7. CHARTING PRIMARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN INDONESIA: FROM CENTRALISATION TO DECENTRALISATION

Dwi Esti Andriani, Simon Clarke and Tom O’Donoghue

7.1 Introduction

This chapter reports a study which was aimed at generating an understanding of leadership at the primary school level in Indonesia, a post-colonial and developing country, where the education system was highly centralised for many years before becoming decentralised. The particular focus is on the historical background to primary school leadership, recent developments occurring in primary school leadership, and issues of current concern to primary school leaders. The study was guided by the theoretical underpinnings of interpretivism. It employed qualitative methods of data collection including semi-structured interviews with school leaders, document analyses and unstructured non-participant observations. The data were analysed using grounded theory methods of data analysis, namely, open coding and analytic induction. Each of the three aspects of the study is now considered.

7.2 The Historical Background to Primary School Leadership in Indonesia from 1945 to 1998

The investigation of the historical background to primary school leadership in Indonesia was based on the assumption that the past has regularly influenced the present in various
ways, including through influencing people’s behaviour. It was recognised that it is not possible to comprehend current school leadership in Indonesia, broadly, without a clear knowledge of how it has evolved over time. Thus, the history of education generally in Indonesia, and especially of primary school leadership, with reference specifically to the two periods of rule: the ‘old order era’, from 1945 to 1966, and the ‘new order era, from 1967 to 1998, is considered. The commentary on this is divided into two periods because national conditions significantly changed from 1967.

From 1945 to 1966, the political situation of Indonesia was fragile. Despite the proclamation of independence on 17 August 1945, a war of independence against the Dutch was still being waged until 1950 (Djojonegoro, 1997). Also, after gaining full independence, many conflicts, rebellions, and separatist movements occurred and threatened national unity. In order to tackle the chaotic situation, the government adopted a ‘guided democracy’ approach that centralised power in the hands of the president (Djojonegoro, 1997; Rifa’i, 2011).

Despite the centralisation approach being adopted, the political situation in Indonesia remained unstable. There was much internal turmoil occurring within the country. The most severe rebellion took place in 1965, led by the Indonesian Communist Party (Djojonegoro, 1997; Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2011). Concurrently, the economic situation of Indonesia was weak. The country inherited heavy financial debts from the Dutch colonial state. In addition, agriculture and mineral exports were still controlled mostly by the Dutch and by the Chinese. The State also lacked an efficient tax-levying capacity, resulting in constant fiscal instability (Kimura, 2013).

The fragile national condition significantly influenced the developments of the national education system during this period. In particular, the national curriculum was established to replace the colonial curriculum. The main function of the curriculum was to facilitate the promotion of education for the purpose of cultivating patriotism and nationalism as a response to the weak political situation (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2011). Education was not yet promoted as a means to develop high quality human resources to support economic development. The priority of developments in education was devoted to expansion, with little attention being placed on education quality (Djojonegoro, 1997). Also, developments in education did not take place in a systematic way and not everything proposed was implemented as expected. As a result, national developments in education made slow progress during this period (Djojonegoro, 1997; Rifa’i, 2011).

From 1967 to 1998, the political situation was stabilised. In 1965, Mayor General Soeharto successfully tackled the most severe rebellion, known as the Movement of 30 September/Indonesia Communist Party. Soon after this, Soeharto replaced Soekarno as the President of the Republic of Indonesia (Djojonegoro, 1997). He accelerated the centralisation of governance in order to maintain political stability. This was considered to be necessary to ensure the establishment of a base of economic development and to build national unity.
Soeharto centralised authority in the military, the bureaucracy, the economy, and even in culture (Kimura, 2013). As a result, Indonesia became a highly centralised and bureaucratic country for a long period, as did the national education system.

