Influencing factors of female underrepresentation as school principals in Indonesia

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Abstract

Purpose – Number of women in the school principalship in Indonesia is less than half of the males'. This paper aims to indentify the factor behind the underrepresentation of women in the principalship.

Design/methodology/approach – The methodological approach utilised in this paper was a structured review of the literature. Twenty sources namely books, journals, newspaper articles, conference papers as well as websites constituted the structured review utilised in this paper. They were the contributing sources to the topic of female underrepresentation in Indonesian educational leadership position.

Findings – Stereotyping, culture and tradition, low level of women's education, perceived lack of confidence/self esteem, and lack of mentorship are the result of the review made on the literatures. Those factors impact the decisions and policies made in Indonesian educational scheme.

Practical implications – The findings highlight the necessity for encouraging more women to be in educational leadership positions by trying to address the influencing factors.

Originality/value – The major contribution of the paper is that it makes a strong claim about the specific influencing factors of female underrepresentation, thereby providing a clearer picture regarding the roots of the problems.

Keywords - Women, education, principals, gender, underrepresentation

Paper type - Literature review

Introduction

Education is not a male dominated world with many women educators in it. However the facts show that women are still under-represented in educational leadership. The unequal distribution of gender in education leadership position happens in most countries in the world and also in Indonesia. As a developing country with the male-dominated tradition widely influencing all aspects of the development, Indonesia experiences even worse situation. The data provided by the Indonesian Ministry of National Education in 2007 shows only around 35% of primary school principals are women and just like a pyramid, the number gets smaller when it comes to higher level: 14% for junior secondary and 12% at the senior secondary

levels (www.depdiknas.go.id). The reason behind this issue is varied. This paper has identified five influencing factors. It will argue that stereotyping; culture and tradition; low level of women's education; perceived lack of confidence/self esteems; and lack of mentorship (role models and peers) are the contributing factors of the underrepresentation of women in educational leaderships in Indonesia. This paper will also discuss the impact of those factors in the Indonesian education policies such as curriculum and the appointment of female teachers and principals.

Background issues

Indonesian women have been participating in education since the Dutch colonial era (19th Century) where some women from aristocratic families such as Kartini and Dewi Sartika opened schools for women. Since then the Indonesian women started to have access to education both as students and educators. Discussion on education in Indonesia cannot be separated from the National Constitution (*Undang-Undang Dasar*). It states that education is the right of all Indonesian citizens and it is aimed at creating intelligent nation. This means all Indonesians are entitled to education; regardless of ethnic group, religion, region, social status and gender; they have to receive education. But the reality is the gender gap in educational sector has become the main factor that affects other aspects of development (Suryadi and Idris, 2004).

The other factor that also contributes to the gender gap in education is the imbalance number of women who are in the decision making positions. This condition happens because of the cultural bureaucracy that place women at the peripheral position (Hara, 2004). It is clearly seen in the small number of women at the structural level starting from strategic up to the operational positions. The consequence of this at the school level is the fact that numbers of female principal are smaller compare to male principals. The numbers get smaller, the higher

education level gets. This is not just happened at the primary and secondary levels but also at tertiary education level and even at National Education Department level.

Data from Indonesian Ministry of National Education website show that women occupy bigger portion of the job in the education (like teachers and lecturers), while out of this number only few then go to leadership positions (See Table 1). Yet, Indonesia is not facing this alone; the issue is also faced by number of European countries where the under-representation of women in senior management is also considered as a major issue. As Hall as cited in Cubillo and Brown (2003) puts it:

> Analysts of education management acknowledge the disparity between women's numbers in the teaching profession and their representation at senior levels in European countries. We have all become sophisticated in interpreting and explaining these figures. We are less proactive in rigorously thinking through the consequences of this disparity for the educational and employment opportunities of girls and boys, men and women. (p 279)

Women are also underrepresented in school administration in United States. Although women perform as good or better as school administrators than men, they are less likely to be hires as school managers (Ouston, 1993)

