# Learning and Poverty: The Exploration of Teachers' Learning Capacity in a School with Poverty in Indonesia

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**[Abstract]** Teachers' professional learning in a disadvantaged school in Indonesia is complex, encompassing issues of support for learning, leadership, poverty and discrimination. Most teachers had difficulty engaging in professional learning, which the research presented here attributed to the additional issues of excessive workload, emphasis on a standards focus and resultant lack of reflective practice. In addition, the research found a preference for individual, rather than collaborative learning.

**[Keyword]** learning and poverty, school learning capacity, Indonesia

Teacher profession in Indonesia has a long history. A teacher is called a *guru* in the Indonesian language that is rooted in the Javanese language as *digu<u>gu</u> lan diti<u>ru,</u>* which means to be obeyed and followed. By this etymology of the word *guru*, Ki Hajar Dewantara formularized the role of teacher in the Javanese language as: "*ing ngarso sung tulodho* (in the front giving examples), *ing madya mangun karso* (in the middle giving encouragements), and *tut wuri handayani* (in the back ready to give assistance)" (Soefijanto, 2003, paragraph 4). Regardless some criticisms pointed to these conceptions that have raised some issues of centralization and bureaucracy in the Indonesian education system (Fakih, Topatimasang, & Rahardjo, 2000; Soefijanto, 2003), these ideas have highlighted the significant roles of teacher in Indonesian society, as master to deliver knowledge, moral examples for students, or even second parent for students in school.

The profession of teacher in Indonesia is regulated by the Government's Law, and the latest version of it, known as the Law No. 14/2005, recognizes teacher as a professional occupation that is responsible for delivering knowledge through pedagogical practices for students (Republic of Indonesia, 2005b). According to this role, a professional teacher should meet formal requirements such as degree from higher education institution or teacher certification. Teacher learning is also mentioned as important part in this law, however requirements for achieving formal standard for being professional teacher are much more focused than issues of having ongoing learning opportunities. Similarly, reviews of other government documents and regulations of teaching profession, such as the Law No. 20/2003 about the National Education System (Republic of Indonesia, 2003) and the Indonesian Government Regulation No. 19/2005 about the National Education Standards (Republic of Indonesia, 2005a), show that concerns on learning as important aspect in teaching profession is less emphasised than points like teacher degree, training and certification.

In Indonesia, programs for teaching quality improvement have been major priority by the government for many years. Nielsen (2003) claims that the Indonesian government has long implemented professional development programs that are designed in complex way and often very expensive. As Nielsen writes (p. 398-399):

…Indonesia has committed enormous resources to improving the quality of primary school teaching. In addition to the resources involved in program development and delivery, the

government must pay the bill for teachers who enter or move to relatively high levels on the civil service pay scale. Perhaps, no nation in the world has designed a more comprehensive and far-reaching strategy…Interestingly enough, the strategy does resemble in many ways strategy developed in other countries…This means that the potential impact of the quality improvement measures is great indeed.

However, the results of such teacher training programs seem ineffective and irrelevant in improving teacher quality. Nielsen (2003) and Thair and Treagust (2003) argue that many teacher training programs in Indonesia have been designed to meet the goal of teacher qualification, not quality. The implementations of teacher training in Indonesia are also complicated by many issues of bureaucracy, funding, teachers' schedules, and trainer incompetence. Although the aim of teacher training to meet teacher qualifications should not be considered as always superficial, since quality can also be shown through qualifications, however attending teacher training for the sake of completing qualifications may lead to superficial learning goals, and this might be the real problem of teacher training in Indonesia.

Indeed, reports on teacher training program evaluations suggest that a lot of teacher training is conducted to simply meet the accreditation requirements. Sachs (2003) suggests this model relates to an old teaching professionalism paradigm. The old paradigm highlights the importance of teachers meeting the mandated standards in teaching accreditation as a definition of teacher professionalism. In contrast, Sachs explains that the new teaching professionalism paradigm emphasises the role of teachers as learners as a basis for improving teaching quality. Engagement in professional learning, which centers on lifelong learning process, is key for teachers to elevate their quality, especially to answer the changing demands of society and to support students to be successful in the future.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the issue of teacher learning within the context of poverty in Indonesia. The exploration of teacher learning capacity in one disadvantaged school in Indonesia is aimed to analyse the interrelationship between issues of poverty and learning in the school through discussions of teachers' belief, experiences and opportunities towards learning. The discussion of teacher learning is based on the needs to enhance educational practices, teaching quality and students' achievement. Teacher learning is fundamental for quality improvement, as this encourages teachers to continually engage in exploring activities through reflection and research (Easton, 2004) and enables teachers to sustain their passion for teaching, in order to help them to solve problems faced in classroom practices and to understand the essence of teaching (Bilimoira, 2000; Day, 2004). Putting all together, exploring teaching learning is crucial considering learning as energy for teachers to grow professionally.