The stable political condition enabled systematic planning and implementation of national development during this period. The government instigated the five-year development programmes, namely REPELITA, starting in 1969 (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2011). The emphasis was on economic development by targeting the establishment of a balanced economic structure of industry and agriculture (Republik Indonesia, 1973). For this, it was necessary to plan in order to create skilled Indonesians who would also be nationalistic. Thus, unlike in the previous era, the emphasis of national education developments was on the expansion of education opportunities and the improvement of education quality and relevance (Djojonegoro, 1997; Rifa’i, 2011). The developments were aided by financial assistance from overseas from mainly developed countries and such multilateral agencies as the IMF, the World Bank, IGGI, The Asian Development Bank, UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO, through loans or grants (Djojonegoro, 1997).

During this period, however, school leadership, including that of school principals, was still neglected. School principals were senior teachers who were assigned as principals based almost solely on the recommendations of provincial governments and without having prior training in leadership and management (Beeby, 1981). Their main responsibilities were providing education as mandated by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) to primarily build patriotism and nationalism. Any kind of improvisation or development in education was not expected (Tilaar, 2004). Thus, work performance was assessed and rewarded mainly on the basis of their behaviour in respecting authority, such as showing obedience, loyalty, and cooperation (Bjork, 2006).

Also, centralisation in governance that located authority for making decisions at the central government level had a significant impact on school leadership. It created a culture of dependency amongst civil servants, resulting in weak leadership. In primary school education, state teachers and school principals came to lack creativity and initiative. They always expected to receive guidance ‘from above’ to implement any education changes. In addition, for many principals their day-to-day work was mainly administrative. So, overall, they lacked the leadership capacity to initiate change (Beeby, 1981). A similar situation has been reported by others who have investigated how highly centralised education systems have had an impact on school leadership (Lee & Hallinger, 2012; Oplatka, 2004). In particular, the arrangement created weak leadership among school principals as indicated by lack of initiative and limited autonomy. They considered themselves primarily as executors of regulations and decrees issued from above (Çinkır, 2010; Oplatka, 2004). This historical inheritance still has an influence today.
7.3 Developments That Have Taken Place in Relation to Primary School Leadership from 1999 until 2016

The decision to investigate developments that have taken place in relation to primary school leadership from 1999 until 2016 arose from the recognition that it is instructive to know what the Indonesian government did to develop education and, in particular, to shape primary school leadership according to the education decentralisation framework, and how this may still be having an impact on the present. In 1999, there was a move from centralisation to decentralisation in education. It was driven by the financial crisis of 1997 that led to a political crisis, and which included disappointment with Soeharto’s regime, the failures of highly centralised governments and a national call for a more democratic nation. It was also a response to a World Bank recommendation.

Decentralisation in education devolved authority for education management from the central government level to the local government level, with the central government retaining authority for the establishment of national education policies and standards to assure the quality of education nationally (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). Authority for education management was also devolved to the school level by promoting school-based management (SBM). The argument is that SBM is an effective way to improve education quality and to achieve universal basic education (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2013a, 2013b).

Under the decentralisation framework, developments in education nationally have been directed to produce a smart and competitive population to support extensive industrialisation driven by globalisation (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2011; Kementerian Pendidikan National, 2005). Accordingly, the expansion of education opportunities continues to receive priority. As part of this, the government became committed to implementing a policy of nine years of compulsory basic education from 1994, which was also related to the government’s commitment to the International Declaration on Human Rights. Also, attention was given to improving education quality and relevance and making it competitive internationally (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013; Ministry of National Education, 2011).

The improvement of education quality and relevance nationally are sought through the promotion of standardisation and the adoption of ‘education thinking’ from developed countries. Accordingly, the national education standards’ (NES) framework was established. It mandated the adoption of student-learning approaches, as originally developed in Western countries. Also, international standards developed in Western countries, including indicators used by OECD member countries and by the centres of training, industry, and international certification, were adopted. Furthermore, English came to be used as a medium of instruction in ‘exclusive’ education programmes, in bilingual classes, and in a wide range of student preparation programmes for participation in international student competitions. Low-cost textbooks have been made available and ICT for e-learning and e-administration also have been...
substantially developed. The initiatives received support and financial assistance from overseas, mainly from developed countries and from such multilateral agencies as the World Bank, UNESCO, AUSAID, and USAID.

