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Strategy in Creating School Environment: Lessons from High Schools in Indonesia

Ismail Suardi Wekke^{a*} and Asmaun Sahlan^b^a State Islamic College of Sorong (STAIN), Klabilim KM 17, Sorong 90817, Indonesia^b State Islamic University Maunlana Malik Ibrahim of Malang (UIN), Jalan Gajayana 50 Malang 65144, Indonesia

Abstract

There is a need to enhance school culture and its surrounding area to support of teaching and learning. Therefore, this research was conducted to identify how high schools in Malang City, Indonesia create their neighbourhood to maintain the process of learning. Qualitative approach was implemented during research circles. Moreover, multisite data collection was research conduction. Research was conducted in five high schools in Malang City, East Java, Indonesia; they are SMAN 1, SMAN 3, SMAN 4, SMA Shalahuddin dan SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Malang. The process to shape religious culture through two main strategies namely: (a) instructive sequential strategy and (b) constructive sequential strategy. The first strategy (i.e. instructive sequential strategy) is the efforts to put the structural instructions aspect into practice. Meanwhile, the second strategy (i.e. constructive sequential strategy) is the efforts to build the schools' religious culture.

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1. Introduction

This research was prompted by an observation on various issues surrounding the employment of Islamic Religious Education in schools that has yet to be well-executed, and only a minority of the schools were found to be

* Corresponding name: Ismail Suardi Wekke. Tel.: +62-951-322-133

E-mail address: iswekke@gmail.com

able to develop it by applying innovations. One form of development is creating a religious culture at school. The creation of culture is considered to be a strategic step in the effort to develop the national education goal, as well as the school's Islamic Religious Education (Herlihy, 1998). This shows that education could be a part of national development project (Segrave, & Holt, 2003).

In addition, efforts for the enhancement of religious education in creating culture at school has indeed seen it fair share of challenges and so, rigorous effort and support from all parties involved, especially the school administration, are required (Lubis and Wekke, 2009). Development of this effort at SMAN 1, SMAN 3 and SMA Shalahuddin, Malang City, East Java, Indonesia, to create religious culture at their respective schools is interesting to be studied in depth, and it is hope that a the subject enhancement strategy can be developed for such purpose. Based on the problem focussed above, it is the purpose of this paper to firstly, generate understanding of Islam enhancement in creating religious culture that includes form of enhancement, creation of religious culture religious subject enhancement strategy in creating such culture at school and support of the school community. Secondly, generate understanding on the underlying reasons for religious subject based enhancement in creating religious culture. This article will explore implementation of religious based activities in stimulating school culture in senior high school of Malang region.

2. Previous Research

There have been many studies on the problem of teaching and learning at school, most of which are conducted because of one factor that is religious education tends to be executed using didactic methods. Teachers are often only invited to discuss the learning-teaching process in only the technical-mechanical sense. In the meantime, the more basic issue pertaining to the pedagogy aspect has rarely been touched whereas the main function of religious education in schools is to provide a guideline that is able to encourage awareness and support from students to behave in a way that supports development of strong religious personalities (Thobani, 2007).

Various problems that arise are, of course, not insusceptible to policies related to Islamic Religious Education in public schools, be it external policies from the government or internal (institutional) policies as a form of operation for religious education in public schools. All of these policies cannot be employed fully when the learning system is ineffective and inefficient (Green, 2011). This responsibility should be on the shoulders of everybody, especially educators who are directly involved in the education system (Scott, 2011). The phenomenon above has slowly gained the attention of educators in public schools. Limited time allocation for the subject should be overcome and enriched with varying strategies, in terms of policy and learning process. The existence of the subject should not only be taken as merely another subject on its own but more than that, it is connected to other subjects too (Ritterbusch, 2012). Therefore, the time portion for religious understanding should be more accommodating to such policies.