Moreover, the discussion of teacher learning in this paper is based on Adult Learning Theory (ALT) as a theoretical framework. ALT accentuates the role of adults to engage in ongoing learning activities in order to manage new challenges generated by changing cultural and society demands. As Peterson (1979) explains (as cited in Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, 2007, p. 427),

To say that someone is an adult is to say that he [sic] is entitled, for example, to a wide-ranging freedom of life-style and to a full participation in the making of things, to be mindful of his own deepest interest and to carry a full share of the burdens involved in conducting society and transmitting its benefits. His adulthood consists in his full employment of such rights and his full subjection to such responsibilities.

In the context of teacher learning, ALT emphasises the role of teacher learning to answer the needs of schools in this challenging time (Hager as cited in Foley, 2004; Mezirow, 2000).

As mentioned above, the issue of teacher learning in this paper is embedded in the context of school poverty in Indonesia. Poverty and education are two most complex issues in Indonesia, and interestingly those issues intersect one another in many aspects. This paper started from the assumption that poverty has been one major issue for many schools in Indonesia which, then, gives substantial impact on the quality of education. Various faces of poverty in school would be described in this paper and how these poverties influence teacher in learning engagement.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Adult Learning Theory (ALT)*

Adult Learning Theory (ALT) is chosen to be the theoretical framework in this paper, as it requires teachers to engage in ongoing learning activities in order to manage new challenges generated by changing cultural and society demands. ALT also focuses on learners' engagement in continuous learning activities that are of relevance to their current workplace context and demands in society (Foley, 2004). A review of ALT therefore provides an opportunity to consider whether teachers in a disadvantaged school in Indonesia are provided with learning opportunities that align with the features of ALT.

ALT is defined as a home for any theories of how adults learn (Yang, 2004). It does not point to one single theory, rather it covers various learning theories within the principles of adult learning, including Piaget's cognitive constructivism and Vygotsky's social constructivism, Mezirow's transformative learning, Kolb's experiential learning, Schon's reflective learning, etc. (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004). Although ALT has links with different learning theories, the foundation is based on Knowles' theory of andragogy. Some core principles of the andragogy theory include self-directed learning, problem solving, critical reflection and intrinsic motivation to learn.

ALT focuses with adults' ability to involve in a complex learning situation, to be aware of relevant issues faced in the workplace – by evaluating external and internal factors, including social, cultural, political and also personal experiences, to elaborate this awareness into clarity to see the problems and find some possible solutions, and finally to take critical action to change the problematic condition into a more effective working environment for adults (Cranton, 2006; Fenwick & Tennant, 2004; Merriam et al., 2007; Mezirow, 2000). Based on learning principles in ALT, it appears that teachers should centre their learning practices on adulthood learning principles for several reasons. First, an adult is at an age level where they should be mature enough to make decision and take responsibility for their actions (Mezirow, 2000). These characteristics are included as criteria of competence teacher in ALT according to Foley (2004). Second, the concept of learning in ALT is always related to the change process. Most definitions of learning bear the understanding that learning always leads to changes in human behavior. Some ALT experts prefer to call this "growth, development of competencies, and fulfillment of potential" (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 13).

These changes are a function of problem-solution seeking tasks in teaching practices (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2005). Third, adult learning also involves the learner as an active agent with Hager (2001) noting that adults have "the capacity to act in and on the world" (as cited in Foley, 2004, p. 29). In summary, these characteristics of adult learning enable teachers to engage in responsive and active learning to develop their skills and abilities to manage the complex nature of the teaching profession.

*ALT and Teaching Context*

　　ALT recognises that learning is contextually bounded. According to Jarvis (1987), learning cannot happen in a vacuum, rather it is always affected by and affects on the learners' outside world (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007). Given this understanding, Merriam et al. suggest two basic principles of contextual learning in ALT. Firstly, learning occurs within the context of a social system, including class, gender, race, power, etc. By this definition, the condition of poverty in a school is believed to have an influence on teachers' learning. Research from David (2008) for instance, suggests that compared to more affluent schools, the disadvantaged schools often provide inadequate support for teachers, which influence teachers' motivation to learn. Secondly, learning results from learners' interaction with the context.

