A Qualitative Analysis of *Pesantren* Educational Management: School Culture and Leadership of a Professional Learning Community

Nyimaz Muazzomi
Jambi University
muazzomi_nyimas@yahoo.com

Muhammad Sofwan
Jambi University
Muhammad.sofwan@unja.ac.id

Fachrudiansyah Muslim
Jambi University
Facrudiansyah.muslim@unja.ac.id

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore supportive and shared leadership structures at one Indonesian Islamic boarding school (*Pesantren*) as a function of school culture policies and procedures in a professional learning community in the district. A qualitative study was conducted at one *Pesantren* located in Jambi, an Indonesian province in west part of Sumatra island. We interviewed three administrators and five teachers to get in-depth information about the purpose of this paper. The interview transcriptions were translated, coded, divided into themes, and elaborated in the findings of the paper. The findings of study conclude that *Pesantren* leaders in the perspective of the participants must provide supportive and shared leadership structures for teachers in order to create positive cultures and effective a professional learning community for the development of the *Pesantren*. Leaders of the *Pesantren* must directly cooperate with teaching staff to provide policies and procedures for teachers in the leadership structure to directly impact school improvement through professional learning community collaborative attempts. This study was conducted based on the school culture and professional learning communities literature by exploring existent policies and practices in schools as unique cases. This study is significant to the community as specific cases informing educational leaders especially in Islamic education on mechanisms that may be leveraged to ensure successful implementation of policies and procedures on the leadership and school culture of a professional learning community literature.

Keywords: leadership, school culture, professional learning community, *Pesantren.*

Abstrak

Tujuan makalah ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi struktur kepemimpinan yang suportif dan berbagi di satu Pesantren Indonesia sebagai fungsi kebijakan dan prosedur budaya sekolah. Studi kualitatif dilakukan di satu Pesantren yang berada di Jambi, sebuah provinsi di Indonesia di bagian barat pulau Sumatera. Kami mewawancarai 3 administrator dan 5 guru untuk mendapatkan informasi mendalam tentang tujuan makalah ini. Transkripsi wawancara diterjemahkan, dikodekan, dibagi menjadi beberapa tema, dan diuraikan dalam temuan makalah ini. Temuan penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa para pemimpin Pesantren dalam

perspektif para peserta harus memberikan struktur kepemimpinan yang suportif dan bersama kepada guru agar tercipta budaya positif dan efektif menjadi komunitas pembelajaran profesional bagi perkembangan Pesantren. Pimpinan Pesantren harus langsung bekerja sama dengan staf pengajar untuk memberikan kebijakan dan prosedur bagi guru dalam struktur kepemimpinan untuk secara langsung memberi dampak pada perbaikan sekolah melalui upaya kolaborasi komunitas pembelajaran profesional. Penelitian ini dilakukan berdasarkan budaya sekolah dan literatur pembelajaran profesional masyarakat dengan mengeksplorasi kebijakan dan praktik yang ada di sekolah sebagai kasus yang unik. Studi ini penting bagi masyarakat sebagai kasus spesifik yang menginformasikan pemimpin pendidikan terutama dalam pendidikan Islam tentang mekanisme yang dapat dimanfaatkan untuk memastikan keberhasilan penerapan kebijakan dan prosedur kepemimpinan dan budaya sekolah dari literatur masyarakat belajar profesional.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan, budaya sekolah, komunitas belajar professional, Pesantren

Introduction

Over the last 30 years, school reform attempts have been focusing on teacher networks, school culture and school improvement (Hofman and Dijsktra, 2010). The study of the success of teachers' network of collaboration has been significant to the set system of the school community, the school culture, and a shared focus on achievement (Hofman and Dijsktra, 2010). School cultures are widely complex network of traditions, ceremonies, and rituals that have been established over time as teachers, students, parents and administrators involve on attempts to provide a culture of collaboration focussed on the achievement of the students (Giles and Hargreaves, 2006). School culture is shaped by the values, shared beliefs, and behavior of the stakeholders, teachers, leaders, students, parents, administrator, and authorities in the school's community (Groseschl and Doherty, 2000). Factors influencing school culture are among others policies, procedures of teaching, learning expectation, and student achievement (Giles and Hargreaves, 2006).