Indonesia's neighbour country, Australia also encounters similar challenge even though the situation in Australia is a bit better than Indonesia with the number of female principals that almost balance with the number of male principals at the primary school level (McKenzie, Kos, Walker, and Hong, 2008). Still (2003) stated that it is obvious that women have not attained leadership positions in any significant numbers in Australia, despite 30 years of legislative, policy and social change. The general picture of the overall percentage of male and female both as teachers and principals in Indonesia and Australia are described below:

Level	Indonesia	Australia

	Teacher		Principal		Teacher		Principal	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
Primary	**39.71 %**	**60.29 %**	**65.30 %**	**34.70 %**	20%	79%	51%	49%
Secondary Junior Senior	**50.18 %** **55.21 %**	**49.82 %** **44.79 %**	**86.15 %** **88.86 %**	**13.85 %** **11.14 %**	43%	56%	68%	32%

Table 1. A comparison of female and male teachers & principals in Indonesian and Australia.

Indonesian women are left far behind men in the educational leadership position. Stereotyping; culture and tradition; low level of education; perceived lack of confidence/self esteem; and lack of role models and peers to support are identified factors that make numbers of women in educational leadership position are still below expectation. They engender women's opportunity to compete with men. Mulia (2008) argues that this disadvantage has happened since 30 years ago, therefore number of male leaders is significantly higher than women.

Influencing Factors

Stereotyping

Teaching has become a feminised profession in Indonesia; with higher number of female teachers compared to male teachers (see Table 1). In the leadership position there still appears to be the stereotypical assumption that women are weak and delicate, and women will not be able to survive the prolonged intellectual effort as leaders (Brubacher, as cited in Wilking, 2001). Spencer&Padmore as cited in Ouston (1993) states that women leaders are believed to be unstable, emotional and not decisive enough that makes women are unsuited to the demands of the leadership job. Women are considered weak compare to men, and are believed to have no capabilities to be good leaders.

> In the Indonesian traditional point of view, women are described as fragile and delicate figures while men are strong and brawny. This standpoint has positioned women as creatures that need to be protected and will always be depended on men. There are fewer women who became leaders; they are set aside by male domination (Rusliana, 2008).

The aspect of women's emotion also blamed to be the factor that contributes to the labelling. Easily feeling frustrated, lonely, guilty, and being disappointed are the fragile emotions that some women cannot cope with since leadership is a highly emotionally charged activity (Sach & Blackmore, 1998). A challenge for many women in leadership positions is their ability of managing their emotion because there is a double standard for women leaders resulting in the following presumptions:

> He is confident ....She is conceited
> He is enthusiastic...She is emotional
> He is not afraid to say what he thinks.................She is difficult to work for/with
> He follows through... She does not know when to quit
> He is firm...She is stubborn
> He is an authority..She is a tyrant
>
> (Pearsall as cited in Wilking, 2001, p 20)

A pro-male evaluation bias is obvious in Indonesian society, in which competent women are evaluated as less than competent and not possessing the necessary attributes to be in the leadership positions.

Culture and Tradition

One area that has been found to create large hurdle for Indonesian women in achieving the leadership position is their culture. In Indonesian tradition, men are positioned above women. The social construction caused women to believe that their jobs are just complementary to men's and their contribution to the family is not important.

> In the culture where marital status is more considered as religious faith to establish the next generation rather than as a shared economic benefit, a husband is accepted as the most important economic provider for the family (Yulaelawati, 1998).

This culture has impacted on women's spirit of competition with men. Many women will avoid competing with their male counterparts because they perceive that priority should be given to men since they are the ones providing more economic benefit for the family. In this social atmosphere, men have been given more privilege and superiority to have better access to a position.