　　Payne (2008) argues that professional development programs for teachers in disadvantaged schools should be based on the understanding of disadvantaged contexts including students' specific needs, in order to help teachers link their learning with the specific needs of the schools. In summary, the understanding of social and cultural context in disadvantaged schools is critical prior to investigating teachers' learning in a poverty context.

　　According to Jarvis, teaching context is understood through teachers' everyday lives. Awareness of teachers' daily experiences is fundamental to understanding their teaching context, since experiences connect teachers with the particular environment or social system as a context. The constructivist learning theory also considers experiences as of importance to understand context. According to Bush (2006), experiences occur within particular contexts; therefore, constructing meanings from experiences requires awareness of the context. In addition, Foley (2004) argues that teachers will engage in powerful learning when they are able to construct a comprehensive contextual framework from comprehension of "personal, interpersonal, institutional, social and historical" (p. 9) dimensions. According to Foley, this contextual framework is built from the analytical and critical reflections of teachers' experiences.

　　There are three key aspects in ALT learning processes from Fenwick and Tennant (2004) that underlie discussions of ALT in this paper, namely:

1) **Learning as an acquisitional**
2) **process.** This perspective emphasises a cognitive based learning, in which the learning process is centered on the acquisitions of knowledge. Some theories within this perspective are the schemata theory and various intelligence theories from Cattel, Stenberg, Gardner, and much more (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004). This learning perspective examines some important principles of learning, such as: "how mental information processing occurs, how cognitive structures develop and change, and how a repertoire of new behaviours is acquired and used as practical intelligent or expertise" (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004, p. 57). This perspective is popular and broadly used in teachers' learning practices, as this focuses on improving teachers' pedagogical content knowledge for teaching. This perspective is also noted as having a similar purpose of learning described in Sach's old paradigm.

　**2) Learning as a reflective process.** Reflection is central to teacher teaching and learning. It is believed to be an important means for teachers to engage in deep learning in order to improve their teaching quality. Reflection enables teachers to stop their routines for a while to conduct deep thinking about their practices and to re-consider actions related to their teaching (Day, 2004). Research on reflective learning shows some important links with disadvantaged school, as it allows teachers to conduct critical reflection through consideration of issues in social justice. Teachers in disadvantaged schools need to conduct reflection based on awareness of political and social

contexts that influence students' achievement. Such reflection enables teachers to integrate their teaching practices with the critical issues faced by students and, thus, helps the students to overcome their problems (Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles and Lopez-Torres, 2003).

However, some drawbacks related to reflection have been noted by several experts. The over-reliance on personal reflection might generate re-adjustment and self-confirming actions (Brockbank and McGill, 2007; Day, 1999; Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003), and thus impede teachers from reflecting from the other sources (Elliot as cited in Day, 1999). To overcome these misleading reflections, Brockbank and McGill (2007) suggest the practice of collaborative reflection that allows teachers to work together to find solution of a particular issue. Rodgers (2002), finally, reminds teachers to place students' advantages over any concerns in order to overcome problems arising in reflection practices.

**3) Learning as a practice-based community process.** The practice-based community perspective highlights the understanding that learning should be based on collaborative practices in community, instead of individual reflection. Some theories related to this perspective are Community of Practice theory, collaborative learning theory, and partnership theory. The practice of collaborative learning is based on the notion that learning is a social activity. According to Watkins (2005), "all human behaviour has a social dimension, and that knowledge is constructed socially rather than individually" (p. 17). Here, Watkins suggests that knowledge is a social product and thus always occurs within a specific context.

De Kock, Sleegers and Voeten (2004) note the merits of collaborative learning, such as helping people to build networking and communication skills, also increasing the accountability of the learning process, for both individuals and groups, through feedback and evaluation. Moreover, the implementation of teacher collaboration provides advantages for both teachers and school. According to Teitel (2003), collaborative learning helps the individual teacher to personally improve their teaching quality while at the same time aligning with the school's goals.

All processes appear to be of relevance to teachers in a disadvantaged school in Indonesia. For example, most teachers' experiences in training would be related on acquisitional process. Moreover, the notion of learning as a reflective process and through community appears to link with individuals and small groups of teachers being able to take control of their learning and this is of particular interest to this research. Although teachers are working in a disadvantaged school, their learning through reflection and with teacher colleagues would seem possible.

