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The influence of socio-cultural factors on leadership practices for instructional improvement in Indonesian schools

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ABSTRACT

Empirical studies have shown that although leadership shares similar practices across East and West, some practices have inherently distinguished socio cultural characteristics. Understanding these characteristics is important in Asian contexts since socio-cultures are a major power in determining the success or failure of a change process. This study sought to explore and identify local leadership practices influenced by socio-cultural factors through in-depth interviews with principals and teachers from six different senior secondary schools in Malang Regency, Indonesia. Key local practices were identified: monitoring learning hours, improving the welfare of teachers, focusing on students' character building, encouraging students' participation in extracurricular programmes, increasing standards, and building partnership with stakeholders. Although some of the practices are similar to those recognised by empirical studies done in Western school context, others reflect local leadership practices influenced by school conditions, social practices, and economic factors. The findings imply that in Indonesian schools, practices of leadership are directly and indirectly dictated by the policies regulated by the government. This strong influence of government can be the impediment for school leaders to make necessary initiatives to promote instructional improvements in their schools.

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1. Introduction

As empirical studies have agreed that school improvement is context-specific (Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan 2002; Elmore 1995; Fullan 1991; Harris 2002) and cultural in nature (Dimmock 2000; James 2008), the focus of school improvement efforts should be derived from contextual factors existing within a given school at a given time (Ainscow and West 2006; Harris and Chrispeels 2006). Context-specificity in addition to focus on learning level, capacity development and evaluation of school improvement approaches is a critical area for school

improvement (Teddle and Reynolds 2000). Therefore, school improvement will work if this context-specific characteristic is taken into account.

As each school has its own characteristics, the focus of improvement efforts should relate to the contextual factors existing within the school at a certain time. Although school leadership acts as a catalyst for school improvement, both the nature of leadership and its impacts are shaped by historical and current conditions in the schools (Hallinger and Heck 2010). Thus, school leaders must be prepared to adjust their strategies to changing conditions at different stages of school improvement. The type of leadership exercised during the improvement period must be linked both to the school learning profile and its improvement capacity at a specific time along the process (Hallinger and Heck 2010; Harris and Chrispeels 2006).

To develop the capacity of schools for improvement, the role of school leaders in creating structural and socio-cultural processes becomes fundamental (Chen 2008; Fullan 2007; Hallinger and Heck 2010; Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach 1999). This role is of importance despite current trends toward emergent models of relational leadership such as facilitative and transformative (Fullan 2007; Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach 1999). To face the dynamic complexity of school improvement, the importance of leadership cannot be reduced by mechanisms such as committees, standardised operating procedures, or participative decision-making (Chen 2008). Moreover, for improvement to take place, change is introduced and implemented to all school aspects and incorporates other factors that may determine desired academic improvement (Dalin 2005). It depends not only on the educational context of a certain effort, but also on wider contexts of political, social, economic, cultural and demographic factors (OECD Report, 1989 cited in Dalin 2005).

2. Socio-cultural context of school improvement in Asia

Since the beginning of 2000, there has been an increasing interest in the comparative study of education systems in Western and Asian contexts (Chen 2008; Cheng 2000; Cravens and Hallinger 2012; Hallinger 2010; Hallinger and Heck 2010; Hallinger and Kantamara 2000; Sofo, Fitzgerald, and Jawas 2012). The main reason for this interest is the tremendous achievement of students from particular Asian countries (Cravens and Hallinger 2012; Sofo, Fitzgerald, and Jawas 2012). Results from international educational indexes such as PISA 2015 shows that Asian countries such as Singapore, Japan, Chinese Taipei, Macao, Viet Nam, Hong Kong, and Korea continue to dominate as top performers above OECD average particularly in mathematics and sciences (Cravens and Hallinger 2012; OECD 2016). Therefore, there has been a renewed interest in investigating the role of different models of leadership in educational change in the Asia.

While educational reform shares many similarities between West and East, power gaps and value mismatches are two challenges that appear to be unique to the Asian context (Cravens and Hallinger 2012; Hallinger and Heck 2010). Large power gaps can serve to accelerate change in some circumstances, through enhanced compliance or take-up of initiatives; but this may not be the case when the reforms are more complex and require a greater degree of autonomy (Hallinger and Heck 2010; Hallinger and Kantamara 2000). Although the reform policies and programmes have tried to accommodate the strengths of West cultures into Asian traditions, some inherent cultural influences are difficult to eliminate from the tensions that emerge from some of the educational policies and introduced programmes (Ee and Seng 2008).