Another obstacle for women in leadership positions is balancing professional and family responsibilities (Justus as cited in Wilking, 2001). Once a woman gets married (has a family), she is given a double burden which puts her in the dilemma to choose between career and family. The women should make choices of when to seek advanced positions based on when their lives more mirror that of their male counterparts; when their children were older or grown up and their husband's careers could accommodate the move. This valuing of the public (male) over the private (female) spheres meant the women have to embrace the male norm in order to secure career advancements (Eddy et al, 2008).

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As a result of the patriarchal norms that still dominate in Indonesian society, men have more opportunities than women in many aspects. People prefer to have baby boys than girls. The birth of a boy would be celebrated with a special traditional ceremony in some ethnic groups in Indonesia while it does not happened for a baby girl; only boys can pass down the tribal membership (Setiadarma, 1993). In some traditions in Indonesia, a man has to give *mahar* (money/jewellery) to a woman or her family as part of wedding ceremony. This is a symbol that since that very moment, the woman belongs to her husband (Andaya, 2007).

With a more than 90 % Moslem population, Islamic tradition also plays an important role in forming society's mindset. Unfortunately, in the traditional Islamic interpretation, women's participation on the activity outside the house is limited and women cannot be leaders.

> Such interpretation of the Koran generates a concept in which the husband is superior to his wife as well as sexual division of labour as an ideal family or community structure. Women occupy the supporting role, and are instructed to be passive and obedient. Women cannot participate outside the household without permission from their husband. Moreover, women are not allowed to be leaders. (Dewi, 2003)

In line with what happens in the house (family), women's subordination also happens in the organisational and socio-political life of women. With numbers of male principals double that of female principals, educational leadership is obviously a masculine hegemony. Acker and Fauger as cited in Cubillo and Brown (2003) stated that an education is "a patriarchal institution inevitably favouring men". Indonesian schooling institutions prefer to have male leaders because of their masculinity and authority. Men demonstrate a more autocratic style (Kabacoff as cited in Wilking 2001). Indonesian concept of professional commitment is not a pro-women concept because of the assumption that women will not be committed enough and they are not assertive. Setiadarma (1993) argues that many Indonesian female leaders are not able or difficult to prove due to their submissive attitudes. This makes it difficult for

women to assert themselves. Therefore not so many women have access to decision-making or leadership positions.

Low level of females' participation in education

The participation rate of girls at school has been proven to be lower than boys. 64 % of Indonesian women are still illiterate (Kompas, 2009). In Indonesian history, women are always the one who have difficulties in accessing education. In relation to formal and informal education, there are two gender conjectures that prevail in the society, especially those in the village/remote areas:

"Our girls do not need to get high education because at the end they will stay in the kithcen', and

"Why do we need to give our girls high education? They will not belong to us forever, one day they will have husband and leave us" (Bemmelen as cited in Sudarta, 2003).

In the community that follows patrilineal descent system like in most ethnic groups in Indonesian, those gender-imbalanced presumptions are significant. They put father's family before mother's. Furthermore, they prefer to prioritise their sons' education and girls'. Suryadi and Idris (2004) state that low level of girls' participation in education then lead to low level of women who have higher education. This issue is one of the key factors why women are underrepresented in all leadership positions including in education.

Perceived lack of confidence or self esteem

Confidence is the key factor for every woman in management. (McLoughlin as cited in Ouston, 1993, p 9)

Growing up in a patriarchal tradition that mainstreams in all aspects of life, it is not easy for Indonesian women to take up leadership positions. Indoctrination by society that females are weak and just a second sex to male develops lack of self confidence and self esteem. Cultural values that put male above female worsen the situation. Women are reluctant to compete with their male counterparts at leadership positions. The traditional assumptions that women are dependant and passive result in women unable to see themselves as potential figure because they have learned that power is not made for women (Ouston, 1993).

