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Madrasah School Leadership in Remote Districts of Indonesia: Establishing a Narrative

Amalia Hasanah†

The University of Western Australia

The study reported here aimed to develop an understanding of leadership at the primary school level, particularly regarding madrasah primary schooling, in a context of challenging circumstances geographically and demographically in Indonesia. It investigated three interrelated aspects of madrasah primary school leadership, namely, the historical background to madrasah school leadership, the recent developments in relation to madrasah school leadership, and issues of concern for madrasah primary school leaders. The study was guided by the theoretical underpinning of interpretivism. Accordingly, qualitative methods of data collection were employed including semi-structured interviews and document study. Grounded theory methods were employed to analyse the data. The results related to the historical background to primary school leadership from 1945 to 1998 revealed that throughout this period the Indonesian government gradually developed a highly centralised governance resulting in the tightly controlled management of madrasah primary schools that debilitated madrasah primary school leadership. More recently, however, the government has devoted greater attention than previously to madrasah education, although, because this sector falls under the aegis of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, it is not decentralised. This has led to more structural constraints than apply in the case of State schools. Amongst the principal current concerns faced by madrasah primary

† Address for correspondence: Amalia Hasanah, The University of Western Australia, M428, 35 Stirling Highway, Crawley, Western Australia, 6009. Email: amaliahasanah_uin@radenfatah.ac.id.

school leaders are those encountered in relation to 'teachers', 'infrastructure', and 'management'. Certain issues specifically in relation to 'students', 'finance' and 'staffing' also arise at some but not all madrasah. Overall, this narrative depicts rare insights into the highly distinctive context of Indonesian madrasahs.

Introduction

In various countries, a combination of multi-culturalism and a major emphasis placed by education policy makers on parental choice has created a 'new school market'. As a result, there have been significant increases internationally in the number of faith-based schools over the past three decades. Those institutions now come in many guises in terms of their affiliation, ownership, and direction and collectively they have become an important part of various countries' education systems. At the same time, research in relation to these schools is quite underdeveloped, especially in terms of leadership practices and issues. That is true as much in relation to long established faith-based schools, like Roman Catholic and mainstream Protestant schools, Jewish schools and madrasahs as it is for their more recent counterparts from other religions and religious sub-groups in a large variety of countries, of which Indonesia is one.

Indonesia has also experienced a multitude of major political reforms since it gained independence. These have included changes in policies and practices relating to education. In particular, there have been numerous changes in the areas of educational administration, curriculum, and teaching and learning, including at the madrasah primary school level within the country.

Back in 1999, Indonesia began to shift towards decentralisation in the education sector. Madrasahs and madrasah education, however, were not decentralised because they were still located under the aegis of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Nevertheless, as a part of the national education system, their authorities have been expected to comply with all regulations issued by the Ministry of Education

and Culture. One of the most significant of these was the requirement to implement a madrasah-based management (MBM) approach. That circumstance probably more than any other placed the madrasahs under considerable structural constraints.

Concurrently, very little in-depth research has been conducted on school leadership and management at the madrasah primary school level in Indonesia, and especially in relation to the circumstances that are brought to bear on those located in remote areas in the country. In particular, the historical background and recent developments in the field have tended to be neglected as have contemporary issues that are of concern to leaders of madrasah primary schools. This, of course, is indicative of the dearth of studies focussing on school leadership in developing countries more broadly (Rizvi, 2010; Simkins, Sisum, & Memon, 2003). As a result, there is a relatively impoverished knowledge base that can be drawn upon to promote an understanding of the context and nature of school leadership in such settings, including in Indonesia. The study reported here was conducted with these deficits in mind.

The paper is divided into four main sections. The first section, by way of background, provides a brief description of madrasahs in Indonesia. The second section presents a synopsis of the research project that was conducted investigating school leaders working in these institutions. A summary of the study's results relating to three central research questions that guided the work undertaken is then presented. Finally, consideration is given to implications of the study for policy development and practice.

Madrasah Schools in Indonesia

The madrasahs in Indonesia provide a formal education similar to that offered by State schools (Basri, 2017). However, unlike State schools under the control of the Ministry of Education and Culture, they fall within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Hadi, 2017). This is because alongside the mainstream State school curriculum students in the madrasahs study Islamic subjects.

Indeed, the latter comprise 30 percent of the overall curriculum (Hadi, 2017).

The madrasah system in Indonesia is divided into three levels: the Madrasah *Ibtidaiyah* (primary school) for six years, the Madrasah *Tsanawiyah* (lower secondary school) for three years, and the Madrasah *Aliyah* (upper secondary school) for three years (Maksum, 1999). All madrasah students sit for the regular State national examinations as they study the same subjects as students from schools administered by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Additionally, students are expected to meet the same requirements as those attending State schools when it comes to passing national examinations at all levels of study (Basuni, 2013).