Cheng (2000) argues for a more holistic understanding of the cultural factors at play in educational reform, suggesting that any framework should specifically account for societal, community, school, and classroom influences. Cultural norms provide those in the leadership level with more significant positions, power and informal authority and the opportunity to catalyse and sustain the change process (Cheng 2000; Chen 2008; Hallinger and Heck 2010; Hallinger and Kantamara 2000). However, the obligation to comply with this culturally-embedded power and authority can create surface politeness and passive resistance among staff (Hallinger and Heck 2010; Hallinger and Kantamara 2000). It thus becomes important for leaders to transform cultural norms by reducing the power distance between them and their followers to initiate stimulus for change (Hallinger and Kantamara 2000). Understanding these nuances of reform in Asia has much to teach about the immense influence of culture and the embedded roles of leaders within the culture.

The inquiries on the power and efficacy of Indonesian school reform led to the identification of three major problematic conditions. The first one is the lack of management efficiency both at local government and local school levels (Sofa, Fitzgerald, and Jawas 2012). Studies conducted by both national and international scholars have underlined the fact that many local authorities, including school principals, have limited expertise and experience in handling the consequences of educational autonomy mandated by National Education System Law Number 20 Year 2003 especially in dealing with public participation and shared decision-making (Bjork 2005; Chan and Sam 2007; Nandika 2007; Sofa, Fitzgerald, and Jawas 2012). This empirical finding can explain the absence of initiatives executed by the principals to make necessary changes, as they continue to rely on directives from their superiors in their school districts (Chan and Sam 2007; Irawan et al. 2004; Surakhmad 2002). The conducted studies also highlighted the insufficiency of the government's assistance to local schools that affect the readiness of the local schools to execute their authority, thus preserving the authority of the government (Bjork 2003, 2005; Chan and Sam 2007). Such empirical findings may indicate that Indonesian school reform has not been supported by qualified management authority and ability.

The second shortcoming has been related to the poor direction provided to the teaching staff (Sofo, Fitzgerald, and Jawas 2012). Empirical studies have indicated the lack of attention from school authorities on teachers' teaching performance that unfortunately leads to the absence of the responsibility to improve teaching quality (Azra 2002; Bjork 2005; Tilaar 2009). Minimum empowerment to teachers and lack of evaluation on teaching performance are the corresponding results of such practice. In addition, the prevalent civil service culture that emphasises more on the obedience to the authority has minimised the exercise of intellectual capacity among teachers (Bjork 2005; Chan and Sam 2007; Kintamani 2002; Raihani 2007; Tilaar 2009). On top of that, the dominance of local elite bureaucracy practices both in working sphere and in the society has discouraged lower level social classes from meaningful public participation including that of teachers in spite of their role as key school members (Fadjar 2003). These empirical findings clearly show that qualified teaching has not been an integrated part of Indonesian school reform.

The last problematic condition is the erratic change of education policies, especially those related to the national curriculum (Sofo, Fitzgerald, and Jawas 2012). The frequent curriculum changes due to poor educational leadership have been seen as one of the major impediments to improving educational quality (Sofo, Fitzgerald, and Jawas 2012). The curriculum does not adequately represent students' characteristics, voices, and interests (Kunandar 2007; Taruna 2007). The curriculum is also criticised for its preference for accommodating the needs and interests of the high-achieving students (Drost 2005; Kunandar 2007; Taruna 2007). Only 30% of Indonesian students are believed to achieve the desired benefits from the curriculum (Drost 2005). The arguments also address the inability of the curriculum to generate the excitement for learning and the freedom to learn (Taruna 2007). In addition, the practice of content-transfer learning to cope with the heavy load of the curriculum has weakened the relevance of learning (Kunandar 2007; Taruna 2007).

These identified shortcomings of the power and efficacy of Indonesian school reform as explained by the empirical analyses above could answer the question on the gap between the main objective of Indonesian school reform and Indonesia's actual educational performance. As highlighted in National Education System Law Number 20 Year 2003, school reform aims at the improvement of educational quality at individual local schools through more intense school stakeholder involvement in school programmes and activities, that can lead to more transparent, accountable, democratic, and responsive school management (Fadjar 2003; Irawan et al. 2004; Indonesian Ministry of National Education 2003). However, as measured by leading international educational indexes such PISA, PIRLS, and TIMSS, Indonesian academic performance has not yet shown any significant and satisfactory achievement despite more than a decade of school reform implementation.

