

How Principals of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri Dealt with Obstacles

Amalia Hasanah¹, Ummi Kultsum²

¹UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, Palembang, Sumatera Selatan, Indonesia

²University of Canberra, Australia

Corresponding author: Amalia Hasanah (amaliahasanah_uin@radenfatah.ac.id)

Abstract: *This study was intended to find out how principals of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) in remote regions in South Sumatra dealt with obstacles of shortage of permanent teachers and lack of infrastructure. This study was a qualitative interpretivist study. Semi-structure interviews and observations were implemented to collect the data. Four MIN principals in remote regions in two districts in South Sumatra were interviewed. The results showed that to overcome the shortage of permanent teachers, the principals took the non-permanent teachers to be in charge as homeroom teachers and placed teachers available to teach subjects that were not suitable with their education background. To overcome the lack of infrastructure, the principals used available rooms in the school for other purposes needed, used the classes in turn, and limited the number of students enrolled in the school.*

Keywords: Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri, obstacles, infrastructure, principals.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, having a total of 12.70 per cent of all Muslims or about 229 million people (World Population Review, 2020). Therefore, Islamic-based schools are significant educational institutes for Muslim society. The madrasahs in Indonesia provide a formal education, similar to that in regular schools (Basri, 2017). However, unlike regular schools under the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), the madrasahs are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) (Hadi, 2017). A madrasah puts 30% of religious subjects such as *Akidah akhlaq*, *hadits* and *fiqih* on their curriculum (Hadi, 2017). Furthermore, the madrasah in Indonesia is divided into three levels: *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (primary school) for six years, *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (lower secondary school) for three years, and *Madrasah Aliyah* (upper secondary school) for three years (Maksum, 1999). All madrasah students also sit for the national examinations based on the national curriculum as they study the same subjects as students from regular schools. Additionally, they have to meet the same requirements as those in regular schools when it

comes to passing national examinations at all levels of study (Basuni, 2013). However, if they were compared to regular schools, they were left behind in the general sciences (Hadi, 2017).

It can be concluded that madrasah students received more religious subjects compared to regular school students. The same thing also goes for the general sciences where Madrasah students did not receive as much as the regular school students. Due to these reasons, madrasah students were taken for granted by some people who undervalued them because of what they learned. Therefore, madrasah students should strengthen their position by mastering specific skills dominated by regular school students. This means that madrasah students should learn double or even triple times harder. Complicating the situation was that 80 per cent of private madrasah were independent of government control and devoted most of their time to teaching Islamic subjects (Subhan, 2010). These private madrasahs suffered, in particular, from shortage of funding, from employing low quality teachers, and from having to operate with inadequate facilities (Asadullah & Maliki, 2018; Subhan, 2010).

Despite the ratio between teacher and students in the year 2014/2015 1:12 for *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, 1:11 for *Madrasah Tsanawiyah*, and 1:8 for *Madrasah Aliyah* (Kementerian Agama, 2016), the problem of shortage of permanent teachers was discovered especially in remote districts, border districts, and outlying areas (Ministry of National Education, 2011). This condition contrasted with the surplus of teachers of madrasah in big cities. Other problem faced by madrasah was poor infrastructure. By 2009, many public primary school buildings and *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN)* buildings, that had been built on a massive scale through the years of *INPRES* Program in the 1970s and the Six Year Compulsory Education Program of the 1980s, were damaged (Handayani, 2009). The poor availability of maintenance and repair budget was adding to the adverse situation. At the end of 2006, for example, it was recorded that out of 889,427 public and *MIN* classrooms, 226,721 (25.6 per cent) were seriously damaged (Handayani, 2009).

