

POLITICAL ASPECTS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A CASE STUDY IN ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY ERA

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to see the political aspects in the success of educational leader using qualitative case study method. Leaders must realize their roles as a CEO, as an academician, and as a political leader. The research problem was why did the educational leaders had difficulty to take their role as political leaders and how to inspire them doing the role? The research applied a qualitative method by using “how” and “why” questions for analysis. There were some complicated issues in educational activities that were difficult to be solved but became easier if educational leaders have skills in persuading, negotiating, and using political process. The significant of the study was to inspire the educational leaders that they did not only take their role as the CEO, or the academician, but also the role as political leaders to be more successful in leading. Vocational and Training institutions in Indonesia face some challenges to be successful in ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) era. The leaders of the institutions will be more successful if they understand the political roles, political process, and political techniques.

Keywords: *political aspect, educational leadership, ASEAN economic community*

INTRODUCTION

ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) has initiated the Common Market and Production Base that allow the liberal influx of goods, services, investment, capital, and skilled labor throughout the countries in Southeast Asia (Sugiharto, 2016). It is an opportunity to do the integration and collaboration, and also competition. Integration and collaboration emphasize the existence of domestic context and regional setting at the same time. Every stakeholder harness all possibilities and potentials that empower the sustainable achievement of the AEC. In AEC, all parties contribute to taking part in the development of the region. Every region is expected to expedite performance indicators and evaluate the output. In the competition, the biggest challenge of Indonesia experienced is the low level of workforce’s competency compared with the other regional workforce.

Experts have contended that the vocational and training school is the rejoinder for the low level of local workforces’ competency inasmuch as its ability to foster skilled workers faster than universities (Hermansyah, 2016). It triggers the government to develop the vocational and training school in the last decades. The Indonesian government has collaborated with Germany to develop 23 vocational and training model schools in 6 provinces since 2014. The government has also promoted the excellence of the vocational and training schools by means of a certification program for 1.650 schools. In essence, the government already had strategic planning and commenced to implement it.

The key concepts of strategic planning comprise of process (design a systematic and dynamic plan), future (provide a lucid vision), assessment (comprehend the contemporary status), alternative

strategies (advance a range of options to attain established goals), and decisions (establish the connection among goals, strategies, and resource allocations). The author also emphasizes that the organization usually undertakes three steps to maximize the good concepts; strategic, tactical, and operational (Lozier, 1995). Taylor and Machado (2006) have also addressed the eight sequential steps process of strategic planning. In addition to the focal point of successful planning towards major elements, Taylor and Machado have also exhorted the importance to reduce the failure (Taylor, J. and Machado, 2006). Therefore, relevant stakeholders are expected to obtain the key elements of a successful plan, the sequential steps of the process, and the risk management strategic planning process. In achieving proper assessment and the commensurable planning, other prominent factors should also be taken into consideration such as two following aspects. First factor concerns about politics and planning (Moore, 2001). An opinion in the community expressed that the political activities are the dirty sector that should be avoided. It is based on some experiences that political activists sent to penitentiary because of bribery and corruption (The Jakarta Post, 2017).

However, in the context of the paper, Donnithorne (1991) has contended that the politics is the skill to negotiate, persuade, influence, and use power to resolve important differences of opinion and values among groups. He has said that politics is the art of arguing. The skill in arguing will alter the faulty activity into a paragon of virtue. In implementing the educational planning, complicated issues will be encountered and resolved. Moreover, it elucidated that consenting educational planning receives approval by the planners who prevail to accept, realize, facilitate, and utilize the political process within their institutions (Donnithorne, 1991).

In the context of Indonesia, after the Reformation, the quality of education in Indonesia became better after the government committed to allocating 20% of the budget in the education sector (Firman & Tola, 2008). It depicts that the Indonesian government, especially under Ministry of Education provides more effort to improve the quality of education in Indonesia equally. Moreover, the government embraces all the stakeholder to focus on the effort. Tobias & Wales (2014) have confirmed the political aspects of the decision because the rise of the budget was the promise of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in his campaign before his presidency and the promise influenced his electability significantly and assisted him to win the presidential election. It has mentioned that the government accommodates the need to raise the budget from the political aspect in accordance with the operational requirements from a quality aspect. Budiman and Majid (2011) have mentioned the willingness of the government towards the school condition, especially in funding, infrastructure, superstructure, and regulation, determine the quality of education.