Major changes also have been made in relation to primary school leadership. Under the SBM framework, the responsibilities of school leaders, and especially of school principals, in school management have been broadened. Together with school committees, they are expected to be engaging in long-term planning and in transparent financial management, providing effective support to, and monitoring of teachers (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013), and engaging in ICT-based school information system management (Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional, 2011a). Furthermore, they are expected to be transformational leaders in curriculum and pedagogy (Ministry of National Education, 2006). Concomitantly, there have also been changes to the ways in which principals are prepared, developed, and supported. In this connection, the central government introduced a new principal preparation programme (PPP), a continuing professional development (CPD) for principals programme, and a performance appraisal (PA) for principals programme. Programme implementation is managed by the district governments. The aim is to produce and develop capable and professional school leaders (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013).

7.4 Perspectives of Primary School Leaders on Current Issues They Face and on the Strategies They Adopt to Deal with those Issues

An analysis of the current concerns that school leaders face in challenging circumstances demographically and geographically under the SBM policy, and of the strategies they adopt to deal with those concerns led to the generation of three broad themes, these being, ‘people’, ‘management’, and ‘infrastructure’. Each of these themes will now be considered in turn.
7.4.1 Participants’ Concerns Associated with People

The participants’ concerns associated with people can be classified into four types. They are connected with issues regarding student dropout and repetition, lack of parental involvement, teacher shortage, and lack of professionalism. Regarding issues associated with student dropout and repetition, participants highlighted three main interrelated influences. They are parent migration, marriage, and the unavailability of inclusive education. Participants reported that student dropout is related to parent migration. One of the participants reported an example of this as follows:

Many parents here migrate to a big city and leave their children home with their poor and less educated relatives... Their relatives do not care if children go to school or not. They let children quit from schooling for working, marriage, or doing nothing.

School leaders also reported that students getting married is another reason for dropout. One of the school principals gave his comment on this as follows:

Parents allow their children to get married at a young age. So, last year, for example, we had a student dropping out because she got married. We talked to her parents to postpone it. They said they could not do it. The man has approached them for a long time to marry their girl.

The circumstances above indicate why school leaders find it difficult to reduce the number dropping out of school as marriage at a young age is permitted.
Student dropout, according to participants, also relates to, as stated already, the unavailability of inclusive education. They reported that almost every year they have children with special needs enrolling in their schools as special primary schools are not available in isolated villages. These children, as a result, need to experience an inclusive education. However, the schools do not receive additional funding from the government to provide the learning resources required. The result is that the students have to study in mainstream classes. Consequently, principals say, they have difficulties in their lessons, often repeat classes, and even drop out.

School principals also highlighted issues associated with the low level of parental engagement in education. They argue that parents do not fulfil their basic responsibilities, feel reluctant to allocate money for education, and do not attend parent-school meetings. This, principals hold, is related to parents’ low level of education and even illiteracy in some cases. Many are only primary school graduates and some never went to school at all. Thus, they do not have the capacity to help their children to learn at home and to do their homework.

Farming duties, school principals hold, is a further factor affecting parental involvement in their children’s education. Most parents are farmers who often go to their fields at dawn and return home in the late afternoon. Such activity, principals state, can make it difficult for parents to fulfil their basic responsibilities to their children. As one of the school principals said:

Most parents are farmers. They often go to the paddy field when their children are still sleeping. So, it is common that students here do not have breakfast before going to school and do not dress up and style their hair neatly.

In addition, some school principals reported that electricity to enable children’s learning at home is often unavailable in houses.

Along with the two factors mentioned already, school leaders also highlighted that they consider the mindset of some parents to be unhelpful. One of the school principals interviewed in the study said:

We don’t have educational support from parents. Parents think that educating children is completely the school’s responsibility.... often they don’t attend the parent-school meeting.