Since structural and socio-cultural processes determine the capacity of school to implement reform (Chen 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe 2008; Southworth 2002), it can be said that the identified shortcomings of Indonesian school reform can be traced down to their social-cultural roots to examine whether they become the influential factor that inhibits required initiatives to implement changes in Indonesian schools. Anchored in these backgrounds, this study was conducted to explore and identify socio-cultural factors that influence local leadership practices in Indonesian schools. It is expected that the findings would reveal local knowledge and practices of leadership that could help identify strengths and weaknesses associated with improvement efforts in Indonesian schools.

3. Research methodology

The design of this study was a qualitative study where in-depth interviews were used to explore and identify local leadership practices expressed by the participants. Six principals and fourteen teachers from six different senior secondary schools in Malang Regency, Indonesia participated in the interviews. This study used stratified purposeful sampling to select the type of school that the participants came from. This was done to ensure that all types of senior secondary schools were represented so that the findings could give a more comprehensive description of the investigated leadership practices. In general, there are three types of senior secondary schools in Indonesia run by government and private sector: mainstream secondary school, Islamic/madrasah secondary school, and vocational secondary school. So, altogether there are six types of

Table 1. Profile of research participants.

ID	Type of senior secondary school	Position	Gender	Years of current position	Educational background
P1	Public	Principal	Male	6	Physical Education
P2	Public	Teacher	Male	25	Mathematics
P3	Public	Teacher	Female	6	Biology
P4	Public	Teacher	Female	18	Bahasa Indonesia
P5	Public	Teacher	Female	24	Civic Education
P6	Public Islamic/madrasah	Principal	Male	10	Islamic Studies
P7	Public Islamic/madrasah	Teacher	Male	17	Mathematics
P8	Public Islamic/madrasah	Teacher	Male	2	History
P9	Public Vocational	Principal	Male	10	Automotive Engineering
P10	Public Vocational	Teacher	Female	16	Chemistry
P11	Public Vocational	Teacher	Female	14	Civil Engineering
P12	Public Vocational	Teacher	Male	26	Islamic Studies
P13	Private	Principal	Male	10	Islamic Studies
P14	Private	Teacher	Male	25	English
P15	Private	Teacher	Female	3	Mathematics
P16	Private Islamic/madrasah	Principal	Male	10	Geography
P17	Private Islamic/madrasah	Teacher	Male	22	Physics
P18	Private Vocational	Principal	Female	10	Psychology
P19	Private Vocational	Teacher	Female	24	Accountancy
P20	Private Vocational	Teacher	Male	18	English

senior secondary schools. [Table 1](#) summarises the profile of interview participants.

From the profile, it shows that in general the participants are senior employees in their school. 79% of teacher participants have been teaching more than 10 years while 83% of the principals are in their final year of principalship. In Indonesia, employment period of a principal is five years and can be extended to two periods. Moreover, principals are selected from senior teachers. Such working length for both the interviewed principals and teachers surely has given them lots of working experiences that shaped their answers to the interview questions. The different educational background also helped to identify common patterns experienced by the interviewees.

To interpret the interview data, inductive analysis was incorporated to reduce and reconstruct the collected data through coding and categorisation processes. It was further supported by basic interpretative studies where the analysis involves categorisation and development of themes. To manage the whole data analysis process, this study used QSR's NVivo 9 software. The process consisted of importing interview materials, creating nodes to store data about ideas or themes emerging from the analysis, coding to tag content about a specific theme or idea, and making classifications to group interview materials based on common characteristics found. The framework of the data analysis referred to the review done by Nettles and Herrington (2007) on empirical studies on practices of school leadership that had direct effects on student achievement. From the analysis, factors of socio-culture that influenced the leadership practices were identified and categorised based on the emerging themes. The findings are presented in paragraphs based on the key emerging activities revealed from the interviews.

4. Research findings

From the analysis of the interview data, the following key local leadership practices emerged: monitoring learning hours, improving the welfare of teachers, focusing on students' character building, encouraging students' participation in extracurricular programmes, increasing standards, and building partnership with stakeholders. Some of the identified leadership practices are similar to practices recognised in empirical studies done in western school context (Nettles and Herrington 2007), while others reflect local leadership practices influenced by school condition, educational values, imposed government regulation, and economic factors.

4.1. Monitoring learning hours

Monitoring learning hours was basically the practice of controlling school instructional time. This practice was seen as the way to manage big number

of students, teachers, and classes. The importance of this leadership practice was emphasised by all the interviewed principals. It was seen as the way to solve high occurrence of tardiness and lack of time discipline in their schools. The practice was aiming not only at the students, but also at teachers. Teacher's procrastination was also highlighted during the interviews. Monitoring learning hours was thus to make sure schools began on time and the instructional processes took place promptly. Such practice required the principals to be at school before schools started. In the morning, the principals accompanied by picket teachers would usually wait at the school gate to observe the arrival of school members. This physical presence of the principals was perceived as an effective means to discourage procrastination and instill time discipline among school members.