Then the school leader acts as a political leader (Moore, 2001). The education as the right and all stakeholders, including teachers and principals, must work hard to make sure that the qualified education can be acquired by the children (Manan, 2015). Even, Woodward (2015) has stressed that schools are a product of social and political decision. It signifies that the education would be qualified if the political sectors are aware of the increment of educational aspects. School leader in an educational institution is responsible for three roles; as a corporate CEO, as an academician, and as a political leader (Triangle concept of Moore). The principals should discern their complex roles and make their functional leaders at the appropriate level. Leading as political leaders will also favor them with flexibility facet (Moore, 2001). Suratno (2016) has pushed the educational leaders to be more creative, even to go beyond regulation and make a breakthrough to achieve a special quality. The principals need to negotiate with the government which determines the direction and policy of the national education (Bank, 2015). Consequently, the paper proposed an approach to examine particular political aspects in the strategic educational planning.

The goal of this research is to remind some other special aspects in the strategic planning. Many people only think that the good and right planning is enough to get success. However, it is important to consider the other aspects, such as planning as politic activity and school leader as the political leader. If leaders have skills in arguing, they can change the result of their activities

significantly. The research problem refers to the reality that some educational leaders don't have skills in politics, don't want to take part in political activities, and even some of them express their resistance. The study is significant to inspire the educational leaders to have political skills in the competition era.

METHODS

The research constituted a qualitative study. It used 'how' and 'why' main questions to understand the political aspects of educational leadership for the success of vocational and training education in Asean Economic Community era (Yin, 2009). The researchers analyzed the two elements: (1) the concept of educators to politics (what and why); and (2) the importance of politics for the success of the vocational and training school (how). The researchers interviewed seven interviewees who resided in Jakarta and worked as principal (A, B, C), consultants in vocational and training schools (D, E), and two former employees of the Ministry of Education and Culture who had experiences to supervise the vocational and training schools (F, G). Based on the agreement with the participants, the participants' profiles were confidential. The study populated the data by the interviews, documentation (newspaper), and observation. The researchers analyzed the data and enacted the conceptual construct through comparing the finding with the theories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Planning as political activity can be seen from what Moore (2001) has said. He has asserted that the notable process in undertaking strategic planning successfully required understanding and ability to perform the political role (Moore, 2001). He said that there is a fundamental impediment in educational institutions that only politics can solve. He, moreover, mentioned that planning is not political imperatives because planning and management are integrated. Planning is a management function that involves planners and leaders in political transactions. Planning is itself political because it makes a difference. When planning makes a difference, something is altered that would not have been changed otherwise (Moore, 2001).

Donnithorne (1991) has said the meaning of the politics as the use of persuasion, influence, and power to resolve important differences of opinion and values among groups. Donnithorne also affirms that planning as political action is relevant in the educational institutions because leaders often experience arduous situations and issues rooted in competing values, conflict of interests, and the ambiguities to choose among the good things. They are obliged to quest the best thing among the good things. In the context, Donnithorne said that politics is the only solution to a systematic organizational problem in which educational institutions cannot avoid because of the complex characters of their purposes and the highly individual and differing views of their faculties (Donnithorne, 1991). He also emphasizes that the long-run success of institutional plans depends on campus politics. The leaders are required to accept, understand, ease and apply the political process within their institutions (Moore, 2001).

Planning as politics serves as a relevant factor when the schools create a process of change. The organizations that have tried to resist change in the external environment have experienced more adversity than organizations that have responded positively to change (Horner, 2003). She has also stressed the relevance to use the persuasion, influence, and power as a political action. Many educational institutions have problems in strategizing and implementing the program because of disorientation of their togetherness (Horner, 2003). She defines togetherness as a situation in which the

leader and follower comprehend, delve in, and inspire each other. Forfeiting togetherness implies that people in the schools experienced dissatisfaction, possessed low expectations and low self-esteem, avoided risk-taking, and worked in isolation. A win-win solution is the best words to explain the planning as a political action consequently.