Shortage of permanent teachers and lack infrastructure in *MIN* became the main foci in this study. These, in fact, influence on the efficiency of teaching and learning process. Principals, as the top leaders in the madrasahs, are the ones responsible for the management of the education process. They should be able to think systematically in managing the madrasahs. To be able to do that, madrasah principals need some ideas and insight to overcome the problems they face. These include how they deal with problems of shortage of teachers and lack of infrastructure. Therefore, this study was intended to find out how principals in remote districts in South Sumatra dealt with shortage of permanent teachers and lack of infrastructure.

1.1 Madrasah principal leadership

In 2010, Nohria and Khurana (2010) pointed out that research on leadership, while having a 50-year history, still had a long way to go to provide satisfactory answers to various questions. This is also true in the field of educational leadership. Back in 1999, Campbell (1999) mentioned that there was a shift from discussing and investigating educational management to discussing and investigating educational leadership because the ‘managerialism’ in education was being critiqued by people like Ball (1993) and Kydd (1997) on the grounds that it was not appropriate for education organizations. Much has happened in the field since then, yet there is still much to be done.

Various researchers around the world agree that the principal is the main factor in successfully implementing change and innovation in schools (Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008; Fullan, 2007). Principals must be prepared to face the challenges and changes of the new vision in order to bring success to the organization. The role of principals as instructional leaders, especially in promoting the learning environment, is promoted. In this regard, it is important that the principals realize their roles as instructional leaders in order to promote a learning environment that may bring improvement in the organization (Abdullah & Kassim, 2012). In being contextually bound, school leaders need to take various appropriate leadership actions. These actions should take account of the interplay with contexts (Gillet, Clarke, & O’Donoghue, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2008; Ylimaki et al., 2012; Ylimaki et al., 2008). Also, they might not reflect such standard leadership models as transformational and instructional leadership. For example, back in 2008, in order to successfully lead school change, the principal of a primary school in the United Kingdom implemented new policies mandated by government only when they were relevant to what the school was doing, in part or as a whole. If they were not, the principal set them aside. This resulted in staff developing a more positive view and positive participation in school reform (Penlington et al., 2008).

Relatively little, however, has been written on the role and impact of education leaders within education systems in developing countries (Rizvi, 2010; Simkins et al., 2003). Especially in the context within which school leaders work in extraordinarily challenging circumstances (Kheang, O’Donoghue, & Clarke, 2018). One of the reasons for this is because much of the effort for educational improvement in such countries has been focused on top-down, system-wide change rather than change at the level of the individual school (Simkins, et al., 2003). Also, there is often a presumption that within the highly bureaucratized education systems of many developing countries the role of principals, not to mention that of others with managerial roles in schools, is relatively insignificant (Simkins, et al., 2003).

Almost all recent research describes educational leadership theory based on a non-Muslim view (Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2018). Little has been written about educational leadership theory from an Islamic point of view (Shah, 2016; Oplatka & Arar, 2016). In Islam tradition, Islamic leaders served as models of leadership for they were taken to be responsible for social and religious life (AlSarhi et al., 2014). In Islamic leadership, leaders follow a vision of creating a society that is just, welfare-oriented, egalitarian, and free from discrimination, exploitation, and oppression (Mir, 2010). Therefore, in madrasah, the role of transformational leader is needed.

People now are paying attention on whether madrasah principal possesses appropriate management skills, leadership styles, and approaches needed to ensure effective operational action of the madrasah. The madrasah principal role as the transformational leader is now being noticed. Burns (1978) conceptualized transformational leadership as being “when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality”, which, in turn, enables the organization and its members to focus on a common purpose (p. 20). The later work of Bass (1995) agreed with this conception by characterizing transformational leadership as motivating others to go beyond original expectations and raising others’ awareness levels in order to shift the focus from the promotion of self-interests to the promotion of organizational interests (p. 469).

Subsequently, scholars within the field of educational leadership incorporated Burns (1978) and Bass’s (1995) viewpoints into a conception of transformational leadership by recognizing the ability of any person within the organization to enact leadership. Thus, the theory assumes that any organizational member who develops the school’s capacity by identifying common interests, building a collective vision, and creating a sense of shared responsibility and a collective school culture, can be perceived as being a transformational leader (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Duke, 1998).