*Factors of Influence on Teachers' Learning*
Conditions that foster teachers' learning have been extensively researched and, according to Tate (2004), investigation on factors that influence teachers' learning provide useful information of why some teachers learn and others do not. Some of these factors and those of particular relevance to this research are teachers' own experiences of learning, their perspectives on the value of learning and their opportunities to engage in learning.

Teachers' experiences are considered as important dimension in ALT. According to de Kock, et al. (2004), learners' everyday interactions with the environment provide valuable learning experiences, including conflict-solutions, reasoning, critical thinking, adjustment process and much more. However, these learning experiences would be effective only if learners are able to acknowledge these as important sources to produce new knowledge. In summary, acknowledging experiences through reflection activities becomes a critical point in learning from experience.

Teachers' perspective towards learning is believed to be a key aspect in teacher learning. Borko and Putnam (1996) and Sparks (2002) promote the importance of teachers' beliefs and

thoughts about teaching as influential to their learning behaviors, including learning motivations, styles, preferences and orientations.

Teachers' opportunity to learn is fundamental in teacher learning. Freppon (2001) strongly argues that the most important thing in professional development programs is to give teachers the opportunity to learn. Furthermore, Freppon links the concept of teachers' opportunity to learn with the importance of building a strong learning community in school. Bolam, Stoll, and Greenwood (2007, p. 18) define professional learning community in school as follows:

> A professional learning community is an inclusive group of people, motivated by a shared learning vision, who support and work with each other, finding ways, inside and outside their immediate community, to inquire on their practices and together learn new and better approaches that will enhance all pupils' learning

This definition suggests the aim of a learning community is to provide significant opportunities for teachers to engage in a strong learning culture at the school level. In other words, a professional learning community in school is a support system for teachers to engage in ongoing and collaborative learning activities with a goal of improving students' achievement.

## The School and Teacher Backgrounds

This is a private junior high school located in a lower-middle society in the most developed island in Indonesia, the Java Island. It is sited in a small but crowded uptown city and surrounded with busy transportation lines that results in too noisy an environment for the school to provide a favorable learning situation for students. It has small building but clean in overall. It has four medium size classrooms with relatively good conditions except some broken windows and outdated facilities. It has a small library that is rarely open due to lack of a librarian and funding to update the books. Eight computers are available for students, however five of them have been broken. Other facilities for teachers such as printer, telephone, DVD player, loudspeaker, TV and typing machines are provided by the government through aids for disadvantaged schools.

The school was first developed in 1977 by a family foundation and gained its popularity within the local community three years later. Following the success of the school, the foundation then decided to open a senior high school. This move progressed quite well until the early 1990s when the school principal at that time implemented stricter regulations with various physical punishments and sanctions were administered to students and staff in order to control behaviors. Reasons behind these strict regulations were not very clear, however these have created serious leadership issues within the school that ended with the resignation of the school principal. The school then experienced difficulty in finding a successor, and a senior teacher at the school was finally chosen as the new principal. The person occupied the position for 17 years until now for no one is willing to take the position.

The school lost popularity within the community while at the same time the numbers of other state and private schools increased significantly. Around 1992 the foundation had to close the senior high school due to a lack of students but kept the junior high school open even though the number of students continued to decline. In 1993, the school had approximately 35 students in total with no new students registered in year 7. In the following year, the school tried to collect as many students as they could by promoting their school door to door in the neighborhood. This effort worked quite well as the school successfully collected 24 new students.

Today, the school has a total of 54 students, with 17 students for year 7, 15 students for year 8, and 22 students for year 9. This number of students is considered as relatively enough and thus

preventing the school to collapse. The majority of the students in this school are orphaned, therefore, the school provides free tuition fee for students who cannot afford to. In consequence, the school relies on the government funding, called *Bantuan Operasional Sekolah* (BOS) for covering all the school's expenses, particularly teacher's salary. BOS is a funding program provided by the Indonesian government for all primary and junior high schools i n Indonesia by subsidising each student for the amount of approximately Rp 45.000 or equal to $4.5 per month. Therefore, the amount of BOS received by each school is determined by the number of students at school.

The school has a total of 13 teachers, with four teachers are females and nine are males, five teachers are civil servant and eight are not, and most of the teachers are aged around 35-50 with three aged above 65. Only two of the 13 teachers are full-time, while 11 teachers are registered as part-time with heavy schedules for teaching in other (mostly) larger and more affluent schools. The two full-time teachers are both unlicensed and the other 11are licensed, although some of these licensed teachers have to teach other subjects outside their expertise.