The mindset that principals referred to is heavily influenced by the fact that many primary school graduates do not earn more than less educated people. As a result, it is not surprising some participants reported that during certain school days, parents may take their children to attend family events for several days or even weeks, or to help them to harvest crops at harvest time. Sometimes, they state, parents are also reluctant to spend money on buying school shoes and additional school books.

Participants in the study further stated that they encountered teacher shortages and lack of professionalism. They frequently do not have a full complement of teachers. In
particular, there tends to be a shortage of sport and religion teachers. To alleviate this problem, principals employ unqualified local people.

School leaders expressed particular concern that the unqualified teachers they use often lack even a basic teaching capability. One of the school principals gave her view on this as follows:

My two honorary teachers lack basic teaching skills. For instance, they are not able to teach good handwriting for students in early grades. I think it is because they graduated from Senior High School.

School principals also highlighted what they see as the low pay that their schools give to non-qualified honorary teachers. This, they believe, leads to poor commitment to teaching. At the same time, it also discourages school principals from requiring a high level of teaching performance.

Furthermore, participants highlighted that teachers lack the capacity to implement current education policies, particularly in relation to inclusive education, ICT for student learning and teaching administration, and the 2013 curriculum. The situation is compounded, they emphasised, because opportunities for teachers to participate in associated professional development are rare. One of the participants commented on this as follows:

My teachers lack opportunities to participate in professional development managed by governments. These events are rare and only one or two civil servant teachers are invited from each selected primary school. Our honorary teachers are not eligible. Thus, teachers here may not have any professional development for years.

Also, principals hold, lack of information, isolation and poor financial support often make it difficult for teachers to participate in those professional development opportunities that they need. As one of the participants said:

Teacher professional development is important for teachers to update their knowledge and skills. However, working in a remote area like this, we lack information about seminars or workshops available to my teachers. Besides, teaching duties and travel create barriers for us to participate in events far from school. Also we lack funding to support such activities.

To this, they added difficulties they themselves experience in relation to providing professional support for their teachers. These have to do with a culture in which older teachers carry more status in society than their younger superordinates. One school principal gave voice to this as follows:

I feel uneasy to assess the teaching performance of my teachers, especially the elder, smarter, and more experienced ones like Mr T. He holds a
masters degree. To my honorary teachers, I should not be demanding. They are underpaid.

He went on to say that the heavy workload often means that he does not have sufficient time to supervise teachers individually in the classroom.

School principals also reported the heavy demands of ICT-based administrative work required of teachers, including ICT-based teaching, curriculum and personnel administration. However, many lack the necessary ICT skills and often do not have their own laptop, while schools either do not have any computers, or have only a very small number. Internet access is often unavailable. All of this, it is held, can distract teachers from their teaching and thus reduce the quality of education being offered.

Participants further held that a low level of teacher professionalism is manifested in high teacher absenteeism. Teachers, they stated, are often absent or arrive late at school. The most common reasons given for this are having a long and difficult home-school journey to travel, especially in the rainy season, attending social or cultural events such as wedding ceremonies, birth celebrations, circumcision, death-related events, visiting relatives in a different district, having a second job, and travelling to the city to carry out non-teaching responsibilities. At the same time, principals hold that absenteeism is not so high when teachers live near their schools.

The other issue is associated with the principalship itself. School principals who participated in the study being reported here claimed to have a very heavy workload as a result of having a broad range of responsibilities in management while still having teaching duties. They also reported that they have insufficient support and facilities to enable them to do their work effectively. One of the participants gave the following example of this:

Today I have a lot of work especially in ICT based financial and personnel administration. However, I don’t have an administrative staff, my school only has one computer and internet connection is unavailable. At the same time, I have to teach many hours due to a teacher shortage. Conflicts often happen between these two responsibilities.