Hofman and Dijskrta, (2010) informed that the improvement of the school and the student achievement have been in positive ways linked to teacher professional learning communities (Hofman and Dijsktra, 2010). Many studies have presented some essential elements and important features of school culture policies, procedures, and professional learning communities: shared purpose and values, shared leadership, a collaborative culture, collective inquiry, sustainable improvement focus (Brendefur et al., 2014; Deal and Peterson, 2009; DuFour et al., 2008). A supportive school culture would create an appropriate focus on each of these characteristics (Deal and Peterson, 2009). DuFour et al. (2008) defined a professional learning community as educators committed to working collaboratively in an ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. The characteristics of econtributive professional learning communities are among others supportive and shared leadership, shared purpose and values, collaborative cultures, and collective inquiry (Feger & Arruda, 2008).

DuFour et al. (2008) mentioned that shared purpose is defined as a collective and mutual agreement on how educators work to develop schools. A shared understanding of mission and vision brings indicators and targets focussed on the learning. Vision creates clear direction, whereas the mission creates the statement for the ways teaching and learning process. The shared comprehension of common value is put on the learning community focusing on the increasing of student achievement is pivotal to a contributive school culture (DuFour et al., 2008). Meanwhile, values are the intrinsic qualities, what it considers good

and provides a foundation for why the purpose is significant (Deal and Peterson, 2009). In education, values introduce beliefs of teachers and administrator on student's ability in learning, student's ability in achieving high levels, a collaborative and collective shared practice, and reflective practice and its impact on the need for instruction innovations and adaptions.

Carpenter (2015, p.4) informed, "Collaborative culture is the way teachers and administrators think and behave about sharing information about their practice. A collaboration culture is the systematic process teachers and administrators use to work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact their professional practice in order to improve student achievement". The collaborative culture should be communicative; to create a good collaboration among stakeholders; teachers, administrators, students, parents, school leaders and authorities.

Problems in schools today largely center on the management of the classroom and school to improve student achievement. The process to increase students achievement does not only rely on teachers performance in the classroom but also other factors; school facilities, parents, school management, and school environment (Mukminin et al., 2017, Sofwan & Habibi, 2016). To solve the problems, collective attempts are needed. "Collaborative collective inquiry of teaching and learning must ensure an increase in student achievement. Teachers must challenge how teaching and learning has taken place based on student achievement and use that information to shape collective teaching methods" (Carpenter, 2015, p.4)

Leaders in educational institutions give the culture of shared purpose and values as they relate to the collaborative culture, collective inquiry and continuous improvement needed for a good school culture. the concept of shared leadership in the context of shared purpose and values development is important to school culture and effective professional learning communities (Feger and Arruda, 2008). Hord (1997) stated institution leaders are similar to learners in the culture who provide shared leadership, power, and authority by providing staff opportunities for access in the purpose and values of the culture. Supportive leadership should be the main priority of characters of the culture and learning community.

Chapman and Harris (2004) stated that institutional leaders should provide the development of the school, which potentially improve teacher's professionalism and should build professional learning community group. The group aimed at motivating sustainable improvement cycle including students' achievement. Some important modeling factors for school administrators to give teachers' real responsibilities to guide the improvement of the school are honesty, openess, and trust (DuFour et al., 2008). This sense of shared leadership needs a decent school administrators in providing sustainable professional development on effective the learning community practice (Chapman and Harris, 2004; DuFour et al., 2008). The practice and methodology are advice to focus more on teacher action research, reflective practice and self-evaluation (Hofman and Dijkstra, 2010).

One of many educational institutions across the world is *Pesantren*. *Pesantren* as a form of educational system has been significantly contributing to education especially in Indonesian educational system. *Pesantren* is an Islamic based-school combining two curriculums, national and Islamic (Sofwan & Habibi, 2016). As the oldest Indonesian education schools, *Pesantren* have historically been a place of practice in terms of Leadership, School culture, and Professional learning community (Sofwan & Habibi, 2016). The research question guiding this study was how much was supportive and shared leadership structures provided at one Indonesian *Pesantren in* one learning community?

Method

The investigation of the research was to explore supportive and shared leadership structures at a *Pesantren* as a function of school culture policies and procedures. At the *Pesantren*, shared and supportive leadership was a component of the implementation of professional learning community practice involved in this research study. The primary objective of this study was to investigate the current *Pesantren* culture and professional learning community practice and present characteristics of shared and supportive leadership found in the investigation.