Teachers' salaries are all paid from BOS for approximately $0.8 hour/topic, therefore each teacher will receive around $25-30 per month. This amount is below the regional minimum wage enacted by the government of around $100 per-month for workers in the area of this school (The Indonesian Human Resource Management, 2008). This is noted as a serious problem in particular for the full-time teachers who must cover all their basic needs solely from the school salary.

Five teachers were interviewed in this study. Each teacher was a voluntary participant and presented with different backgrounds, including their teacher status, roles at school, areas of teaching and the total income received per month. Each teacher is introduced in the following paragraphs, however a table that summarises the characteristics of the five teachers in the sample would be first depicted below.

*Table 1*
*Teachers' Characteristics*

| Name | Age | Gender | Marriage Status | Teaching Period | PNS[9] Status | Teaching Status | Monthly Salary |
|------|-----|--------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Hadi | 65 | Male | Unmarried | 30 years | Non-PNS | Full-time | $30 |
| Ahmed | 45 | Male | Married | 15 years | Non-PNS | Full-time | $50 |
| Doni | 48 | Male | Married | 21 years | PNS | Part-time | $ 200 |
| Kristin | 46 | Female | Married | 14 years | Non-PNS | Part-time | $ 100 |
| Ami | 35 | Female | Married | 4 years | Non-PNS | Part-time | $ 50 |

Hadi (anonymous - All teachers' names mentioned in this report are changed to protect their confidentiality and anonymity) is 65 years old and has 30 years of teaching experience. Coming from a family in poverty, Hadi once had an opportunity to pursue his bachelor degree in economics at a prestigious university in Indonesia. However, due to lack of financial support, he had to quit his study and take up teaching to secure an income. Although noted as an unlicensed teacher, his commitment to teaching full-time at school has enabled his promotion to the vice principal. This position does not come with an increased salary rather just increased responsibilities. With an income of approximately $30 per month Hadi lives in very poor conditions, never marrying and still living alone. As a full-time teacher, Hadi has to teach a number of topics, including English

language, economy, history, and ideology and moral topic.

Ahmed is aged around 45 years and he is also an unlicensed full-time teacher who has taught at the school for about 15 years. Ahmed's own schooling consisted of six years of study at an Islamic school, known as *Pesantren*, in one small island in Indonesia. The *Pesantren* Ahmed studied in was probably a private informal Islamic school equivalent to a senior high school level. Ahmed then left his hometown and went to Java Island to pursue a better career. He arrived at the school in 1985 and his first role was maintaining the school's sanitation and security. In 1987, he married another teacher from the school; both lived at the school and still do. After he married, Ahmed opened a canteen at school while his wife continued to teach at the school and in another larger public Islamic high school. In 1993, Ahmed was asked to help his wife in teaching the Islamic religion subject at the school. Ahmed then officially became a teacher and took on responsibility for teaching sport, as the school has no sport teacher. With profit from the canteen and salary from the school, including his wife's salary, Ahmed's family income reaches $100 -150 per month. Together with Hadi, Ahmed's status of unlicensed teacher impedes him from applying for *PNS* status.

Doni is a 48 years old teacher who has worked as a part-time teacher at the school for around 21 years. Doni appears to be the most successful and advantaged teacher at school due to his status as a *PNS* teacher of level 4A from the highest level of 4E, and a salary that reaches approximately $200 per month. He originally dreamed of being in the army but failed the entry test and decided to pursue his teaching degree in physics instead. Doni now teaches physics at the school but only on Saturday due to his full time position and an excessive teaching workload in another larger school.

Kristin is 46 years old and is a part-time and non-*PNS* teacher at school. Due to poverty experienced by her family, Kristin then enrolled in a teaching academy, as this was less expensive compared to other courses. She chose Indonesian language as her area of teaching and graduated in 1988. Kristin started to teach at the school in 1994 and now she also teaches in two other non-public schools. Teaching in three schools increases Kristin's income to approximately $100 per month. However, Kristin's excessive teaching workload in other schools limits her time to teach at the school.

Ami, at 35 years of age, is the youngest teacher at school. She is part-time with non- *PNS* status and 4 years teaching experience in the school. Ami also teaches in another more disadvantaged private junior high school, which allows her to earn a total income of approximately $50 per month. She is a licensed economics teacher, however due to the school's lack of teachers, she has to teach science subjects including biology and physics.

The profiles of the school and teachers present some major issues related to poverty, which then influence educational quality. The school has students from disadvantaged background with poor achievement and low learning attitudes; it has very low teachers' salaries and staff that lack formal qualifications also Excessive Teaching Workloads. These Conditions Influence The School Quality And In Particular Affect Teachers' Attitudes Towards Improving Their Teaching Quality.