Overview of the Research

The study that is central to this paper aimed to generate understandings about leadership at the primary school level in relation to madrasah primary schools in Indonesia. For this purpose, it had three main aims. The first aim was to promote an understanding of the historical background to madrasah primary school education and leadership in Indonesia from independence until 1999. The second aim was to promote an understanding of developments that have recently taken place in relation to madrasah primary school education and leadership during the decentralisation period. The third aim was to promote an understanding of the issues that are of current concern to madrasah primary school leaders, especially in some of the more remote areas of the country.

The decision to focus on leadership at the primary school level in Indonesia, and particularly in relation to primary school madrasahs, was influenced by a number of factors. First, consideration was given to recent calls for investigations to be conducted that seek to understand the context within which school leaders work in extraordinarily challenging circumstances (Kheang, O'Donoghue, & Clarke, 2018), and especially in the case of developing societies (Floyd & Fuller, 2016; Simkins et al., 2003). In this regard, there

continues to be a paucity of empirical evidence on the challenges school leaders in developing countries encounter.

A second rationale for the study's focus on leadership in Indonesian primary school madrasahs relates to a criticism that education policies and reforms in developing countries have often been based on models extrapolated from 'western' practices (Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Oplatka, 2004). The study reported here was intended to assist in rectifying the situation by contributing to understanding how cultural context and politics can influence leadership and practice in such settings. In other words, the results of the study may be seen as contributing to understanding the importance of considering diverse contexts and their influence on leadership practice (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2016). Finally, cognisance was taken of the practical contributions that the results of the study could make. In particular, it was felt that a contribution could be made to informing processes of professional preparation and development for those assuming leadership positions in Indonesian primary school madrasahs.

Research Design and Methodology

The nature of the research aims is consistent with the interpretivist paradigm. That is because it is a paradigm that provides intellectual approaches enabling researchers to examine social phenomena and develop an understanding of complex social institutions (Crotty, 2003; O'Donoghue, 2018). In particular, it helps one to understand the experiences of people from their own perspectives (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). The data collection procedures adopted needed to be such that they could help to promote understanding of the particular circumstances being examined (Merriam, 2009). Thus, both the selection of documents and of participants for the study were purposive.

Since the first research aim was historical in nature, it was addressed by analysing a range of documents, including education policy papers, official websites, official statistics, regulations, and legislation. In addition, documentaries, books, and published

strategic plans were perused (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The second research aim was also addressed by means of document study.

The third research aim was addressed by engaging in semi-structured, in-depth interviews with a variety of local school-level participants. The study, was restricted to the province of South Sumatra because of constraints related to time and funding. Specifically, it was conducted in the three districts of Muara Enim, Ogan Ilir, and Lahat that in 2013 had populations of 755,800, 398,300, and 384,600 respectively (Badan Pusat Statistik Propinsi Sumatera Selatan, 2015). Participants were chosen from six government-run madrasah primary schools in these districts from the total of 37 madrasahs in South Sumatra. The madrasahs were selected based on their location which was more than 50 kilometres from the district office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in each district. The total number of madrasahs that qualified based on this criterion for location was 12. Three madrasahs in the district of Muara Enim were chosen from the total of 10, the only madrasah in the district of Ogan Ilir was also selected, and two madrasahs from the total of five in the district of Lahat were selected.

The participants were primary school principals who were working at the selected madrasah primary schools along with teachers and school committee representatives. Principals and teachers were interviewed because they were deemed to be in the best position to report on the current concerns of school leaders. They were also in a good position to communicate the developments that have occurred in relation to school leadership. School commitee representatives were involved because they participate in assorted aspects of the operation of schools and thus can represent the perceived views of various parents about the education of their children. Given the exploratory nature of the research, it was also considered appropriate that those selected should vary in their characteristics in terms of their education background, experiences, working periods, gender, and age.

The data were analysed using selected grounded theory methods of data analysis, namely, open coding, and analytic induction. Open coding facilitated the construction of conceptual categories grounded in the data through constant comparison (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Analytic induction was then adopted to relate themes and categories generated about the phenomenon to each other (O'Donoghue, 2018).

Summary of the Research Results

The First Research Aim

The first research aim, it will be recalled, was to promote an understanding of the historical background to madrasah primary school leadership in Indonesia from independence in 1945 until 1999, when decentralisation of the education system was implemented. The rationale behind the pursuit of this aim was premised on the assumption that the past regularly has an impact on the present in various ways, including through influencing people's actions. Therefore, it was argued, it is not possible to comprehend current school leadership more broadly in Indonesia without having a clear knowledge of how it has evolved over time. As a result, developments related to madrasahs at the primary school level were examined with reference to two political regimes, namely the Old Order Era (1945 – 1965) and the New Order Era (1966 – 1998). It was President Suharto who first used the latter term to contrast his rule with that of his predecessor, Sukarno, which was described as the Old Order.