One *Pesantren* in one professional learning community in Indonesia was selected in this study. This *Pesantren* is located in one of the Indonesian provinces in Sumatra Island. The *Pesantren* has more than 500 students with 30 teachers and 6 administrators. We used a purposive sampling by specifying the characteristics of participants and then locate individuals who have the characteristics (Creswell, 2011). Theories say that for qualitative research, the number of participants is not definite; they can be one or more (Creswell, 2011). Therefore, we interviewed three administrators and five teachers to get in-depth information about the purpose of this paper. Table 1 show the participants 'distribution

Table 1. The participants 'distribution

No	Anonymous	Age	Roles	Work Experience in education
1	Abdul	55	Adm	31 years
2	Siti	51	Teacher	30 years
3	Mila	45	Teacher	18 years
4	Jaka	43	Adm.	19 years
5	Defa	38	Adm.	20 years
6	Fitri	37	Teacher	15 years
7	Lina	31	Teacher	7 years
8	Bujang	23	Teacher	4 years

The interview transcriptions from the participants were translated, coded, divided into themes, and elaborated in the findings of the paper (Prasojo et al., 2017; Mukminin et al., 2017; Habibi, et al., 2017; Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2011). Each participant was interviewed and provided information on the structure, leadership, and implementation of professional learning communities at the *Pesantren*. Some empirical studies have linked teacher interaction in professional communities with a focus on student achievement (Hofman and Dijkstra, 2010; Little, 2002; Schechter, 2008; Carpenter, 2015) and those studies have produced a framework for effective professional learning community structure. The studies have presented the overlap between a contributive school culture and common characteristics for effective professional learning. To this end, shared purpose and values, a collaborative culture, problem solving and collective inquiry, and a focus on continuous improvement are all components of a positive school culture, school improvement and an effective professional learning community (Hofman and Dijkstra, 2010; Little, 2002; Schechter, 2008; Carpenter, 2015).

In establishing the trustworthiness of the study or to verify the accuracy of the data, findings, and interpretations, we took several measures in insuring the trustworthiness of the data collected (Creswell, 2011). We applied triangulation, member checking, and reflexivity to strengthen the trustworthiness in this study. Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives (Patton, 2002). In qualitative research, Creswell (2011) stated that researchers have to explicitly identify their biases, values, and personal interest about their

research topic, process, and access to the research participants. The problem with qualitative research is that the researchers find what they want to find, and then they write up their result. One potential threat to validity that researchers must be careful to watch out for is called researcher bias. Through reflexivity, researcher becomes more self-aware to control her biases (Prasojo et al., 2017; Mukminin & Mc Mahon, 2013).

In this research, names of the participants were hidden to keep the participants' confidentiality and makes them feel well- being as a participant. In the research principle ethics, respect for persons requires a commitment to ensuring the autonomy of research participants where autonomy may be diminished and to protect people from exploitation of their vulnerability. The dignity of all research participants must be appreciated. Adherence to this principle ensures that people will not be used simply as a means to achieve research objectives (Prasojo et al., 2017; Mukminin & Mc Mahon, 2013; Habibi et al., 2017)

Findings and Discussion

The *Pesantren* had more than 500 students when we conducted the research with three school levels; elementary level (*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*), junior high school level (*Madrasah Tsanawiyah*), and senior high school level (*Madrasah Aliyah*). The *Pesantren* has been established from 2004 by local community with only sixty students. It has thirty teachers and six administrators with three principals and one foundation president. The school is located in the city of Jambi. The *Pesantren* was considered as a popular school within the community with a good academic tradition considered by several participants in the interview session. The school has fifteen classrooms and some supporting facilities; sport fields, bathrooms, teacher offices, meeting room, praying building or mosque, administration offices, canteen, and school principal offices.

Purpose and value

The administrators and teachers got mutual understanding that the purpose of professional learning communities was to give a platform to develop student achievement. Teachers stated in the interview session that the aim of the learning community was to give space and time for all teacher members to have reflection on the practice of the teaching and learning process. The administrators set a great value on the meeting time in order to obtain high quality teaching and to improve students learning achievement. One of the administrators said,

> We set the meeting monthly in this *Pesantren* to achieve the goal of this institution, students' achievement, and quality teaching. Abdul

Teachers in the meeting discussed of the previous data of their students achievement. However, they did not really put the data for the priority of the discussion. The important part was to improve students' achievement in the future.

> We discuss the data of the students' achievement in the past but it is not as important as the future achievement. Mila

The administrator revealed that they appreciate the community to help get data about the students' achievement in order to promote them into a top spot place in order to motivate other student to achieve more achievement.

Collaboration

The collaboration at the *Pesantren* were said to be well-implemented. Administrators stated that the teachers have worked together for a long time and it would be a good experience for them to achieve the purpose of the community in the *Pesantren* (Allison et al., 2010; DuFour et al., 2008). They mentioned of their confidence in collaborating with other peers to share their experience and ideas in teaching and learning process. They also mentioned of their obligation as teachers. One of the teachers had his thought,

> I am confident with the community in our district. Regular meeting in a learning community with the administrators is good to share our ideas and experience and to give refreshed mind on our mind of our obligation in the school. Bujang

Teachers and administrators said that in the *Pesantren*, they did not accept any training in collaboration in the community. However, the collaborative culture appeared in the community due to frequent interaction among the participants. Almost all of the teachers expressed that the community did not provide any chance and guidance on collaboration.