The principals would also check teaching and learning activities once the school started. They would go round the school classes to check from the outside whether teachers had been in the class and the instructional processes had taken place. The inspection was thought to be necessary as it would augment the morning observation done by the principals. Many occurrences happened that teachers did not directly go to the class to teach and spend much time talking with their colleagues in teacher's office. Therefore, such inspection done by the principals would make the teachers and the students know that they were scrutinised for their teaching and learning responsibility. This learning hour monitoring and inspection practice was acknowledged by many of the interviewed teachers to be a supervisory support for them. It showed that the principals paid attention to the instructional process and encouraged the teachers to perform their duty. Only a few of the teachers perceived the inspection not necessary since it showed a lack of the principals' trust on the teachers' work ethics.

4.2. Improving the welfare of teachers

Improving the welfare of the teachers basically meant to give extra financial allowances to the teachers in addition to their monthly salary. This practice aimed to non-tenure teachers who usually comprised more than one third of the teacher body especially in public schools. The salary of the non-tenure teachers was not paid by the government and it was the responsibility of each school to pay the salary. In the public schools participating in this study, it was the responsibility of the principals to allocate the financial resource for paying the allowances. To do this, usually the principals would involve the non-tenure teachers in every government project that the school received. By doing this, the non-tenure teachers would get additional earnings from this extra job. The principals also involved the non-tenure teachers in other non and extra instructional school activities that would entitle them with honorarium. The allowances

that they got were expected to make the salary they took home a decent income.

Financial allowances were also allocated for tenure teachers. The common financial restraint faced by such teachers was the slow process of salary increase. Government bureaucracy for this process was complicated and time consuming. Therefore, the schools did similar approaches to those done for non-tenure teachers by involving the tenure teachers in some activities that would provide these teachers with extra earnings. In addition to that, schools also provided administrative help for teachers who were selected for government certification programme. This certification comes with a financial reward. The principals would appoint teachers who already got the certification to be the mentors for those who were in the application process. This mentorship was expected to increase the possibility to be selected in the certification programme. This assistance was also practiced by the principals in private schools (P13, P16, P18). Teachers from private schools are also eligible for this government certification programme. All of the interviewed principals viewed this certification programme as a relief of their financial burden as well as an anchor to provide a steady allowance to the teachers.

The interviewed teachers were aware of the school efforts in providing them with better financial situation. Some of them acknowledged that they did experience some difficulties with their economic condition and had to take moonlighting practices after school hours. They said such extra working made them tired and drained their energy and concentration in performing their teaching responsibility. This condition was recognised by all the principals. The principals were fully aware of the impacts of teachers' financial problems on their teaching performance. They said that it would be difficult to expect quality teaching from exhausted teachers. Therefore, the welfare of the teachers caught the attention of the principals. Similarly, the teachers recognised the effort from their school and appreciated the financial incentive they received from the schools.

4.3. Focusing on students' character building

During the interviews, character building or character education was the most repeatedly mentioned words by almost all of the participants. Character building was an attempt by the school to instill good characters in every student. The values adopted to build the characters of the students were basically taken from universal principles, and of religious and cultural practices. The universality of the values was expected to bridge the heterogeneous backgrounds and different religious beliefs of the students. It was believed that this approach would make the students not only aware of local wisdoms but also responsive to global values. For students in vocational schools the characters were molded more by industrial and work ethics to help the students adjust themselves faster and perform better in their job later on. For students in mainstream

schools, the values to promote good learning habits such as the habits of punctuality, discipline, hard work, honesty, respect and independence were highlighted.

In Islamic/madrasah schools, the focus on the characters of the students was more obviously imperative. The principals and the teachers recognised the tight scrutiny from the community on the characters of their students. Community associated a madrasah school as a place for students to learn and acquire decent characters and there was a stronger expectation for well-mannered and good – character students. When the students behaved differently from this community expectation, it would be judged as a failure of the school. As the image of the madrasah in the community was at a stake, the focus on the characters of the students became a very important mission of the school. Islamic religious values and practices were promoted and cultivated. One of the madrasah schools participating in this study even collaborated with neighbouring *pesantren* (Islamic Boarding House) to encourage pious characters among the students. Such partnership with the community institutions was expected to encourage the desired characters especially after school time since many of the students resided in the *pesantren*.