The Old Order Era (1945 - 1965). During the Old Order era, from 1945 to 1965, the political situation in Indonesia was fragile. Notwithstanding the proclamation of independence on 17 August 1945, a war of independence against the Dutch was waged until 1950 (Falch & Fischer, 2012). Additionally, numerous conflicts, rebellions, and separatist movements threatened national unity. In response, the government adopted a 'guided democracy' approach in which power was centralised. Turmoil, however, continued, with the most severe rebellion occurring in 1965, led by the Indonesian

Communist Party (Adriono et al., 2011; Djojonegoro, 1997). The economy was also weak with high levels of foreign debt and agriculture and mineral exports still controlled mostly by the Dutch and Chinese (Kimura, 2013).

Although madrasahs had been established long before independence, for several decades they were not recognized as part of the national education system because of their religious content, a non-standardized curriculum and a non-uniform structure. Instead, they were overseen by a separate Ministry of Religious Affairs (ACDP, 2013). In 1958, the Minister of Religious Affairs announced the introduction of an eight-year madrasah compulsory education (Shaleh, 2008). To support this initiative, a specialist teacher training centre was established (Shabir, 2013). Subjects taught included agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, crafts, 'co-op', sports education, and religion (Shabir, 2013; Yuningsih, 2015).

The New Order Era (1966 - 1998). Between 1967 and 1998, the political situation stabilized. National developments were planned and implemented systematically by means of the five-year Rencana Pembangunan Lima Tahun/*REPELITA* programmes (Adriono *et al*., 2011). The emphasis in those programmes was on balanced economic development involving industry and agriculture (Republik Indonesia, 1973). This enterprise required planning to create skilled Indonesians who would also be nationalistic in their outlook. An emphasis on expanding education opportunities and the improvement of education quality and relevance followed (Djojonegoro, 1997; Rifa'i, 2011). Financial assistance was provided by a number of 'developed' countries and by such multilateral agencies as the IMF, the World Bank, IGGI, The Asian Development Bank, UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO (Djojonegoro, 1997).

Along with the quality of madrasah education, a priority of the Minister of Religious Affairs was placed on nationalising the madrasahs themselves (Shabir, 2013). Since the inception of those institutions, few of them had been operating in favourable circumstances. Inadequate management skills, dilapidated

buildings, and unqualified teachers were among the problems that schools tended to encounter (Shaleh, 2008). The government sought to support the madrasahs by providing funds for infrastructure improvements, training, operational expenses, and scholarships (Shaleh, 2008).

The passing of 'Law No. 2 of 1989 on the national education system' (UUSPN) resulted in the government integrating madrasah education into the National Education System. As a consequence, madrasahs were required to adopt and apply general education curricula issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture, while also teaching religious subjects. Eventually, madrasahs at all three levels, from *Ibtidaiyah* (primary) to *Aliyah* (upper secondary), became distinctive Islamic public schools (Haq, 2015).

The Second Research Aim

The second research aim of the study reported here was to promote an understanding of recent developments in relation to leadership at the primary school level in Indonesia from 1999 until 2019, and particularly in relation to primary school madrasahs. The rationale behind the pursuit of this aim arose from a recognition that it is important to gain an understanding of the Indonesian government's recent initiatives and its efforts to develop education in the nation in order to comprehend the current circumstances encountered at the madrasahs. In this regard, the recent developments that have occurred relating to madrasah education at the primary level of education in general and the implications for leadership at this level of schooling during the period of decentralisation were examined.

Since 1999, governance in Indonesia has evolved from a highly centralised system to one which is decentralised. The first regulation implemented to facilitate that transition was 'Law No. 22 of 1999 on Local Government'. According to that regulation, authority was devolved to the provincial and the district governments in relation to governance, management and service delivery. As such, it aimed to improve public welfare by bringing

public services closer to the community and to help preserve national unity (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013).

The enactment of 'Law No. 22 of 1999' has had implications for schools, including the madrasahs. A particular problem that emerged for the latter was that, while on the one hand they were recognized as part of the national education system, on the other hand, they were accountable to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which was not expected to promote autonomy (Yahya, 2014). This circumstance placed the madrasahs in a very difficult position because it meant that they could not receive the same benefits as public schools, especially in regard to funding. Relatedly, local governments were not made responsible for the madrasahs' continuous development.