Transformational leadership has continued to reinforce the idea of influence by categorizing organizational members as either ‘leaders’ or ‘followers’ (Bush & Glover, 2003) and has tended to equate leadership with such formal positions as that of the principal (Leithwood & Duke, 1998). In spite of these limitations, it is acknowledged that theories of transformational leadership signify an important shift within the field of educational leadership as it began to associate the notion with those who were not in formal positions (Bush & Glover, 2003; Leithwood & Duke, 1998). Consequently, its importance to the field has continued to the present day.

One of the weakest aspects of madrasa performance, however, is in the area of management. They have many senior teachers who have competencies in teaching but do not have management capability (Suparman, 2012). The problem is that, as the paramount leader in madrasa, the principal, should be able to decide, implement, share responsibilities for, and supervise the program he or she proposes, so that it can run well.

1.2 Parents' involvement in supporting the madrasah

Parents as a part of the madrasah are also taken responsible in supporting the operational of the madrasah. Parents are asked to support the madrasah by supplying some funds needed for making the teaching and learning process run smoothly. Parents' involvement in supporting the madrasah can be implemented in the form of membership of madrasah committees and by means of such activities as the construction and physical maintenance of schools. It can also be through encouraging students to learn, identifying dropout students and motivating them to go back to school. Further, it can be through building communities amongst parents to provide support for the improvement of teaching and learning (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2013).

Madrasahs are also allowed to accept small fees from parents as long as there is full agreement by the members of madrasah committee that this is appropriate and as long as the money is managed by the committee. This is in accord with the following Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 66 of 2016 article 62B:

- (1) Madrasah financing managed by the Madrasah Committee as referred to in Article 62A is used to:
 - a. fulfilment of the lack of education costs obtained from the government;
 - b. funding for education quality improvement activities that cannot be budgeted by the government;
 - c. financing of quality improvement activities carried out by educators and education personnel carried out outside working hours and / or which do not include workloads;
 - d. payment of honorarium for educators and non-civil servant education staff which is not financed by the State budget;
 - e. financing the procurement of education unit facilities and infrastructure that are not financed or meet the shortfall in costs originating from the State revenue and expenditure budget;
 - f. financing the personal costs of living needs of students in the dormitory for education units that run the dormitory system;
 - g. granting scholarship to students; and
 - h. financing certain activities that can support increased access, quality, and competitiveness of education units and students (Menteri Agama, 2016, p. 5)

At the same time, 'Article 62B section 2' states that the fund should be restricted to providing for students and parents who are experiencing financial hardship. Furthermore, it is to be restricted largely to finance student admission, assessment of their learning outcomes, and graduation requirements. It is also restricted in its use for the welfare support of committee members or institutions representing madrasah stakeholders, both directly and indirectly (Menteri Agama, 2016).

However, due to the low socio economic problems faced by the parents, sometimes madrasah can not really rely on the fee collected from the parents. This condition happens in remote and border areas. Therefore, the principal of the madrasah should be able to think out of the box to solve the problems they face.

II. METHOD

The interpretivist paradigm was chosen for this study because interpretivism seeks to reveal the meanings that people bring to their situations and actions, and which they use to understand their world (O'Donoghue, 2018). The meanings are created through social interactions. Accordingly, they have to be understood and interpreted within the context of the social practices in which they are embedded. Understanding these meanings can lead to an understanding of the social phenomena in question (O'Donoghue, 2018).

Methods of data collection and analysis used by those who espouse grounded theory approaches to research and which are consistent with interpretivism (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hennink, Htter, & Bailey, 2011) were employed. The essence of a grounded theory analysis is to generate conceptually abstract categories grounded in data through a process of abstraction in which concepts are inductively inferred and designated to stand for categories induced from the raw data (Punch, 2014). The outcome of this approach is often a set of propositions showing connections between concepts which are more abstract than those in the data themselves (Punch, 2014).