School principals further highlighted that their day-to-day managerial and administrative work is concerned very much with activities associated with the implementation of the programmes of the Sub-district technical implementation unit (STIU) of the District Education Office (DEO). They went on to state that it is a ‘must’ for them to participate in, support, and to facilitate all of the STIU’s education programmes because they come under the management of the STIU.

School principals also emphasised what they see as their demanding supervisory tasks, and particularly responsibilities associated with teacher performance appraisal. As one of the participants stated:
Principals are required to conduct teacher performance appraisal. So, I have to assess the teaching practices of my teachers. Then I type, print, and upload the results. It is really complicated, time consuming, costly, and significantly increases my current heavy administrative work.

The situations highlighted here indicate that supervisory tasks, particularly teacher performance appraisal, involve engagement in a very wide range of activities.

Regarding management responsibilities, participants claimed they have insufficient skills for the tasks expected of them. One of participants gave the following illustration of this problem:

Today all school data should be online. Even, the results of teacher performance appraisal should be uploaded. I am minimally trained regarding ICT. So I find that principal’s work is troublesome, very difficult.

They also stated that they are not well prepared for challenging leadership roles that arise in rural and remote areas, such as dealing with poorly motivated teachers, poorly educated parents, or poorly motivated students, and conflict between school personnel. On this, one of the participants gave an example of her difficulties in dealing with a conflict with the chair of the school committee:

I have conflict with my chair of the school committee. He thinks we do something wrong with the SOA’s budget. We have given him a detailed explanation about it many times. I don’t know what else I can do. It is difficult to make him understand.

A further example of this was provided by another participant. He said:

All I need as a principal in a rural and isolated primary school like this is strong leadership. I felt this when I had conflict with my school committees and teachers. I did my best to deal with it, but it was so complicated. I really got stressed.

Another participant went on to say that such situations illustrate the need for specific leadership preparation and development. He put it this way:

I found that leadership is the most difficult task. We can delegate our work but not our leadership actions. If I make a mistake, conflicts may happen, and I may get less support. I see many principals feel the same, but we don’t know how to be an effective leader. We need leadership training.

Principals consider the current principal preparation programme (PPP) to be inadequate to help them to develop the leadership skills they need. Also, only a few of them reported that they received training before being appointed, and those that did said that the training was not very helpful. One beginning school principal commented on this as follows:
Before being appointed, I was trained for three months. However, the training courses were too theoretical and complicated to be applied here, a small, rural, and remote school. The leadership session was very good though. However, it was insufficient. I still need more leadership training.

They also claimed that they lack appropriate training to implement such technical initiatives associated with inclusive education and the use of ICT for administrative work and learning.

7.4.2 Participants’ Concerns Associated with Management

Participants identified two issues associated with management. The first issue relates to difficulties in financial management. School principals claimed that this is as a result of the nature of the school operation assistance (SOA) grant. The grant is allocated to their schools based on the number of enrolled students, with the expectation that schools should no longer charge school fees. Thus, there is often not enough money as they have to finance student participation in a wide range of competition programmes managed by STIU. One school principal made a comment on this as follows:

Our SOA’s grant is insufficient. We send students to join many competition programmes as requested by STIU. It is costly as they are held in the city creating huge expenses especially for transportation. We often have to take a certain amount of money allocated for other educational costs to participate in these events.

Another participant made a similar comment:

Ideally every year we should allocate the SOA grant for maintenance and learning facilities. However, there is always, no money left. Every year we have to participate in so many student competitions organised by the STIU.

The circumstances illustrated here indicate that the high cost of participation in student competition programmes results in an insufficient SOA grant being made to finance other education costs, such as providing adequate learning facilities, teacher honorariums, and school maintenance. The problem is especially acute in relation to small and rural schools. They receive a smaller grant than their larger counterparts, yet they still have to implement a wide range of mandated government programmes and policies. In addition, and as already indicated, these schools usually employ non-qualified teachers and pay them out of their own resources.