To reinforce the expected characters, teachers and staff in the school were obliged to be the role models for the students. Many of the interviewed principals believed that modelling the desired characters was the best way to encourage students to acquire and carry out similar characters. The majority of the interviewed teachers also believed in the same thing. They said that when everybody in the school believed in similar values and behaved accordingly, it would fasten the process needed to instill these characters school wide. Such characters would create the image of the school in the community. The role of parents and the home environment in student character building was also acknowledged. Both the interviewed principals and teachers believed that parents could become the best role models in promoting desired characters to the students. They also believed that the home environment was the best place to build the characters. To do this, parents were invited to school and were informed about school programme on the character building. Parents were then encouraged to supervise the behaviour of their children at home.

4.4. Encouraging student participation in extracurricular programs

In the interviews with the principals, student participation in extracurricular programmes was perceived as the way to balance students' school life and to invigorate their learning enthusiasm. The principals believed that some physical activities offered in some of the programmes could help improve students' learning concentration and maintain their mental health. These programmes were also seen as the way to develop students' characters. Sportsmanship, fairness, honesty, discipline, hardwork and team work could be fostered in the

extracurricular programmes. Students could also showcase their talents and abilities to be recognised by their schools and wider communities. The competitions held for extracurricular programmes gave schools the time to celebrate and appreciate the diverse potentials of their students. In addition, students' achievements in extracurricular competitions could be a promotional opportunity and helped create a favourable school profile in the community.

To encourage students' participation in the extracurricular programme, there were different ways taken by the principals. In one of the vocational schools participating in this study, the principal (P9) worked together with local sport clubs in managing the extracurricular programmes. The clubs were in charge of providing regular trainings and examining the students' performance. This collaboration with the local sports clubs was thought to be effective since clubs offered the opportunities to participate in competitive tournaments and become professional sportsmen. This could motivate the students to seriously participate in the programmes. As the students were examined by the clubs, their performance evaluation was believed to be fair and authentic.

In one of the madrasah schools, the popular extracurricular among the students was indie movie production. Although this activity was quite contrast with the common characteristics of a madrasah school, the principal (P16) believed that the programme would provide the opportunity for the students to cultivate creativity and imagination. The school provided full support for the programme and held an annual indie movie festival so that the students could showcase their acting and movie-making talents and abilities and the winning movies would be played in the school auditorium and the tickets were sold to parents and the surrounding community. This extra-curricular activity had become the pride of the school.

In another madrasah school, journalism was the main focus of the extracurricular programmes offered to the students. The principal (P6) said that journalism would train how the students reacted to current issues that happened in real life and how they expressed and argued for their ideas constructively. The principal added that journalism would sharpen the ability of the students to think critically and to be sensitive towards issues in the community. The school had sent students to participate in several student journalism competitions and had won several awards both at district and provincial levels. He said that the achievements had attracted students in the school to join with the programme. The winning also improved the image of his school in the community. The interviewed principal believed that students' achievements in extracurricular competitions could promote the school to the public and schools with high achievements would be more attractive to prospective students.

In the mainstream schools participating in this study, the extracurricular programme that caught much attention from the principals and teachers was that related to academic. The common one was Olympic Group for science and mathematics. The students who joined the groups would be rigorously drilled with

many tests so that they would develop the ability to work on any test item. Teachers who taught science and mathematics would be appointed by the principal to be in charge of this programme. The students would represent the schools in the Olympic competitions on the subjects. Winning in such competitions was considered a high privilege for both the schools and parents since the winners would go to the next higher competitive levels and represent Indonesia in similar international competitions. The academic prides gained from winning in the competition made this extracurricular programme an emphasis for the schools.

Another extracurricular that caught the attention of all participants of this study was Indonesian Youth Scout known as *Pramuka*. Different from other extracurricular programmes that are optional, *Pramuka* is a compulsory extracurricular programme for all students in all schools. Such regulation is mandated by the national curriculum. From the interviews, both the principals and teachers considered scout an important activity to augment student character building. In this scout activity, students were trained not only for some basic scout competencies but also soft skills in the form of team work, discipline, problem solving, and independence. The schools also held regular annual semester-end scout camp known as *Persami (Perkemahan Sabtu Minggu)*. Teachers and students had to participate in the camp. During the camp, competitions related with scout competencies and skills were contested among the scout groups. This camp was also regarded by the interviewed principals and teachers as the enthusiasm recharge for the students. As the camp activities were designed to be competitive yet fun, the students were refreshed after their semester study routine.