In line with the grounded theory approach, data gathering and analysis were undertaken simultaneously (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The researcher went back and forth between the participants, gathered new data, and then returned to the evolving theory to fill in gaps and to elaborate on certain matters (Cresswell, 2013). In doing this, the researcher was able to choose new participants based on the emerging concepts and validate the concepts developed (Merriam, 2009). On this matter, series of semi-structured interviews were conducted to *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN)* principals.

Interviews were supplemented by a process of unstructured and non-participant observation. In non-participant observation, the researcher studies participants, or settings, from the 'outside' (Cresswell, 2013), while in unstructured observation, the researcher does not use prespecified categories and explores the setting or participants' perspectives and actions in a natural open-ended way (Punch, 2014). Unstructured non-participant observation was employed only as a means to check, or confirm, interview data, and to encourage further data gathering questions.

Four principals of *MIN* in remote regions in two districts in South Sumatra were selected as the participants of this study. To be able to gain more insights on the problems discussed, some teachers were also interviewed. The identification of participants interviewed was guided by judgments made related to their potential to generate further insights about how they dealt with the problems of shortage of teachers and lack of infrastructure. The Madrasahs are located far from Muara Enim and Lahat districts capital cities. The madrasahs in Muara Enim district are 143 km and 117 km away, meanwhile the madrasahs in Lahat are 85.6 km and 59.7 km away from the district offices of Ministry of Religious Affairs located. This research was conducted on the academic year of 2018/2019.

Grounded theory methods of open coding, were used to logically and systematically analyse the total body of transcribed interviews. The purpose of this analysis was to understand how the madrasah principals in the challenging circumstances, geographically and demographically overcame the problems of shortage of teachers and lack of infrastructure. General ideas, concepts, themes and categories were generated. These were then used as the basis for generating propositions.

III. RESULTS

3.1 How the principals of *MIN* dealt with shortage of permanent teachers

At *MIN* A, the present authors found out that it had 14 full time teachers and nine non-part time teachers. Further, it had 12 classes, with two classes for each year group. The total number of students enrolled was 268. According to the principal, the Madrasah had a shortage of teachers who taught Arabic subject. "We barely have enough teachers to teach the subject", he said. The only solution he could find, he claimed, and one which displeased him, was to get some of the other teachers who taught other Islamic subject to teach them despite their shortage of appropriate qualification.

In *MIN B*, there were five permanent teachers and 15 non-permanent teachers. This Madrasah lacked the required number of homeroom teachers, PE teachers, art teachers, and Arabic teachers.. The principal stated: “This Madrasah needs a lot more permanent teachers. We only have five so far. This is not enough to cover all the teachers’ tasks. In total, we only have 20 of them.” As with the principal at *MIN A*, she said that “the non-permanent teachers are assigned as homeroom teachers and PE and art subjects are assigned to the homeroom teachers. It means that homeroom teachers now spend more hours teaching than they are supposed to.”

Shortage of teachers was also became a challenge in *MIN C* in Lahat district. This madrasah had 335 students with seven permanent and 20 non-permanent teachers.. The Madrasah was particularly lacking in homeroom teachers, PE teachers, Arabic teachers, and art teachers. The art teacher was a non-permanent teacher, while PE was managed by homeroom teachers and Arabic was taught by teachers of other Islamic subjects. Commenting on the situation overall, the principal stated:

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

MIN D in Lahat district also had the problem of a shortage of permanent teachers. It was short of two homeroom teachers, two for *aqidah akhlak*, and two for Arabic. Moreover, one of its teachers of Arabic was almost 70 years old and was still a non-permanent staff member. The principal mentioned: “It is very hard for us to find dedicated non-permanent teachers who are usually underpaid to teach in a Madrasah.” “To cover the task of homeroom teachers, non-permanent teachers were assigned and to cover the task of teachers of *aqidah akhlak* and Arabic, teachers of other Islamic subjects were asked to teach those subjects” the principal added.