The educational leader also can be seen as the political leader. There is a metaphor (model) regarding the role of the leaders in educational institutions in terms of planning, politics, and presidential leadership (Moore, 2001). The educational leader plays roles as an academician (triangle model), the corporate chief executive officer (square model), and politician (circle model). Moore (2001) has described the complex roles as follows; (1) Academician: school leader leads a formal educational institution. The triangle symbolized the role of the school leader as an academician, presiding over an institution with the special vision and mission. (2) As a corporate CEO: the square describes that the institution is a substantial economic enterprise that must be properly managed. School leader assumes a managerial role similar to that of a corporate CEO. (3) As a political leader: the circle indicated the institution as a community or civil society. In the institution, the leader has a role as a public or political leader. It reflects that the educational institutions are a complex social organization comprised of numerous and diverse constituents.

According to Moore (2001), an effective planning process should facilitate the leader's ability to provide appropriate academic, management, and community leadership. Moore said that the organizational culture is incomplete if we fail to consider the circle and the proposition that schools are also socio-political communities. Within this context, school leader plays the role of pluralistic leader; the hallmark of the pluralistic leader is that he or she accepts the inevitability of organizational politics. A pluralistic leader understands that their task is to help find the common ground among the many stakeholders, often motivated self-interest who encircle them (2001).

In politics, leaders will become more skillful at marshaling political support for their strategic ideas (Donnithorne, 1991). They allow and lobby advocates of differing views to present their positions. They identify pockets of resistance to change and focus energy on these persons through lunches, meeting or telephone appeals. Donnithorne has also stated that the wicked problems often involve competition and conflict among special interest groups where there are potential winners and losers, or at least the perception that some people will be advantaged or disadvantaged. In the complicated situation, the institution required a conversant political leader (1991).

Cleveland-Innes, Emes, and Ellard (2001) have believed that in a situation, a key to successful change is collaborative engagement. It indicates that there is a necessity to undertake collective action for the realization of qualified strategic planning. The authors state that it is the job of the planners to construct a process for change by identifying collaborators and creating an environment in which critical linkages can be built within the institution between central support and decentralized action. They also discuss how to do the collaborative process. They accentuate that in the good process, the institution is obliged to switch from the centralization to the decentralization. In the situation, the power is shared, and goals focus on common interests eventually.

All respondents agree that the education is distinct from the politics. In the context of Indonesia, it is better that the principals do not get involved in politics. Ms. A states that politics does not fit with the education. Politics means negotiations and lobbying to get the project that is part of personal or group interests. Mr. G expresses that politics signify a dirty game and only for the benefit of its group. The teachers expound good image to the persons with high integrity. Accordingly, they do not involve in the politics if they don't want to be ensnared in an unfavorable system.

Mr. B states that a healthy school ventures out to make a distance from the politics. Otherwise, they will enter the systems that may obscure their vision, mission, and their objectives. There is a big dissimilarity between the education and the politics. However, Mr. D reminds that the arguments

concerning the dirty politics are based on the negative side. Moreover, many people encountered bad experiences related to politics. They experienced that the negotiation and lobbying in politics brought them in bribery and corruption. They refer to the Indonesian situation where businessmen and politicians are arrested for bribery cases. Indonesian social and political situation induce some school leaders to become allergic to politics.

Mr. C, Mr. D, Mr. E, Mr. F, and Mr. G aver that school leaders overlook the politics in the neutral term. They remain in the situation of their traumatized experiences. Mr. D reckons that the politic has the neutral meaning that describes the competencies to negotiate and lobby for the success of the institution. The skills are predominant aspect currently. Leaders will encounter obstacles to prevail the competition and to influence the decision maker for the good policy unless they are equipped with the relevant skills. Mr. D comments that if leaders do not want to take their role in politics, they are indolent or safety players. Mr. E elucidates the culture of paternalistic espouses the school leaders to limit themselves in their territory and remains in comfort zone. They perceive congeniality in their situation as the director. They become passive, uncreative, and less proactive when dealing with the world and society.