The cost of transporting materials and supplies to remote schools for the provision of education can also be more expensive than in relation to urban schools. Furthermore, financial contributions from parents are often not forthcoming. School leaders highlighted that this situation is closely related to poverty. On this, one school principal stated: “We collect financial
contributions from parents, just a little, 150,000 rupiah a year. Still not every parent can contribute. They are poor”.

School principals also highlighted parents’ views on free primary school education as follows:

Given SOA’s grants, parents think that primary education is totally free...
This is wrong. The grant frees students from education operational costs but not from other costs such as buying uniforms, student worksheets, and supplementary books.

Such comments indicated that the financial contribution from parents is needed to finance educational costs that are not covered by the SOA grant. Further, school leaders added that it is also needed to finance improvements to a school’s infrastructure that are not covered by the SOA grant, such as building landslide barriers, wells for sanitation, a school gate, and a school name board.

The other issue presenting difficulties in financial management is associated with having a predetermined budget allocation. One principal illustrated an associated problem as follows:

We need to buy new tables to replace the broken ones, but we can’t. The SOA manual mandates that budget allocations should give priority to operational costs. If we don’t follow it, we will be in trouble.

A similar comment was made by another participant in a larger school:

We have to allocate the SOA’s grant to buy books we didn’t need just because the SOA manual mandates us to buy books every year.

Overall, the view is that the top-down approach to school budgeting means that schools find it difficult to achieve sufficient efficiency and effectiveness in managing their resources.

The second issue is related to curriculum and instructional management. In line with the spirit of the decentralisation of education policy introduced in 2006, the central government replaced the 2004 curriculum with the School Level Curriculum (SLC). This curriculum gives autonomy to schools to formulate curriculum and to manage its implementation (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan 2011; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). However, the school principals who participated in this study stated that they still lack autonomy in relation to curriculum and instruction as the local governments continue to interfere. One participant provided this example:

It is difficult to develop effective teaching and learning. We have to use textbooks recommended by the STIU. The textbooks are developed based on the national curriculum and an assumption that students in early grades can read. Here, most students in early grades can’t read as they do not have kindergarten.
But we must use the books because the test items of final examinations are developed based on the textbooks.

The circumstance highlighted here indicates that school leaders can have difficulty effectively managing instruction because the textbooks provided by the STIU are not necessarily those that are deemed to be required.

School principals also highlighted issues associated with seeking to implement a new approach to pedagogy. The SLC mandates the adoption of a student-centred learning approach, namely PAKEM, at primary school level. School leaders raised various concerns associated with the initiative. One of them provided this illustration of the problem:

PAKEM won’t work here. The IQ level of our students is just fair... So, they need detailed explanations, many directions, exercises, and repetitions to comprehend their lessons. Such needs are even more evident for students who do not have kindergarten education and students with special needs...

Another participant offered a similar view. He said:

If we apply the student-centred learning approach, our students will be slower in mastering their lessons.

In particular, the principals believe that this model is not suitable for the learning abilities of students in the circumstances in which they find themselves.

Referring specifically to the 2013 curriculum that was implemented in 2015 for one semester, and was then implemented nationwide in 2017 to replace SLC, one of participants commented as follows:

The 2013 curriculum mandates the adoption of a thematic learning model. This is difficult. My teachers will be in a rush as students need a longer time to understand the lessons in such learning approach. Moreover, teachers often teach in two different classrooms at the same time while the approach needs full teacher attendance. Also, we don’t have sufficient instructional media to support this kind of learning.

Principals also experience difficulties with using and overseeing the use of the associated learning assessment model. This model is considered by them to be too complicated and too time consuming. As one participant commented:

The 2013 curriculum requires us to do qualitative or descriptive assessment and to not rank students. This is really confusing, complicated and time consuming.