4.5. Increasing standards

Increased standards were applied in different aspects in accordance with the school policy. For some schools, the increased standards were applied to school management while other schools increased the standards for school facilities. However, almost all participants expressed similar emphasis on increased standards for student learning. For vocational schools, student apprenticeship was considered as the means to expose students to the increased standard in their learning based on the real job requirements. For other school types, increased standards for student learning were measured by increasing minimum passing scores both in formative and summative school tests as well as in the national exit examination. In the opinion of the participants, increasing the minimum passing score in school tests and the national exit examination would encourage students to study harder so that they could accomplish more in their learning.

In one of the private schools participating in this study, the standard for management especially for financial management caught the attention of the

principal (P16). The management was improved in terms of its transparency and efficiency. Transparent management aimed to ensure the accountability of the school to the stakeholders, especially when dealing with school financial and programme management. In the opinion of the principal, the transparency approach would strengthen the trust and confidence of the stakeholders on the school leaders and the management which is imperative for a private school like his. While efficiency meant that every decision taken by the school management had to base on the school's actual needs. This required continuous monitoring and evaluation of school current condition and performance. It would give real data for making the management decision. Such data-based approach was thought to be the way to increase the efficiency of school management.

Increased managerial standard was also reported by the principal of one of the vocational schools in this study (P9). In his school, the management was run by adopting industrial standards that required the management service to be accurate, reliable, quick, and equal for any school stakeholders. Reducing the waiting time for any school service to the stakeholders was the top priority. It was also applied to school administrative and academic services to the students. He expected that the adoption of these industrial values could improve the quality of management service in his school. He further added that using the industrial approaches in daily school management could provide a good exposure for the students of how industries were managed. This exposure was also expected to be a way to prepare his students to enter the industrial market later on.

Increased standard for learning facilities caught the attention of the other principal from private vocational senior high school (P18). Her school was undergoing a major transformation in its facilities to make it a technology-driven school. Every classroom was refurbished to be equipped with multimedia and internet connection. This technology-driven school was the concept of a modern school that her school aimed for. The availability of multimedia and internet connection was expected to influence instructional activities in her school. The school aimed at providing *technopreneurship* that combines technology literacy and entrepreneurship skills in its instructional activities. She expected that the improved facilities would help achieve this instructional goal. She was proud that almost all of the classrooms in the school were equipped with internet access and multimedia facilities.

Providing local and overseas apprenticeship programmes for the students was done to increase the standards for student learning experiences. Such practice was reported by all the participants from vocational senior high schools. One of them was specialised in the hospitality industry. The principal (P18) believed that the apprenticeship programme would give the real hospitality experience to the students. The compulsory apprenticeship programmes with local, national, and international industries for final year students were thought to be the way

to increase the standards in learning. She added that the experiences the students got from these apprenticeship programmes would provide them with authentic knowledge of standards required by the industry and use the knowledge to improve their skills. A similar idea was expressed by other principal from vocational senior high school (P9). He said that the apprenticeship programme that his school had with some leading companies in automotive and heavy machinery would give the students an exposure to industrial standards. He expected that the industrial standards would enhance the learning standards used in his school.

4.6. Building partnerships with stakeholders

The availability of human, expertise and financial resources in the communities was both seen by the participants as an opportunity and a challenge for schools to build partnerships with their communities to get the benefits of these ready resources. Quantity and quality of the communication with the stakeholders were highlighted by the participants. Some of the participants said that trustworthiness and respect were the essence of the communication to get the support from communities. While others added that open and genuine communication could make the relationship between a school and its stakeholders closer and stronger. All principals in this study believed that a strong school-community partnership depended on the mutual benefits that both sides could get from the established relationship. They thought that when mutual contributions became the foundation, it strengthened the significance of the relationship. They also added the importance of making the contributions recognised and appreciated.

The highlight of partnership with stakeholders is prominent in all participating vocational schools in this study. The partnership was mainly done by involving the partner industries in curriculum revision of some productive subjects. In a public vocational school participating in this study, the partner industries were involved in co-designing the content of the curriculum, recruiting students, evaluating learning progress, and providing job experiences. The schools contributed to the industries by providing a qualified workforce of high performing students. In a private vocational school participating in this study, partner industries were involved in identifying required competencies from the perspectives of real practitioners to enhance the relevance of the curriculum. The partner industries also became the employers for student apprenticeships programmes. In an Islamic/madrasah high school participating in this study, the collaboration was done with local *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools). The collaboration was intended to reduce the learning load of the students since the students study Islam and its practices in these local *pesantrens* during off-school hours.