The overall situation, however, was not entirely negative. The implementation of 'Law no. 20 of 2003' as applied to the national education system, strengthened the position of the madrasahs as a component of this system in certain ways. In particular, they were given an equal opportunity to develop along with other educational institutions and to receive equitable treatment. As a result, they came to be seen in the public mind as equal to other schools administered by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Madrasah leaders were also encouraged to implement madrasah-based management (MBM). Notwithstanding that their staff often comprised numerous senior teachers with competencies in teaching, they did not all possess management capability (Suparman, 2012). A special programme, known as *Tahfidz* House, was developed to assist in addressing this deficit and was supported by the Provincial Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, including in South Sumatra.

In relation to leadership preparation, prospective madrasah principals were expected to follow the same regulations as those stipulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture. However, it was also required that they be Muslims. Furthermore, they were expected to be able to read and write the *Al Qur'an* (Menteri Agama, 2018).

The Third Research Aim

The third aim of the study being reported here was to promote an understanding of current issues of concern for madrasah primary school leaders in challenging situations in Indonesia. The range of those issues that were identified were categorised in relation to the following themes: teacher shortage, lack of certain resources, lack of certain facilities, and management issues. Each of these is now considered in turn.

Teacher Shortage. A common issue that arose pertaining to the madrasahs studied is that of teacher shortage. The shortage is sometimes an overall one and at others times it is one that relates to a shortage of teachers within a particular subject. The former was evident at Madrasah TK, located in the village with the same name. There the school was well serviced by 14 civil servant teachers and nine non-permanent teachers to teach 268 students in 12 classes, with two classes for each year group. The principal, however, was frustrated as he had no teachers of Arabic subjects. The only solution he could find, he claimed, and one which displeased him, was to enlist some of the other teachers to teach those subjects despite their lack of appropriate credentials.

There are other cases of schools lacking the required number of teachers in general as well as appropriate subject teachers. In Madrasah B, for example, with 285 students, there were only five civil servant teachers and 15 non-permanent teachers. The situation was one where there were not enough classroom teachers and no teachers qualified to teach physical education, art, and Arabic. As with the principal at Madrasah TK, she said that "the non-permanent teachers are assigned as classroom teachers and PE and art subjects are assigned to the classroom teachers. It means that classroom teachers now spend more hours teaching than they are supposed to."

The situation was similar at Madrasah W in Lahat district. This madrasah had 335 students enrolled but only had seven civil servant

teachers and 20 non-permanent teachers. Again, it did not have classroom teachers qualified to teach physical education, Arabic, and art. The art subject teacher was a non-permanent teacher, while PE was managed by classroom teachers and Arabic was taught by teachers of Islamic subjects. Commenting on the situation overall, the principal stated:

> We only have seven civil servant teachers. Meanwhile, the total number of classes is 12. This means that for classroom teachers we still have to rely on non-permanent teachers. If one of them suddenly leaves, it will be very hard for us to find a replacement.

Madrasah LA in Lahat district was short of two classroom teachers, along with two for *aqidah akhlak*, and two for Arabic. Furthermore, one of its teachers of Arabic was almost 70 years of age and a non-permanent member of staff. It had 315 students enrolled in the school year 2018/2019. Those students were spread across years 1 to 6, with two classes for each year. It had 12 civil servant teachers and 30 non-permanent teachers. The principal commented on this situation as follows, "it is very hard for us to find dedicated non-permanent teachers who are usually underpaid to teach in a madrasah."

The pattern of staff shortages was replicated at Madrasah P in Ogan Ilir district. It was short of a teacher in the *Qur'an Hadits* subject and was also short of two classroom teachers. Furthermore, it had one non-permanent teacher of Arabic who held a teaching certification from the government. In total, this madrasah had 23 teachers employed, consisting of 18 civil servant teachers and five non-permanent teachers. The principal commented thus:

> To overcome our problems, we should be able to assign two non-permanent teachers to be the classroom teachers. We also do not have teachers who are specialized in teaching the *Qur'an Hadits* subject. To teach this subject, we depend on teachers who teach other subjects related to Islam.

Madrasah AM also had a shortage of classroom teachers, PE teachers, and art teachers. This meant that the work of some classroom teachers had to be assigned to non-permanent teachers who were also expected to take responsibility for teaching PE and art related subjects. Here, there were only five civil servant teachers and six non-permanent teachers in that year. The principal clarified this situation in the following way:

> We have 12 classes this year, two for each year. However, we only have 11 teachers in total. We really need more civil servant teachers who can be classroom teachers, as well as PE teachers and art teachers. If the government would allow our non-permanent teachers to become civil servant teachers, we could then hire more teachers ourselves to replace them.