Mr. G explains that majority school leaders are not prepared when they pursue the formal study in university. Some students are reluctant to participate in the organizational or political activities. The reasons are based on the thought that the field is not part of them but part of other students in the relevant study program. The teacher candidates are sterile from the politics. If they preside the school, they possess a passive propensity, and they are disinclined in committing to innovation.

Mr. G observes that some successful leaders are political leaders. They own skills in negotiation and lobbying to protect their institution and to win the hearts of the decision makers. Mr. E says that the school leader as the political leader does not feel guilty for their involvement in the politics. It is obvious for them that the negotiation or lobbying is their mission. They will feel disgrace if they do not struggle or be proactive in winning some issues. Mr. C says that politics means negotiating or lobbying in order to build linkages. The weakness encountered in vocational school involves negotiation, lobbying, and linkages. School leaders have realized that politics in a neutral sense is a weakness that must be addressed. They usually focus on a particular skill. Without the ability to negotiate, lobby and make linkages, they just become unskilled laborers. They only become workers because they have the expertise but do not have the ability in personal approach.

CONCLUSIONS

Strategic planning aids the educational institution to run appropriately. In the strategic planning, the institution must undertake the environmental assessment, institutional assessment, values assessment, and master planning assessment to achieve the goals in the related sectors. If the institution has done all process and it will go to implementation, there are some aspects that must be considered to run the plan successfully. The proper concept and concise planning are not enough to improve the quality of the education. There are some other aspects that must be taken.

The research, furthermore, discusses these other special aspects, such as planning as a political activity and school leader as a political leader figure. In the context, the politics is the skill to negotiate, persuade, influence, and utilize power to resolve important differences of opinion and values. The school leaders apply the skills consistently as the political leader in their positive or neutral meaning. On the other side, the leaders devise plans to ensure that their political intentions are uninterchangeable over the personal/group political interests. Therefore, there is a need that the school

leaders reflected the ability to recognize, understand, and implement the political knowledge and skills at the right corridor. If they apply the proper knowledge of politics, implement it precisely, and evaluate the extend to the achievement, it would enable them to be more successful in running the schools. It is not the era to mention that politics is the dirty activity and the school/principal must go away and do not involve into it. There is a need to change the mindset that the school leaders are involved in the process of negotiation, persuasion, and mutual collaboration to strive for the educational interest nationally.

The research recommends the change of the mindset and thinks that the involvement of the politics and political steps in their leadership are embedded in their function as a principal. So, it is a must to make political moves. Of course, the principals have to make their steps in politics in the genuine terminology and be meaningful. This research suggests three recommendations for school leaders, for the university, and for the government. For the school leader, he/she has to be a proactive leader. They have to use their skills and resources to win the competition. They have to work hard to realize their plans and programs. They have to convince the others to cooperate with them in formulating legitimate as well as beneficial policies and programs. The school leaders have to discern politics in the neutral terminology. They have to remedy the traumatized situation and regard the politics as the good activities and big mission in their leadership. With nascent apprehension, the school leaders will consider the politics as part of their duty. They behoove to undertake negotiation, lobbying and initiating the linkages. In the context of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the skills to build the linkages are related to the respectfulness the concept of multiculturalism and language skills. The school leaders are obliged to develop the areas. They will compete with the others in the flexibility setting in doing politics and master language skills.

The recommendation for the University in this research is it is the time for the university to prepare their graduates with the resourceful, beneficial, and targeted skills when they graduate and plunge on work. The school leaders have to be flexible to compete in the modern world. They need the skill of negotiation, lobbying, and building a network. While the recommendation for the Government is it is important for the Ministry of Education and Culture to create the democratic environment in the schools, the department the researchers recommend to provide more autonomy to the schools and assist them in developing their units. On the other hand, the government treats the school leaders as their partners, not as the subordinates. If the school leaders possess self-confidence to argue, negotiate, and lobby in the internal context and with the government, the school leaders own assets to compete in the external context with the other schools in the scope of Southeast Asian countries.

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