, but did not know exactly what happened. Muslim students added, but whether the practice is still going on, I have no idea.

In The Hope School, the principal proudly conveyed that he had covertly issued a specific policy of keeping the number of new non-Muslim students limited to maintain the domination of the Muslim majority in this favourite school. He continued to explain that in Batam Chinese community constituted a large proportion of the whole population and the majority of them were non-Muslims. If he did not "play this game", the number of Muslim students who are the Malay majority would be decreased in the school since Chinese students were famously described as generally diligent and smart.

As one of the Chinese students, Jessica, told me, the above discriminating policy was not limited to the new student selection, but also the streaming selection. Like in other secondary schools, the Natural Sciences stream was considered the best stream and, therefore, many students during the first year worked very hard to become qualified for that stream whose classes had limited spaces. The hidden policy, as Jessica explained, was that teachers never gave good marks in several relevant subjects to many Chinese students, even though some of them deserved it. This made them unable to compete with other students to be qualified for that stream in Year Two. This was confirmed by several teachers I interviewed, and they argued that this was an affirmative action to assist Muslim students to perform better than non-Muslim ones.

The above practices of student selection and evaluation did not fully comply with the principles of fairness, equal opportunity, and meritocracy. Both new and old students should be treated equally and given equal opportunity to compete with each other in fairness. There should not be any discrimination or differentiation in any way. Affirmative actions can be applied with the conditions to support a minority to be more represented in a school, to create a more diverse community in a school so that students are exposed to and learn from it, and to promote more equity in admission. Other than these reasons, the policy would turn into discriminative actions to maintain the domination of the majority, a situation of education that critical pedagogues criticized (Freire 1970).

Evaluating Teachers for Promotion

As part of professional career practices, teachers in all the studied schools got promoted. They were promoted to a higher rank of teaching position after a certain period and meeting the requirements, and some others were promoted to have additional responsibilities such as being placed as vice principals. The process of getting promoted could be different from one school to another, and in some instances, identity was played to allow someone to be promoted or not.

In Creativity School, Catholic teachers felt that they were being discriminated against in their career promotion because of their religious affiliation. Arnita, a senior Catholic teacher, explained that teachers from non-Islamic backgrounds never got promoted to vice-principalship, not because of their competencies, but religion. She continued to say: "There used to be an assessment for becoming vice-principals, and one of our Catholic colleagues actually passed the assessment. But, because she is Catholic, she never get promoted". Another teacher confirmed this story and explained that there was a power behind the principal that decided on strategic issues in the school. The principal was weak in some aspects, as she said.

While the above issue was not uncovered in The Hope School, in Rose Garden, it was a different story. The principal exercised a very strong approach in selecting teachers for promotion to new positions. She never consulted teachers nor did a proper assessment, but decided by herself on who was placed in vice-principalship positions. As the principal argued, she chose those who represent religious groups in the school so that there would not be any chaos. However, as many teachers put forward, although the representativeness could be understood, it did not really demonstrate a participative decision-making process and, therefore, led to the placement of the wrong people in the wrong places. In other words, they were not capable of the positions.

What has been described above indicates a very delicate situation of interreligious interactions among stakeholders particularly between school leaders and teachers when it comes to issues of selection and promotion (Banks 2010, 2011). Religious identity was capitalized to raise up and down people neglecting merits, competencies, fairness and equal opportunity. From the findings, leadership was crucial in playing the politics of religious identity in the schools. On the one hand, the Creativity School principal was described as a laissez-faire leader who submissively let powerful others intervene with such strategic decisions. On the other hand, the Rose Garden principal used religious identity to ensure the

representativeness of every religious group in the leadership team despite the criticisms of such an undemocratic practice. In this case, she preferred stability to participative decision-making.

Conclusion: Politics of Identity in School

From the above findings, it can be learned that school leadership in the three schools – The Creativity, Rose Garden and The Hope – has demonstrated an awareness and understanding of cultural and religious differences in both the schools and the surrounding community. At the personal level, this awareness has become one of the principals' visions to create a school for nurturing tolerance and harmony amongst the existing groups but was not reflected in the official school visions. However, several school programs were deliberately designed to cater for the needs of students from different backgrounds and expose them to cultural and religious differences that provide ample opportunities for learning to live together in harmony. In fact, on the grass root, students interacted fluidly across boundaries and were not concerned with differences when deciding on friendship.

Another lesson from the findings is generally ethnicity and culture do not matter to many school community members, but religion does. This partly confirms previous findings in multiculturalism research in Indonesia that what comes out as the main concern in group relations is religion (Parker 2010; Parker and Hoon 2013). This study, however, reveals another interesting insight that while ethnicity, in general, is not a problem, the increasing presence of Chinese students in school has concerned the principal of The Hope School in Batam. There remains prejudice growing in the minds of many Indonesians towards their fellow Chinese countrymen. This has not changed a lot since the New Order regime (Hoon 2008; Suryadinata 2004) and influenced a discriminative policy towards this ethnic group like what happened in The Hope School. School leadership in this study has failed to show moral imperatives of social justice and equality.

The politics of identity have been played in the researched schools in the matters related to power and influence as a result of group prejudice and feeling threatened by others' existence. The cases of student recruitment, evaluation and staff promotion as presented above were indicative of hidden discrimination driven by a political agenda of the dominating group in the schools. The dominating group strive to subordinate others by abusing power and discriminating against the powerless religious others. From the findings, this did not necessarily mean that Muslims dominate non-Muslims, but those who possess power tend to dominate and discriminate

against others. So, religious group competitiveness has gotten increasingly stronger in almost every context of Indonesian society, as previously discussed, and led to more prejudice and injustice. The increasing presence of transnational ideologies and political Islam have coloured significantly the dynamic of interreligious relations (Abuza 2007). In this study, unfortunately, the principals of the three schools could not convincingly demonstrate moral and social-justice-oriented leadership.

In such increasingly played politics of cultural and religious identity in both immediate school and broader contexts, it becomes more delicate to expect that the bottom-level student relationship in school remains fluid. The prejudice might be viral penetrating and influencing the minds and actions of students. Consequently, the schools failed to become a place for inclusive practices of Indonesian citizenship, which provides an equal opportunity for all students to develop their potential at maximum without having discriminative experiences. Lastly, although this article is based on studies conducted quite some years ago, the findings remain valid and factual until now since Indonesia has increasingly been prone to the excessive use of cultural identity to gain political benefits.

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