Lack of Certain Resources. Echoing comments made by madrasah leaders in other schools, the principal also commented on the need for up-to-date textbooks for students to use in their engagement with the latest curriculum prescribed. Furthermore, attention was drawn to the perceived need for an additional LCD projector for the classroom. At the time the study was undertaken, only one projector was available. That situation, as the principal observed, meant "that if two classes need it at the same time it cannot be done".

The school leaders at Madrasah AM also stated that they need textbooks related to the latest curriculum that was implemented in 2013. One teacher went out of her way to emphasise that the textbooks for years 3 and 6 are still not available from the publishers for schools administered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Consequently, it was commented that students in those year groups are still using textbooks for the curriculum of 2006. She had tried to download the current materials from the website provided by the Government, but the cost of printing was twice the price of the textbooks. Moreover, the quality of the copying for the textbooks was not deemed to be good enough for distribution to the students.

Another concern that applies to a particular madrasah was seen to occur in Madrasah LA in Lahat district. The issue in question highlights the potential vulnerability of the school in being overly dependent on financial support from parents for the provision of extracurricular activities. The parents are willing to pay Rp. 240,000, per year (approximately 24AUD) to support the school in these endeavours. They usually pay the money once a month, or annually, depending on their financial situation. The madrasah leaders then use the funding received from the parents to pay an additional salary to teachers responsible for providing such extracurricular activities as the *tahfidz*, scouting, the school's marching band, and *pencak silat* (the traditional martial art in Indonesia). While this arrangement demonstrates considerable generosity on the part of the parents, the school would inevitably be adversely affected (as has been the case in some other madrasahs) should this source of funding be no longer available.

Lack of Certain Facilities, Regarding a lack of certain facilities, leaders at Madrasah TK indicated that they needed a prayer room and a school medical room. They pointed out that they have never had such rooms in the school. Commenting on that situation, the principal stated: "We will use the prayer room for students and teachers who need to say their prayers. We will also use the room for students who would like to exercise their *tahfidz*." He went on to add: "We need a medical room too. When the students are in need of medical assistance we have the trouble of having to take them to the nearest health centre because there is no special school room."

The leaders at the school further indicated that they were forced to use one classroom that had been left unfinished, with no tiles on the floor and no ceiling. Not surprisingly, this was quite vexing for the teachers who had to teach in such an environment. The classroom became dusty because it was not tiled and whenever it rained the sound of the rain was loud and intrusive because of the absence of a ceiling. Referring to these conditions, one classroom teacher described the situation thus:

> It really bothers us. We cannot concentrate when we are in the class. Whenever I teach, I can see how uncomfortable

> the students are because of the conditions. We really need to be given the finances to finish the classroom.

School leaders at Madrasah B also said they were in need of a prayer room, a library, and a school medical room. They only had the use of one room to accommodate all of their needs. The principal commented on the situation accordingly: "We need more rooms. Currently, we have only one room for three functions, that is as a prayer room, a library, and a school medical room. I know the students feel uncomfortable having to conduct all of their activities in that room, but we have no choice." The classrooms, he said, were also in poor condition and in dire need of renovation. Furthermore, he went on to say, that they were not big enough to accommodate all of the students in any one class. For example, one of the classrooms was only fit for 20 students yet it had to accommodate 29.

Another concern that was raised at this school related to the need for more robust gates to be provided to protect the school grounds. At the time the research being reported was conducted it was observed that the school's front gates were only constructed from wood and that the rear gates lacked height. "We need to get a budget from the government to start rebuilding the gates," the principal said. "As you can see, our gates are made of wood and therefore it is easier for unwanted people to pass through them than if they were made of more sustainable material," she added.

A lack of classrooms was encountered, once again, by teachers at Madrasah W. This school had three classrooms that were unusable because the rooms had not been fully constructed. In relation to this predicament, one of the teachers said:

> Because we cannot use three classrooms, the first and second year students use the classrooms in turn. Year 1 study in the morning until 10am. After that, the classrooms are used by the year 2 students. However, the year 2 students sometimes arrive at school at around 8am. Then, they gather and chat in front of the year 1 classes. This arrangement is really not ideal for the students nor the

> teachers, because the noise made by year 2 students disturbs the year 1 students studying.

Further concerns mentioned by these madrasah school leaders replicated those encountered in other participating schools. For example, there was comment on the need for a larger field in order to hold flag ceremonies and for teaching PE. As things stood, the students had to use the village's soccer pitch.

