

Becoming a principal in Indonesia: possibility, pitfalls and potential

Bambang Sumintono^{a*}, Elslee Y.A. Sheyoputri^a, Na Jiang^a, Ifa H. Misbach^b and Jumintono^c

^a*Institute of Educational Leadership, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia;* ^b*Faculty of Educational Sciences, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia;* ^c*Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia*

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The preparation and development of school leaders is now considered to be fundamental to school and system improvement. In the pursuit of educational change and reform, the leadership of the principal is deemed to be of critical importance. This qualitative study is part of a large scale research project that is exploring principal preparation and development in seven different countries. In particular, this article focuses on how public secondary school principals in Indonesia are prepared, developed and selected for their role. Disappointingly little is known from the empirical literature about being a principal in Indonesia or about principal preparation and development. Therefore this contemporary, descriptive, non-experimental qualitative study focused on a purposive sample of 18 public secondary school principals in four different provinces in Indonesia. The initial findings reveal that even though principal training has been standardized in Indonesia and is now a compulsory part of a principal certification process, micro-political influences still currently govern the appointment of school principals.

Keywords: principal preparation; principal selection; education development; Indonesian public secondary schools; educational decentralization

Introduction

The centrality of leadership in the pursuit of better outcomes is now widely accepted and acknowledged (Hallinger, 2011). The quality of school leadership is now directly associated with better academic success and higher achievement for every student (Harris, 2014; Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Although many of the contemporary claims made for leadership remain contested and debated (Bush, 2011; Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2008; Harris, 2008), it remains the case that many countries are investing heavily in principals' preparation and development in the anticipation of improved performance and outcomes.

In many Asian countries, including Indonesia, there has been a propensity to follow Western approaches to leadership development and training, even though it is acknowledged that the cultural setting is so very different (Cravens & Hallinger, 2012). A recent review of the literature conducted by Hallinger and Bryant (2012) concluded that the contribution of research undertaken in the educational leadership field within an East Asian context is "relatively unimportant given the small volume" (p. 618). Further, during 2000–2011 in eight core journals in educational leadership and management, only one article about Indonesia could be located (Raihani, 2007). This reveals that relatively little is known about leadership and leadership development in Indonesia compared to other East Asian countries. The analyses of the available literature also highlight that there is a relative

*Corresponding author. Email: bambang@um.edu.my