Further, school leaders reported that the frequent changes that are made to the curriculum at the national level can disrupt the process of teaching and learning in a way that can diminish the quality of education.
7.4.3 Participants’ Concerns Associated with Infrastructure

Participants revealed their concerns associated with infrastructure. These pertained to lack of education facilities. They claimed they have poor education facilities in their schools. Many have fewer than six classrooms and many existing classrooms are sub-standard in terms of size and quality. One of the participants made this comment:

Our classrooms for students in grade one and grade two are too small. It was originally one classroom that was divided into two with plywood. It is not conducive to support effective student learning as when one class is learning to sing, the other class gets disturbed.

Some also reported not having a school yard, sanitation, a room for a library, and a principal’s and teachers’ room because of a shortage of land.

School principals further emphasised that they lack appropriate teaching and learning equipment, including visual aids, especially for science. They also claim to be short of appropriate books for the library, sports equipment, an LCD projector, and instructional media to facilitate engagement in inclusive education and productive learning. Again, this problem is mainly attributable to a small school budget, compounded by inefficient distribution and supply of teaching and learning resources.

Principals also experience, as they see it, a poor physical environment at the school. In particular, they often encounter water scarcity in the dry season and have to negotiate difficult tracks and roads, especially in the rainy season. Additionally, internet connections are often unavailable, or are very unreliable. Some principals whose schools are located in remote villages with very small communities also reported that they may lack electricity. This restricts students being able to study at night. One of the participants gave an example of the general challenges as follows:

I have students who live behind the small hill over there. In the rainy season, the track from there to school is dangerous, narrow and very slippery as it is a soil base. Thus, in the rainy season, they are often absent. Parents do not let them go to school.

Another participant provided a similar illustration:

We do not have sanitation and there is a lack of running water. It makes us difficult to teach students about cleanliness and religious practices, for instance wudlu (Islamic ritual ablution before praying) that needs water. So, it really presents constraints to developing strong character and the religiosity of our students.
The overall situation, it is held, creates obstacles to school leaders in their pursuit of good quality teaching and learning.

7.5 Implications

7.5.1 Further Research

The area of educational leadership in a context of developing countries, including those ruled formerly by Europeans, has been neglected as a subject of academic attention. It is even more barren terrain in a context of challenging circumstances geographically and demographically where SBM is policy. It is hoped that this study will serve to promote such research. It might be worthwhile, for example, to conduct longitudinal studies on the perspectives of school leaders on how they deal with the contextual complexity in which schools in developing countries, and specifically in challenging circumstances demographically and geographically where SBM is a policy, are located. In doing so, it would be instructive to ascertain the extent to which there is variation in the strategies and leadership styles adopted by school leaders to deal with the problems encountered.

Another implication of the present study for further research relates to the need to conduct interviews with primary school teachers. Such interviews could be based on what school leaders in this study have reported about their teachers. In an assortment of comments, school leaders reported that their teachers, especially unqualified honorary teachers, lack professionalism. This would be a fruitful area for further investigation.

Furthermore, future research could investigate further expressions of societal culture and school leadership in Indonesia. It could also investigate the extent to which the societal culture contributes to effective school leadership in other Asian contexts. There was evidence in the present study that there can be a culture in which older teachers can carry more status in society than their younger super-ordinates, and that this can influence the leadership practices of school leaders. It would be worth investigating the relationship between such matters and school leadership. Such research could help fill the deficit of educational leadership studies in non-Western cultures (Walker & Yu-kwong, 2010).

7.5.2 Policy Development and Practice

Addressing student attrition and repetition and low parent engagement

Despite the fact that the national government has provided the SOA grant that has freed students from having to pay tuition fees, students from poor families are still dropping out of school. This situation is related to complex contextual factors, including poverty, marriage, parents’ mindset, and also unsuitable education for students with special needs. These
problems need to be addressed if Indonesia is to successfully achieve universal primary school education. The government can reduce attrition by providing and ensuring that every low-income family receives additional financial assistance to meet the direct costs of schooling. It is also desirable that parents be educated about the purpose and importance of education.