An additional situation that the madrasah leaders lamented was the absence of a prayer room. As a result, they had to use the library for prayers that made the students feel uncomfortable. Another recurring refrain was regarding the inadequate security of the school grounds. In this connection, the principal mentioned that "because of a lack of secure gates, many children enter the school premises in the afternoon. They are not registered as madrasah students and they use the school's toilets. "This circumstance, he stated, results in the school's toilets being "dirty and smelly every morning."

The absence of a prayer room was again reported at Madrasah LA in Lahat district. Here, the students use their own classrooms as prayer rooms. It was argued that a dedicated prayer room was required because 12.30pm is the time when Muslims say their mid-day prayer. The principal remonstrated by saying: "We really need a prayer room so that all of the students and teachers can pray together. At the moment, when prayer time comes, the students have to rearrange their seats to make space in their classroom for it."

There was also a perceived need for a library, especially as the school's books were stored in a teacher's room. This was of considerable concern for the principal because the room was a mess. "As you can see," he said, "the space in this room is already limited. With the books in here that should be in the library it makes the room cluttered." He also suggested that the school needs a medical room because whenever a student requires attention from an emergency medical assistant, he or she cannot be treated in the school.

The school, the leaders claim, needs larger classrooms as those that are available tend not to be ideal for teaching and learning. For example, there is one small classroom that was designed to hold a maximum of 28, but is often required to accommodate additional students. The situation, it was argued, is uncomfortable for teachers and students, especially in the dry season when the temperature soars. Accordingly, one classroom teacher stated: "The students sit uncomfortably close to each other. Also, we do not have fans in the classroom. That makes the circumstances even worse." Moreover, as appears to be customary across the schools in question, there were concerns expressed about shortages of resources for implementing the curriculum and for facilitating teaching and learning more generally.

In Madrasah P located in Ogan Ilir district, school leaders argued that more chairs and desks were needed for the students and the teachers. This was a considerable concern for the principal, who commented: "The students could be hurt because the existing chairs and the tables are really heavy and are already rusty – these chairs and tables have not been replaced for three years." The medical room, he went on to say, also needs beds, partitions to keep male and female students apart, and medicines for emergencies. Indeed, it was considered that the school required a major renovation of its buildings in general because of their leaking roofs.

This madrasah, it was also argued, needs more permanent classrooms as three of them are wooden constructions and are extremely noisy. The principal commented: "The non-permanent classrooms are one of my biggest concerns. It really bothers me as the rooms are located beside my office. I can hear the noise made by the students. I can imagine how this situation is troublesome for the teachers teaching nearby." Other permanent classrooms also need major renovation, the principal went on to say, as the tiles are cracked and could cause injuries to students. In addition, he pointed to some broken furniture stacked at the back of the classroom that needed to be replaced. Teachers also claimed that while the students are really eager to read and borrow books from the school almost

every day, they do not have enough of them. Indeed, the teacher who was in charge of the library stated: "Our students really love to read. They are allowed to take the books home for three days. Sometimes, they return the books in one day. However, we do not have much variety. I am sure students would love to have more books to read."

The school also has some problems regarding toilet facilities. This, it was claimed, is attributable to a lower secondary private madrasah being located on the same site. The principal complained that "It is one of the problems that I cannot solve. The private madrasah students use our students' toilets because the facilities are not available at their school. However, they use these amenities without showing care."

Madrasah AM in Muara Enim district reveals another particular issue. It is one that may be associated with perceived inequity. This school has sufficient facilities to cater for all necessities. It has a canteen where students can buy food at break time, a medical room with a bed, a library, a prayer room, and even a meeting room that can be used to hold all the ceremonial activities conducted by the school. This abundance of facilities, however, is purported to be demoralising for leaders at other madrasahs who are aware of the situation and make comparisons with their own relatively impoverished circumstances.

Madrasah B, in Muara Enim village, is the only public school in the area. The issue here relates to the community. For student admission purposes, the madrasah conducts an entrance test in reading ability, a medical examination, and takes into account the age of the applicants. The leaders, however, are often frustrated because it is sometimes the case that because of insufficient space they have to inform those parents whose children are not accepted to the school that they need to teach their children at home or put them in early childhood education facilities for at least another year before applying again the following year.

Management Issues. The principals of the madrasahs also confided that they experienced difficulties in coping with various aspects of management. In particular, they had problems dealing with the curriculum which, taking into account their circumstances, they considered too difficult to implement. The curriculum is predicated on the assumption that the students enrolled in schools are able to read, to write, and to calculate. However, for students in remote areas the situation tends to be more complicated. The principal in Madrasah LA commented on this as follows:

> We find it quite difficult to cope with the curriculum of 2013, the newest one. By implementing this curriculum, the government assumes that the students in lower years are able to read, to write, and to calculate. In fact, not all of them went to the kindergarten before they came to study here. The teachers should teach them how to read, to write, and to calculate before starting with the materials.