Building partnerships with parents also gained the attention of the participants. All the principal participants believed that educating children had to be

a joint effort between schools and parents. A similar emphasis on shared responsibility between school and parents in students' learning was expressed by the teacher participants. They thought that together with the school's efforts, parents' active involvement in their children's learning could help the children to succeed in their study. Some of the teachers wanted the parents to have a genuine interest in their children learning and be aware of the progress achieved. They believed when parents actively engage in their children's education, it could motivate their children to put their best effort into their study. The role of parents in their children's learning was added by other teachers. In their opinion, parental control and supportive home environment could determine the successful learning experiences of the students. As students spend longer hours at home than at school, they believed that parents and home environment have more substantial impacts on students' learning.

5. Discussion

The identified practices of leadership explained above clearly show that leadership practices are bound to the context where the leadership exists. Scholars have argued that leadership practices are more about responding to rather than dictating the context (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins 2008). As leadership is not set in isolation but contingent to the context where it exists (Davies 2005; Middlehurst 2008; Southworth 2005), the application of these basic practices is varied and context-influenced (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins 2008). Leadership can be contextualised by many factors such as history and culture, particular settings, methodological approaches and perspectives of particular disciplines, the availability of resources, and other factors (Leithwood and Riehl 2003; Middlehurst 2008). Leaders are encouraged to be sensitive and to match and adapt appropriate styles and behaviours to the context that they are dealing with (Davies 2005; Middlehurst 2008). It is about being aware of patterns and trends outside the schools, understanding the implications they may have on students' learning needs, and taking appropriate actions accordingly (Davies 2005).

For the first practice of monitoring learning hours, it was perceived more as time management to control that classes were started and finished on time rather than as class supervision to improve learning activities. The latter actually is the original definition of monitoring classroom hours in Weber's instructional leadership model (1996). In addition, in their review, Nettles and Herrington (2007) included frequently monitoring instructional processes as one of the characteristics of high performing principals. However, this practice of classroom supervision was not the objective of the practice of monitoring learning hours in Indonesian schools. The different definition and practice of monitoring learning hours in Indonesian schools is likely the school's response to the number of the students. For 2013/2014, it was estimated that almost ten million out of fifty six

million students attended senior secondary schools (Bureau of National Statistics 2016). On average, each school where the interviews took place had more than 500 students. In vocational senior secondary schools, the number could be as many as 1000 students. To make sure many parallel classes and its big number of student and teachers start and finish the instructional activities on schedule, controlling the instructional time becomes imperative. This time discipline would maintain an orderly climate in the schools.

Another likely factor that influences this practice of monitoring classroom hours is related to the cultural dimension of time. Among Indonesians, time is perceived as a flexible concept, different from the way the westerners perceive time as a substance (Underhill 1997). The relaxed way of using the time can be a serious problem if such attitude is carried onto school life. That is likely to be the reason why principals monitored classroom hours. The majority of the participants said that such practice could eliminate tardiness and cultivate punctuality and discipline not only among students but also among teachers as well.

The next leadership practice is improving the welfare of teachers. From the interviews, the economic burden was considered a real obstacle that could prevent teachers from giving quality teaching. Attention to the welfare of teachers could be related to the Indonesian Gross National Income (GNI) profile issued by the World Bank. For 2014, Indonesia's GNI per capita was US\$ 3630 and it was categorised into a lower middle income country (The World Bank 2016). Indonesia's GNI is lower than some countries in East Asia and Pacific (The World Bank 2016). In addition to that, teaching was among jobs in Indonesia that did not offer a high salary (Chan and Sam 2007; Tilaar 2009). Therefore, among the society, teachers are famously entitled as the *unsung hero*. Such treatment to Indonesian teachers contributed to the lack of financial reward to teaching and showed a lack of appreciation to teachers' roles in national development (Chan and Sam 2007; Tilaar 2009).

Building the character of the students also caught the attention of the principals in exercising their leadership. Character building or character education is among the key elements of the Indonesian education system. The national education system is mandated by the national constitution to strengthen the people's faith and moral character as a means for enhancing the intellectual capacity of the nation. The function of national education is to develop the capability, character, and civilisation of the nation for enhancing its intellectual capacity. From the interviews, the adopted values for building the character of the students were taken from religious and cultural wisdom as well as universal principles. The universality of the adopted values is imperative in the Indonesian context because of the heterogeneous ethnicity and religious beliefs of the students. These universal characteristics of the values could bond people from different religious and cultural backgrounds (Komalasari 2012).