> I think it is important for us to be given a kind of guidance or chance to work together in the community to improve our ability to achieve the purpose of the community. Siti

Problem solving

The training in the community was held to give teachers tool for collective inquiry. Teachers at the *Pesantren* were provided inquiry with the training skills of problem solving. However, the teachers said that the administrators did not structurally set the program.Follow up training was also provided. The administrators provided no guidance on the inquiry process and had no consistent expectations for teachers. Teachers expressed frustration with the process

> I think what the administrators explained to us on the problem solving is consistent. They might be forgetting to what they have stated in the community meeting. Lina

A consistent paradigm at the *Pesantren* persisted in that teachers were not provided consistency in training and follow up on how to have skills of problem solving use student data to drive instructional collective inquiry. The administrators in the discussion confirmed their concern set the plan to solve the problems,

> We concern on that matter and have many plans to solve the problems. We will discuss more with all stakeholders on this matter. Therefore, the teachers could be more improved. Defa

Sustainable improvement

The sustainable improvement cycle required a shared purpose, shared values, an active collaborative culture, and a well-trained collective inquiry process (Allison et al.,

2010; DuFour et al., 2008). The sustainable improvement cycle of teaching and learning needs teachers and administrators to systematically get involve in an ongoing systematic cycle of gathering data of students' performance levels, having reflection on past teaching and learning, establishing strategies and innovative and contributive practice to have ensured all students have achieved, implemented the innovating steps, analyzed the impact of the innovations, and implemented the new knowledge obtained from the cycle to the next cycle of sustainable improvement. (DuFour et al., 2008).

The *Pesantren* had a well-defined sustainable improvement process. The participants worked together to develop the sustainable improvement process through training and follow up work with teachers in the communities. They did the jobs together to provide follow up for teachers working in the communities to ensure common beliefs and values concerning teaching and learning development. The shared and supportive leadership structure facilitated a culture of high expectations for the process of development. The *Pesantren* did not provide a well-defined sustainable development process. Administrators facilitated a top down management structure, having teachers fill out forms to ensure their accountability for work in the communities. Teachers and administrators did not corporate to provide next steps for teachers working in professional learning communities. The lack of shared and supportive leadership for the process of development resulted an appropriately hostile environment where teacher isolation persisted and there were no expectations for sustainable improvement.

The *Pesantren* did not apply and implement student data to shape and form instruction. A training review and follow up steps revealed a lack of data training provided to teachers and this created in lack of data literacy. The *Pesantren* had utilized the training and follow up steps of opportunities with teachers and administrators to increase data literacy so that teachers were utilizing data for instructional decision involvement, but data literacy was still a brand new concept and knowledge for them. At the *Pesantren*, there were no expectations for the utilizing of data. This process was recommended to reflect the requirement for teachers' accountability in the sustainable process of development. However, they were not provided with training and seminars on data and how to use it to shape their instruction in the collective process of inquiry, little less provided the chance to get involved in the practice of reflection in the cycle of sustainable development. The lack of leadership on the condition resulted in a culture of disbelief in the *Pesantren* that reflected the biggest distance for a true development.

Shared leadership

The school leader is also a learner that should present professional development meetings, is friendly and facilitative in sharing leadership, power, and authority through giving staff decision making access (Hord, 1997). The *Pesantren* leader can share responsibility for improvement of the institutions with teachers by providing a systematic structure where collaboration is well-determined. Framed collaboration functioned as an exercise in construction of shared meaningful ideas and notes that research on conversational analysis has been identifying features of interactions providing participants to reach the construction through the supervision, monitoring, and repairing of the knowledge. The *Pesantren* had a shared leadership structure. The school leaders enrolled and entrusted a group of teachers to attend the study in the process of professional learning community process and help the staff learn this process through job training and meetings.

Conclusions

Shared leadership is a pivotal part of of effective professional learning in collaborative groups such as professional learning communities and trainings. Shared leadership facilitate the venue for sustainable improvement. Ensuring each member of the group collaborator focusses on common outcomes of the sustainable improvement cycle requires commonality in what and how the group functions in general. Through defined purpose and values the collaborative group may overcome the problems associated with the effectiveness of instruction and further help with the growth of the students and the improvement of the school at achieving the goals of the institution.

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