Furthermore, according to Cantwell (2013), in order to overcome the problems faced by the world of education as described above, two approach can be used, namely first macrocosmic approach, whereby education is analyzed in term of its relation to a broader social framework, second microcosmic approach, whereby education is analyzed as one live unit that comprises of interactions. The second factor is the development of programmed culture through the learning process (Felderhof, 2010). This pattern begins from within the culturist himself, and voice of truth, conviction, basic assumption or belief strongly embraced as faith, and actualized through attitude and behaviour. The truth is achieved through experience or trial and error, and its evidence lies in how the faith is displayed. For this reason, this actualization is called teaching by example.

3. Method

The study employed a naturalistic paradigm or it is also usually called interpretive paradigm or non-positivistic paradigm. This paradigm is used in qualitative observations. It is suitable with the function of knowledge, in general, so the use of a naturalistic paradigm was chosen to describe and explain the features, characteristics and connection of cause and effect or influences that influence the events and culture at the school being observed. Furthermore, a naturalistic paradigm was used in order to enable the researcher to find meaning and understanding of every phenomenon, so much so as to achieve local and traditional knowledge, people's knowledge and theories

from the subjects observed (Van der Geer, Hanraads, & Lupton 2000).

The purpose of this study is to obtain an in-depth picture of the learning development in creating religious culture in schools by employing qualitative approach and a multiple case study plan. Cases observed are the development of subject in creating religious culture in schools that have different backgrounds. SMAN 1 and SMAN 3 are both State schools under the National Department of Education, whereas SMA Shalahuddin is an Islam-based private school under the patronage of Yayasan Ma'arif NU (NU Ma'arif Foundation). The difference between SMAN 1 and SMAN 3 is in term of its leadership and worship infrastructure at the school. SMAN 1 is managed by a principal with a background in Islamic Education and is concerned on developing religious culture at the school whereas SMAN 3 is lead by a principal with a background in public education. Nevertheless, a religious environment has also risen at SMAN 3. In term of worship infrastructure, SMAN 3 Malang has a mosque while SMAN 1 does not – it only uses spaces such as the hall for activities of worship.

Keeping in mind the schools described above, all three cases are different in terms of characteristics, cultural values embraced and even their management. And so, it is fitting that this study employs a multiple-case study plan (Hicks, 2012). A multiple-case study plan begins from, firstly, a single case (as the first case) and then continues to the second and third case.

4. Findings and Discussion

Based on the study findings of the three observations made, the religious culture that were found include smiling, greetings, mutual respect and tolerance, fasting on Monday and Thursday, performing Zuhr prayer in congregation, reciting the Qur'an, prayers together. Religious culture is a collection of religious values that lie beneath behaviour, tradition, daily habits and symbols practiced by the principal, teachers, administration staff, students and other members of the school community. For that reason, the culture is not limited to symbolic meaning but it is filled with values. Its existence does not appear out of thin air but it appears through a process of acculturation. This acculturation process involves three phases; firstly, values embraced, which is to collectively formulate religious values that are agreed upon and require development at the school. Furthermore, collective commitment and loyalty are developed among the members of school community to the agreed values. Secondly, daily practice, which involves agreed religious values being actualized in daily behaviour and personality of all members of the school community. The development process is done in three stages, namely (1) socialization of agreed religious values as the ideal behaviour that is to be achieved in school in the future, (2) determination of a weekly or monthly action plan as a systematic benchmark and measures to be done by all at the school in achieving those religious values. (3) Reward of appreciation for performance. Thirdly, cultural symbols, which replace cultural symbols that are less in line with the teachings and values of Islamic religion.

In addition, religious subject enhancement in creating religious culture involves two steps. First, it is done through school policies and second, through the commitment of its Principal and School Community. The effort to enhance the subject in creating religious culture in schools, there are several ways including school's administration policy, employment of teaching-learning activities in class, extracurricular activities outside of class, and tradition and behaviour of the school community that is continuous and consistent until religious culture is successfully acculturation at the school.