The leadership practice of encouraging student participation in extracurricular programmes can be seen as school response to compensate the heavy load of its

curriculum. Curriculum, indeed, has been quite a contested issue in Indonesia's educational system (Drost 2005; Taruna 2007). Indonesia's curriculum has been criticised for its inability to generate learning excitement and to meet the needs and interests of the students (Kunandar 2007; Taruna 2007). The curriculum was also argued for its incapability to generate the excitement for learning and the freedom to learn (Taruna 2007). Therefore, students' participation in extracurricular programmes could balance students' lives in schools and invigorate their learning enthusiasm. Since extracurricular programmes encourage physical activities and maintain mental health, they could be an alternative to revive the enthusiasm for learning and improving students' learning concentration. In addition, extracurricular programmes provide the place to develop students' characters which is one of the underlined aspects in the education system. Values such as sportsmanship, fairness, honesty, discipline, hardwork and team work were fostered through these programmes.

Actually, securing high standards has been the focus of research on school reform and effective leadership (Bush 2003). Scholars agreed that setting and implementing standards determined leadership success (McDougall, Saunders, and Goldenberg 2007). However, the way the standards applied in Indonesian schools is quite varied depending on the type of the school and the definition of standards as perceived by the school leaders. These different practices of increasing standards among the schools reflect different objectives that each school is aiming for. In vocational schools, workplace standards influenced the standards of the schools. In private schools, the attention was given to school facilities. It might due to the attraction of quality of the facility to the prospective students. As mentioned by some of the participants, the school facility could build the image of the school in the society. For public schools, increasing learning standard in the form of raising passing scores was the emphasis. This is to satisfy the requirement imposed by the government. It is a common fact that public schools are obliged to comply with government regulations (Nandika 2007).

The last leadership practice of involving parents in the preparation of the national examination is driven by the increasing pressure on schools to succeed in national exit examinations. As a low graduation rate has a severe impact on school public image. Schools could be perceived to be low-performing if many of the students failed in the exam. This would severely affect the profile of the schools in the community and the attractiveness of schools for parents of prospective students. The challenge left for schools is how to come up with programmes that can assist schools to attain a high graduation rate. The purpose of involving parents in the preparation of the national examination was to get their approval for and participation in school examination preparation programmes. Scholars have argued that strengthening parental involvement was found to be essential during the implementation of reform programmes

(Chen 2008; Dalin et al. 1994; Elmore 2000; Fullan 1991; McDougall, Saunders, and Goldenberg 2007; Sergiovanni 2001).

The practice of engaging parents could be linked to the implementation of School-Based Management (SBM) in Indonesian schools. SBM was primarily driven by the importance of involving school stakeholders including parents in school decision making (Indonesian Ministry of National Education 2004). It was expected that with parental support, schools would be able to improve quality through innovative efforts (Indonesian Ministry of National Education 2004). Empirical findings have shown that school improvement depends not only on the educational context of a certain effort, but also on wider contexts of political, social, economic, cultural and demographic factors (OECD Report, 1989 cited in Dalin 2005). Therefore, to initiate school reform, a holistic approach should develop and connect all levels of the internal system to the external system that they interact with (Elmore 2000; Fullan 1991). This is to achieve the consistency of the reform policy structure and to synchronise the efforts within the systems, and to create clarity and consistency at both the top and bottom of the system (Cheng 2000; Chen 2008; Hallinger and Heck 2010; Hallinger and Kantamara 2000).

6. Conclusion

From all of the identified local leadership practices, they show both implicitly and explicitly that although educational autonomy has been implemented more than a decade in Indonesia, the influence of government role remains strong. Many of the local leadership practices basically demonstrate how school principals as the school leaders respond to the government-imposed regulations and synchronise their practices to such regulations. In Indonesian school context, leadership practices are more as the direct or indirect responses to government regulations. Such circumstances can preserve government authority in spite of the implementation of educational autonomy mandated by the National Education Law Number 20 Year 2003. As argued by scholars, system-wise, Education in Indonesia remains the status quo of government influence. When such influence persists, it will be difficult to expect school principals as school leaders to implement creative initiatives in executing their leadership roles to introduce changes for instructional improvements.

In conclusion, the findings of this study reaffirm that leadership practices are context-specific and context-influenced. In Indonesian context, school conditions, social practices, and economic factors can affect the practices for instructional improvement executed by the principals. As the world's fourth most populous country with around 300 ethnic groups that carry with them distinct socio-cultural practices, Indonesia offers an extensive research context especially to examine its educational system including the educational leadership practices in relation with the issues associated with its national development phenomena.

Scholar has argued that to understand the current state of education in Indonesia, it is necessary to examine the development of the system, especially the impacts that the nation's social, economic, and political conditions have left on schools (Bjork 2005). Therefore, more future research is needed to have a more comprehensive understanding on the influence of socio-culture on educational leadership practices particularly for school instructional improvement efforts.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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