3.2 How the principals of *MIN* dealt with lack of school infrastructure

Regarding lack of infrastructure, principal at *MIN A* indicated that they needed a prayer room. They pointed out that they never had such room. He explained: “We will use the prayer room for students and teachers who needed to do their prayers. We will also use the room for students who would like to exercise their *tahfidz* (memorising verses of Quran). When the interview was conducted, the principal mentioned that the teacher used the teachers’ room to pray and used each classroom to conduct the *tahfidz*. The principal informed that they had one unfinished classroom with no tiles on the floor and no ceiling. This was quite inconvenient for

teaching and learning process since the room was quite dusty. Whenever it rained the sound of the rain could be heard clearly because of the lack of a ceiling. A teacher complained: “It really bothers us. We cannot concentrate when we are in the class. Whenever I teach, I can see how uncomfortable the students are because of the condition. We really need to be given the finances to finish the classroom.”

The same issue also faced by *MIN B*. The principal mentioned that the school needed a prayer room and a library. They only used one room to cover students activities. The principal stated: “We need more rooms. Currently, we have only one room for two functions, that is as a prayer room and a library. I know it feels uncomfortable for students to conduct all of their activities in that room, but we have no choice.” He also stressed that the classrooms were not in good condition and needed renovation immediately. Moreover, she was also worried that the classrooms were not big enough to accommodate current numbers of students. For example, one classroom was only fit for 20 students yet it had to accommodate 29. Therefore, in order to maintain learning efficiency in the classroom, *MIN B* as the only elementary school in the village should do an entrance test to limit the student number. The principal stated: “Because our school is the only primary school in the village, we have to conduct an entrance test, due to the limited classrooms that we have. It tests reading ability, health condition check-up, and age.” Each year, also, the madrasah has to reject some of student applications because they do not pass in one or some of these areas. Parents then have to be told to teach their children at home or put them in early childhood education for one more year before applying again for a place the following year.

The principal also said that they needed more solid gates to protect the school area. During the visit, the researchers found that the front gates of the school were only made of wood and that the back gates were not high. “We need to get a budget from the government to start rebuilding the gates,” the principal said. “As you can see, our gates are made of wood and therefore it is easier for unwanted people to pass through them than if they were made of more sustainable material,” she added.

A lack number of classrooms was also experienced by *MIN C*. It had three classrooms that teachers were unable to use because they were still under construction. The principal said:

Because we cannot use three classrooms, the first and second year students should use the classes in turn. Year 1 would study in the morning until before 10 a.m. After that, the classes could be used by the year 2 students. However, the year 2 students sometimes arrive at school at around 8 a.m. Then, they would gather and chat in front of the year 1 classes. This condition is really not ideal for the students and the teachers, because the noise made by year 2 students would bother the year 1 students studying.

The principal also said that they needed a bigger school field for flag ceremonies and for PE. Currently, most students used the village's soccer field for the lesson. Further, the principal said that a prayer room was also required as they had to use the library for prayers and that made the students uncomfortable as some, at this time, read books instead.

A lack of a prayer room was also found at *MIN D* in Lahat district. The study found that most students prayed in classrooms. It was argued that the prayer room was required for their extracurricular activities that were conducted after school time, from 12.30 pm to 2 pm the exact time for student to perform mid-day prayer. The principal stated: "We really need a prayer room so that all of the students and teachers can pray together. At the moment, when prayer time comes, the students have to rearrange their seats to make space in their classroom for it."

The principal also said that they needed a library. During the visits, the researchers could see that the most of school's books were stored in the teachers' room. This really concerned the principal as the room was a mess. "As you can see," he said, "the space in this room is already limited. With the books here that should be in the library it makes the room crowded." The school, the principal said, also needs bigger classrooms as those available are not the best for conducting teaching and learning. There is one small classroom that was designed to hold a maximum number of 28 students. However, the researchers found 33 students in a classroom instead. This condition was uncomfortable for teachers and students, especially in the dry season, when the temperature is high. A homeroom teacher stated: "The students sit uncomfortably near to each other. We do not have fans in the class. That makes the condition worse."