Principals also highlighted problems encountered in dealing with the school operation assistance (SOA) fund allocated to their schools. For example, the principal of Madrasah P stated that he has to budget according to instructions contained in the SOA manual. He added that at "every beginning of the financial year, the Provincial Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs invites us, the principals of the madrasahs, to make the budgeting allocation for the SOA fund. We should conduct the programmes in the madrasah based on a budgeting allocation according to the SOA manual. We cannot use the fund as freely as we wish because it will put us into trouble".

The SOA fund, the principal went on to comment, is used for covering operational costs only and has to be based on the budgeting allocation. In this connection, the principal of Madrasah W further suggested:

> The SOA fund is used to cover operational costs, such as costs for consumable educational materials or equipment, and indirect costs in the form of electricity, water, services, telecommunications, maintenance of facilities and infrastructure, overtime payment, transportation, taxes, and

> insurance. We cannot suddenly buy new chairs or tables even if they are required if they are not listed in the budgeting allocation.

Another management matter that appears to be of common concern relates to a Government sponsored principal preparation programme (PPP). Of the six madrasah leaders participating in the study being reported, only one principal had been given the opportunity to complete the PPP. Indeed, the principal of Madrasah P, who had not been so fortunate, mentioned that he only learnt how to lead by seeking advice from the previous principal. He went on to comment:

> I was recently appointed as the principal, but I did not have the chance to join the PPP before taking up the position in this school. Fortunately, I was able to consult the previous principal about how to lead the madrasah. The previous principal was appointed as the principal at the lower secondary madrasah here, in the same location. So I can ask him directly if I need to know anything about matters I do not understand.

The only principal who was able to engage fully with the PPP was the principal of Madrasah AM. He stated that he felt fortunate to have been able to participate in the programme because it gave him insights into the role after he was appointed. He elaborated on this as follows:

> I was lucky because before being appointed as the principal, I was given the chance to join the PPP programme. This programme really broadened my perspective after I became the principal in this madrasah. By participating in the programme, I acquired some basic knowledge of management, and interpersonal, supervisory, and entrepreneurial aspects of leadership, which are required by a principal that I could implement in my school. I always treat the teachers and staff as friends, so that they do not feel awkward when they want to talk to me. I tell them that it is okay if they complain to me concerning anything about which they feel uncomfortable.

At Madrasah B and Madrasah AM, the particular problem noted related to a shortage of administration staff. Unlike other madrasahs where special staff were designated certain administrative responsibilities including as treasurer, these two madrasahs had to designate similar additional tasks to one teacher. The teacher performing duties as treasurer in Madrasah AM referred to the complications of such an arrangement thus: "Once a month, I have to go to Lahat district to do some financial work so that our teachers and staff can get their salary on time. My work as a teacher while I am away has to be done by another teacher or by the principal."

Madrasah AM also lacked staff who could take charge of computer applications. Some madrasah leaders have to handle at least 18 computer applications in dealing with the education management information system (EMIS) that is regulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Because the madrasah in question only has one non-permanent staff member designated as 'computer staff', one of the non-permanent teachers has to help him deal with five computer applications. The principal said: "The computer operator staff member is often overwhelmed by all of the applications requiring his attention. I feel really grateful to the other staff member who helps him."

Implications of the Research for Policy and Practice

The outcomes of the study reported in this paper have implications for the substantive area of madrasah primary school leadership in Indonesia. The results related to research questions One and Two provide a framework that could be used to contextualise and understand current issues faced by madrasah primary level leaders in the country. Acquiring such understanding, it may be contended, is critical for those seeking to address current madrasah leadership challenges. The results pertaining to research question three clearly have implications for policy and practice. It is to those that attention is now turned.

Implications of the Study for Addressing Teacher Shortage

As institutions under the aegis of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the number of civil servant teachers employed by the madrasahs is decided upon by the central government. While aimed at improving efficiency and effectiveness, madrasahs at the primary school level in rural and remote areas continue to experience teacher shortages. Accordingly, it would be desirable to establish a coordinating mechanism between the central government and district governments for enabling madrasahs in remote areas to recruit the number of civil servant teachers they require. One way to overcome this problem would be by recruiting non-permanent teachers with suitable education backgrounds to become civil servant teachers and providing them with specific preparation.

Implications of the Study for Improving School Infrastructure

This study has revealed that school leaders in primary school madrasahs in challenging circumstances geographically and demographically face issues associated with inadequate education facilities and a deprived school environment. To some extent the madrasahs can harness contributions from parents and the local community to deal with these issues. However, the community and parents' contribution is often limited because of poverty. This is another problem that needs to be addressed urgently if the quality of madrasah primary school education is to be improved. For this purpose, it could be worth investigating if funds might be forthcoming for the CSR budget from commercial companies located in the districts.