Based on this observation, various policies can be used to develop Islamic education in creating religious culture at schools. Policies can be in the form of expanding time allocation for the subject or by creating a religious atmosphere, and increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of learning Islamic education both in class and outside of class, compare to Philippine (Baring, 2011). However, due to the unique characteristics of each school, implications exist on the form of religious subject enhancement at the schools.

The strong commitment found at SMAN 1 Malang is sequentially as follows: (a) principal's commitment, (b) students' commitment, (c) parents' commitment, and (d) teachers' commitment. The solid commitment shown by the Principal of SMAN 1 Malang can be described using a structural approach, which is the religious subject enhancement strategy in creating a religious culture at the school has already been embedded into the commitment and policies of its principal, so much so that it leads to various rules and policies that supports such activities, along with related infrastructures and facilities that are geared toward developing religious culture including funding. Thus, this approach is more of a 'top-down' approach, whereby religious activities are carried out on the precursor

or instruction from the school's office or principal. Apart from that, the head of school plays an important role in determining positive and negative religious activities at the school. There have been many sanctions at the school such as a student needs to pay a fine for avoiding a religious activity on purpose or without good reasons, and the money collected is then used to buy, for example, a new carpet or the Qur'an or other necessities at the school.

5. Theoretical Implication

Religious culture developed at school can be actualized internally and externally by two ways. Culture actualization that occurs can be covert or overt. The first, covert, is when one is not explicit, pretending, not saying what one actually feels, uses metaphors and symbols, and being secretive. Whereas the second, overt, usually involves one that is direct and straightforward to the point of conversation at hand (Wang, 2009).

According to Sanpath (2006), the strategy to be undertaken by education practitioners in forming religious culture at school includes (1) giving example (exemplification), (2) normalize good manners/practice, (3) hold fast to discipline, (4) provide motivation and support, (5) give rewards, especially psychologically, (6) punish (may be in term of disciplinary action), (7) create a religious atmosphere that may influence children's growth (Alberts, 2010).

Moreover, generally speaking, there are four components that very much support the success of religious subject enhancement strategy in creating a religious culture in schools; first, school principal's policy that supports enrichment; second, success of learning-teaching in class as is done by the religious education teacher; third, increase in extracurricular activities as organized by the OSIS (students organization) manager, specifically the religion section; and fourth, support from the school community for the success of activities enhancement (McGregor, 2009). Those instruments are elaborating the opportunities for school to enlarge learning opportunities not only in the class room but also environment surrounding the neighbourhood. The institution also adapts technology in teaching and learning (Wekke and Hamid, 2013).

This research shows that SMA Shalahuddin can be described as being inclined toward using coercive power that is based on fear. A leader that possesses such power also has the power to punish, scold or dismiss. Generally, in human life, people with such power are usually associated with the use of physical force or even weapons such as war. According to Ludvigsen (2012) and Blummer (2008), everyone holds a sort of power. The only difference is the power to hurt or punish others is often used and it is difficult to control. This findings correlate to the religion that enhance the spirit of believers (Ducène, 2012).

6. Conclusion

Finally, the conclusion from the discussion, religious subject enhancement is not sufficient by just improving learning in class in terms of quality and time allocation. Instead, making the subject based as a culture in school is the strategic form, whereby the role of school's leaders are increased to support and execute acculturation through habituation, exemplification and subtle persuasion, which provide good reasoning and convincing prospects. Secondly, the development of religious culture in the form of enhancing Islamic education in schools include smiling, greeting, mutual respect and tolerance, fasting every Monday and Thursday, performing pray, reciting the Qur'an, performing collective prayers. These habits or practices have been proven to increase students' spirituality, their sense of brotherhood and tolerance, discipline and determination in learning and carrying out activities. It can also increase *tawadhu'* (humility) of the students toward their teachers in the form of respect, and they are convinced that they will gain *berkah* (spirituality) from the teachers in other form of knowledge, as well as stabilizing students' mentality, so much so that it affects their grades and values that they can be proud of. This research shows how school could expand opportunities in creating environment and stimulate any kind of advancement.

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