**Addressing teacher shortage and lack of professionalism**

According to the education decentralisation policy, teacher management is devolved to the district governments, while the central government retains authority to determine the number of public servant teachers who can be employed (Ministry of National Education, 2011). As a result, while the devolution policy is intended to improve efficiency and effectiveness in teacher management, primary schools in rural, remote and low SES areas continue to experience teacher shortages. Accordingly, there is a need to establish a coordination mechanism for teacher recruitment and distribution between the central government and district governments.

Certainly, the professional development of teachers has received attention. Governments have run a wide range of professional development programmes for teachers. However, these programmes are seldom available. Thus, it would be desirable for the allocated quota of teachers participating in government organised training to be extended. Also, as resource contraints and the isolation of schools can create barriers for teachers to participate in professional development, there is a need to empower existing ‘teacher working clusters’ (TWC) in which teachers from several primary schools located near each other are encouraged to work and learn together. This could be done by providing required resources and support for the TWC to operate on regular basis.

**Leadership preparation and development**

Since 2010, the central government has run a principal preparation programme (PPP) to guide district governments in preparing qualified school principals (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). This programme has a standardised process for the recruitment, selection, and certification of principals. Part of the process is a 300 hour ‘training to develop candidates’ competencies to become principals (Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional, 2011b, 2011c). However, as the study considered here reported, to date, not all principals have attended PPP programmes. Many others only receive briefings on policy documents issued by district offices, or attend short management courses before being appointed (OECD/Asian Development Bank, 2015). Further, some have a perception that the courses are too theoretical, too complicated, and not applicable to challenging schools geographically and demographically. It is important that this situation be addressed as expeditiously as possible.
Certainly, leadership development for principals has received some attention. Among the relevant programmes is the continuing professional development (CPD) programme introduced nationwide in 2013. Put simply, it requires school principals to develop and implement an annual CPD plan consisting of self-study and learning activities on five principal competency standards through principals’ working clusters (PWC) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). However, the study being reported here found that none of the school principals participated in this study was engaged in CPD activities through PWC. This is a matter that would benefit from attention by system administrators.

Also, providing PWC as a forum of continuous leadership development for principals who work in isolated areas could be very beneficial. There is a need to provide sufficient funding to support its operation. In addition, there would be value of adopting peer learning approaches. This learning could involve the use of such methods as narrative accounts and storytelling on leadership issues that are drawn from school leaders’ experiences to enhance the personal learning of practising and aspiring leaders (Clarke, 2015). Along with this, mentoring programmes could be developed. Capable mentors can provide emotional and professional support for school principals who are isolated because of their disadvantaged school location, and consequently find it difficult to get access to professional help for dealing with real, actual, contextual leadership challenges (Msila, 2010). Further, it is desirable that mentoring programmes involve exemplary leaders, or retired successful school leaders who have worked in challenging contexts, along with experts from higher education institutions to provide various perspectives on how to deal with the challenges relating to their school situation (Msila, 2010; Ylimaki, Jacobson, & Drysdale, 2008).

Improving efficiency in school management

SBM has been implemented nationally since 2001. The essence of SBM is the devolution of authority for resource management to the school level (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2013a). The study reported here revealed that, under SBM, resource management is still less efficient than previous practices as school leaders still lack autonomy in the management of school budgets and in curriculum and instruction. It would be helpful, therefore, if authentic autonomy were granted to school leaders to empower them in managing their schools’ resources while taking local conditions into consideration.

Improving school infrastructure

This study reported here revealed that school leaders in challenging circumstances, geographically and demographically, face challenges associated with inadequate education facilities and dilapidated school environments. To some extent, they could harness contributions from parents and the local community to deal with these problems. However, the
community and parents’ contribution is often limited because of poverty. This is a further challenge that needs to be resolved if the quality of primary school education is to be improved.

Figure 7.2: Primary school teacher’s house in rural Indonesia.
References