Implications of the Study for Leadership Preparation and Development

As already mentioned, since 2010, the central government has run a principal preparation programme (PPP) to guide district governments in preparing school principals, including for primary

school madrasahs (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). The programme has a standardised process for the recruitment, selection, and certification of principals and includes a 300 hour 'training' to develop candidates' competencies to become principals (Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional, 2011a, 2011b). However, to date, not all principals in either State schools or madrasahs have attended PPP programmes. Indeed, among the principals of the madrasahs investigated in the study reported here, only one principal had participated in the PPP programme before he took up his appointment.

Included in the continuing professional development programmes available for principals, which accommodate those of madrasahs, is the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme introduced nationwide in 2013. However, it does not always address a sufficient range of competencies, including those pertaining to the madrasah context that could enable school leaders to become sufficiently equipped for implementing a broad repertoire of current education policies and reforms like those introduced as part of the 2013 curriculum, along with inclusive education and leadership. These are matters that would benefit from attention by system administrators.

Contiguously, research specifically focused on madrasah primary school leaders in Indonesia that replicate studies of school principals who successfully turn around schools in other contexts through implementing context-responsive leadership could be undertaken (Garza Jr., Murakami-Ramalho, & Merchant, 2011; Gordon & Patterson, 2006; Gu & Johansson, 2013; Khalifa, 2012; West, Ainscow, & Stanford, 2005). It would also be valuable to investigate how those principals who are adept at practising community leadership, manage to create structures and processes capable of unifying the home and school environments, and have the capacity to provide advocacy for community concerns (Khalifa, 2012). Indeed, it may be argued that the study reported here has highlighted the efficacy of two particular approaches to leadership, namely, distributed leadership and authentic leadership.

Distributed leadership assumes that leadership emerges from the context in which it takes place and from the interactions that occur between people and their environments (Spillane et al., 2001, 2004). Thus, the practice of distributed leadership can offer schools a way to enhance their capacity and their ability to cope with the increasing number of contextual factors that have an effect on the school environment (Woods, 2005; Woods et al., 2004). An aptitude for distributing leadership responsibility to enhance the efficacy and agency of everyone in the school will also be dependent on the principals of madrasah primary schools building a deep personal understanding of their morals and values (Duignan & Bhindi, 1997) which is intrinsic to authentic leadership. That, in turn, could help to improve the practice of leadership (Duignan & Bhindi, 1997). As a result, an emphasis on leading through collaboration and cooperation in order to develop and nurture these relationships is to be recommended (Duignan & Bhindi, 1997).

Implications of the Study for Strengthening Madrasahs' Islamic Programme

As one component of the madrasah-based management programme (MBM), the *tahfidz* programme is implemented in every madrasah. This programme attracts many children from the surrounding area to enrol as students. The madrasahs in question could offer parents teaching by specialized teachers qualified in *Tahfidz* so that they can help their children at home and when the children graduate, they might be able to recite more than one *juz* (sections in Al Quran consisting of some *surah*s). The primary school madrasahs could also offer other Islamic programs such as *nasyid* (singing Islamic songs), *syarofal anam* (reciting good words about the prophet Muhammad), and *rebana* (drums used for Islamic celebrations) playing. By providing such activities, it is anticipated that the parents would be willing to contribute a little extra money to help the madrasahs pay for the teachers who teach them.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the outcomes of the study featured in this paper will inform those interested in the improvement of quality and equity in relation to madrasah primary school education in challenging circumstances geographically and demographically in Indonesia. More specifically, it is hoped that the study's results may inform leadership preparation, development and support for madrasah primary school leaders in such circumstances. Overall, the outcomes of the study could serve as a helpful reference for use by practitioners and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to reflect on their experiences and consider ways of improving policy and practice. They could be of similar value to others in equivalent and contrasting circumstances.

It should also not be overlooked that while school leaders in madrasahs in Indonesia encounter complex problems, significant progress has been made as a result of the introduction of low-cost textbooks, a wide range of new programmes to improve the professionalism of teachers and school principals, and the introduction of the twelve year compulsory basic education programme. There is, at the same time, much room for improvement. Finally, one cannot stress enough that because of the challenging circumstances geographically and demographically within which many madrasahs operate in Indonesia, the preparation, development, and support of capable, responsible and resilient school leaders are crucial for exercising contextually sensitive madrasah leadership practices. This requirement also calls for an expanded research agenda into the day-to-day realities of madrasah leadership as understood and practised in such contexts to help further inform leadership development and support programmes underway in these settings.

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