Women are also afraid of failure. That is one forms of burden in doing their leadership roles (Yulaelawati, 1998). They are expected to do it as well or better than their male counterparts. Females have twofold pressure to control their desire about their position because gender competition and personal ambition are less valued in the locally accepted standards and norms

Lack of mentorship

As the result of the gender gap in Indonesian educational leadership, the number of female school leaders (principals) is left far behind male principals (see Table 1). In the male dominated group (school principals), women are excluded from the informal relationship and network (Ouston, 1993). Moreover, Indonesian traditional values have put women's positions under men's which makes women's 'voices' are ignored by men (Suryadi and Idris, 2004). It seems that male administrators or male managers are generally more comfortable sharing knowledge with males than females, particularly in informal settings (Enrich, 1994).The male principals are reluctant to share knowledge and experience with their female counterparts. For some group of traditional men, women are labelled as temptation (Mulia, 2008) therefore men try to keep distance from women even in the professional environment. Social

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construction has placed women's professions as less valued than the male's one. Yulaelawati's extensive study of Indonesian educational leadership delineated that male leaders understand their privileges and mutually strengthen their responsibilities to support each other career development (1998). This does not happen to women because men are reluctant to share with them, moreover, there are only few women available to help.

Lack of role models is a driving factor why there are not many women encouraged to be in the leadership positions. Women characterise school principalship as the 'hegemonic male culture academia' (Ouston, 1993). They do not feel comfortable talking and discussing about the professional related issue with men. They prefer to receive support from other female counterparts. Female principals are the key individual for female teachers who want to proceed to leadership positions. The need other females to motivate and guide them so they can feel encouraged. Women educators do not receive the same kind of social messages which men do concerning promotion to principalship.

> One of the solutions proposed by research in recent years in response to the problems of not only women's lack of traditional mentoring experiences, but also male sexism and sex-role stereotyping, is the argument that women should be mentors for other women. The solution of same-sex mentoring for women is seen to be a panacea for improving women's career prospects. (Enrich, 1994, p 75)

A mentor or someone with more experience is needed by other female principals to help them with their professional development. Lack of figures to guide or motivate female principals or female teachers who are interested in leadership positions has influence the growth of the percentage of women as educational leaders (Enrich, 1995).

Impact of women under-representation at educational leadership

Lack of women in leadership roles or positions impacts the system of education in general.

In Indonesia, the impact that perpetuates the cycle of men holding positions at decision making level (leaders) are the gender biased educational policies. The Indonesian national curriculum is one of the examples of gender biased which sill exists in the educational field. The curriculum and lesson materials have not aimed at gender equity and equality principles (Mulia, 2008). The content of the text books use in Indonesian school are still not gender sensitive. Most of the text books, especially for the subjects such as Language, Social Science, Civic, Physical Education, and Art contain gender biased (toward male) values. Women in those books are described to do the domestic roles, while men are in the public/productive roles. Pictures inside the textbooks are dominated by pictures of boys than girls, boys are also describe to have more activities (Sudarta, 2003). It is an acknowledgement that there are still a tight segregation space between men and women (Fatmawati, 2009).

The association of masculinity, male authority and school leadership is pervasive in the life of school. The other factor resulted from male domination in leadership position in education is the decisions are taken without any or with less input from women and without considering aspects of gender equity and equality (Suryadi & Idris, 2004). Government's decision on improving education of girls from poor families is also still weak. Guiding principle on teachers/principals' appointment at primary and secondary school levels are still male oriented, while at kindergarten level is female oriented (Dewi, 2003). These are also forms of gender bias resulted from women's underrepresentation in the educational leadership positions. The policies become the trigger of gender imbalance because they will have direct impact on the composition of the female teachers and principals.

Conclusion

Indonesian education has been a feminised world with the high number of female teachers at all levels of education. However, it does not followed by the number of female at educational

leadership positions. Women only occupy small numbers of all school principals throughout the country.

Female under-representation in Indonesian education is trigger by five influencing factors. They are stereotyping; culture and tradition; low level of females' participation in education; perceive lack of confidence; and lack of mentorship to provide supports. All this aspects at the end have impacts on policies and decision taken for the development of education. Most of the decisions and policies are gender biased due to lack of inputs and considerations coming from females' side.

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