IV. DISCUSSION

From the results mentioned above, the principals of *MIN* in remote regions had no choice when it comes to the shortage of permanent teachers. They should find immediate solution to this problem. The direct solution that they could implement was by placing teachers who act as the homeroom teachers to teach art and PE subjects and positioning teachers who teach other Islamic subjects to be in charge in teaching the subjects that they had shortage of. Even though it was not ideal, this was the only solution to address the problem.

In dealing with the lack of school infrastructure, various solutions were implemented by the principals. The first thing they did was by using the room as it was which was implemented by all principals. They even used unfinished classroom for the teaching and

learning process like in *MIN A* or used the room even though it was overcrowded for the students which was implemented in *MIN B* and *D*.

The second thing was using the room for various functions. This was implemented by principal of *MIN A*, *B*, *C*, and *D*. Principal of *MIN B* and *C* used library for prayer room. In *MIN A* the classroom was used to conduct the *tahfidz* recital and teachers' room was used to become prayer room. In *MIN D*, each classroom was used as prayer room and teachers' room as library. The third solution was using the classes alternately for students in year 1 and 2. This was implemented by *MIN C*. The last solution was by limiting the number of students enrolled in the madrasah. This was applied by *MIN B*.

It looks like the problems of shortage of teachers and lack of infrastructure as suggested by Abdullah and Maliki (2008) and Subhan (2010) were not only experienced by private madrasahs. These problems were also experienced by public madrasahs, especially in remote regions as suggested by Ministry of National Education (2011). Considering how the principals of madrasah dealt with the problems, it could be seen that the solutions applied were only temporary. Those problems need more thorough solutions. As institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the number of permanent teachers employed by the madrasah is decided upon by the central government. While aimed at improving efficiency and effectiveness, madrasah in rural and remote areas continue to experience teacher shortages. Accordingly, there is a need to establish a coordination mechanism between the central government and district governments so that madrasahs in remote areas can recruit the number of permanent teachers they require. One way to overcome this problem would be by recruiting non-permanent teachers with suitable education backgrounds to become the permanent teachers and giving them special preparation.

The study reported has revealed that madrasah principals in challenging circumstances geographically and demographically face issues associated with inadequate education facilities and a poor school infrastructure. To some extent they can harness contributions from parents and the local community to deal with these issues. However, the community and parents' contribution are often limited because of their low socio economical condition. This is another problem that needs to be addressed as soon as possible if the quality of madrasah education is to be improved. One other thing that is worth investigating is if funds might be forthcoming for the CSR budget from some commercial companies around the districts.

In solving the problems, the madrasah principal as the top leader needs to perform transformational leadership as suggested by Hallinger (2003) and Leithwood and Duke (1998). They should be able to share responsibility with others. The principal must be able to lead,

direct, motivate and mobilize in order the teacher could do their job well despite the shortage of teachers and lack of infrastructure they face. This will help achieve predetermined goals. If the principals fail to do that, then what has been suggested by Suparman (2012) can be confirmed. The principals' knowledge about the managerial tasks would affect their ability to perform transformational leadership.

V. CONCLUSION

The results and discussion revealed that to overcome the problems of shortage of permanent teachers the principals of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN)* had no other choice but to place non-permanent teachers to be in charge as homeroom teachers and placed teachers available to teach subjects that were not suitable with their education background. To overcome the lack of infrastructure, the principals used the classroom as it was, used available rooms in the school for other purposes needed, used the classes in turn, and limited student enrolment. The present researchers recommend that those who are interested in investigating the madrasah in remote area could do the research in the management and curriculum implementation.

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