## School Poverty and Relation with Learning

According to Day (1999) and Taylor (2000), teachers' working context and backgrounds give significant influence on their beliefs and practices toward learning. Teachers' learning cannot be separated from their reflections of the context in which they are working as well as their previous and present experience. The condition of poverty in school or in teacher's personal life will

contribute to their values or practices of learning. On the other hand, the concept of teacher learning is also fundamental to be implemented in a context of poverty. Considering the definition of learning itself as change, teacher learning enable teachers to engage in deeper understanding of the disadvantaged context and link their learning with the context in order to make education quality improvement.

Teachers' voices regarding to poverty are clustered into two main categories, the external and internal factors. The external factors explain the problems of poverty that happen in school, student, government and other related levels. The internal factors highlight the faces of poverty in teachers' level, including teachers' experience towards poverty, personality factors related to poverty, teachers' status and other beliefs in teaching that create the issues of poverty. The interactions of external and internal factors related to poverty issues then lead to the discussion of teachers' engagement of learning. The outcomes of teachers' engagement in learning are presented in two different themes, the processes of learning and reasons for learning. Each teacher presents different stories of learning as result of their experiences of poverty in school context.

### *The External Factors*

Explanations of the external factors expose the faces of poverty in four different levels, which are the school level, the student level, the government level and other-related level.

**School level.** This theme discusses the issues of poverty at school, and categorizes the issues in two sub themes, namely the condition of poverty at school and the problem of school leadership. The poverty condition at school describes the material poverty, including school's lacking financial and resources that support pedagogical practices. Teachers strongly argue that school's lack of facilities limits their ability to develop and upgrade teacher quality and teaching practices. Comparing to other schools, this school does not have laboratory, thus Doni and Ami who teach physics often omit topics that need experiments in laboratory.

> "I can't elaborate my teaching with experiments in laboratory as I always do in other school, but I manage to use accessible materials or used materials taken from other schools, so that students could at least do small experiment with their topic. This is the best I could do," Doni says.

> "I always find difficulty in teaching my topics as they need experiments in laboratory…(when asked about being creative teacher in developing experiments using accessible materials) I know I have to be more creative with my teaching, but we (the school) have no sufficient resource to support the experiments," Ami explains.

From teachers' explanation, it can be seen that the poverty condition at school raises the feeling of powerlessness to engage in creative teaching. This means that the school's poverty limits teachers' ability to develop their practices in ingenious and productive ways. However, according to Hager (as cited in Foley, 2004), creativity is personal character of a person in order to be a self-directed learner. This personal character is built from inside through the awareness of context and situation in order to make change. Therefore, the nature of creativity is active and requires a person to make innovative implication. Teachers' inability to engage in creative teaching is a state of poverty itself owned by teachers, and this state becomes more complicated by its interaction with the poverty of school.

Another serious poverty issue that rises in school is leadership. The leadership issue emerges

from the poverty condition at school. This disadvantaged condition results in the school's inability to financially support teachers and therefore reduce the school's influence on teachers' work. Hadi explains that the school's disadvantaged condition limits him and the school principal to force teachers to improve their teaching quality as the school could not improve teachers' welfare. Hadi argues that strictly controlling teachers would destroy teachers' commitment to the school. According to Hadi, teachers' willingness to teach in such deprived conditions has benefited the school; hence, "giving teachers freedom to teach is the best model of leadership for the school." By also considering the past issue of leadership Hadi explains that the school's leaders should not implement strict regulations on teachers and students to avoid leadership mistakes. Hadi's explanations suggest the school's preference to implement a lenient style of leadership due to their poverty and negative experience of leadership. This leadership model has promoted different responses among teachers. Doni and Kristin support this model of leadership as they argue that the school has to understand their limitation in teaching due to responsibilities in other schools. According to them, giving teachers freedom to teach is a "win-win solution" as both the school and teachers have limitations. Kristin explains,

> I have limitations to improve my teaching quality due to workload in other schools.
> However, the school has also limitation to financially support me, and therefore let me
> just do the best I can do for the school but don't force me to work beyond my power.

On the other hand, Ami disagrees with the school's model of leadership. She argues that teachers still strong school leadership to guide and control teachers' work in order to need guidance from the school's leaders to align with the school's goals. Interestingly, teachers' understandings about the role of leadership consider it as merely controlling teachers' behavior. According to Grier and Holcombe (2008), strong leadership is crucial for disadvantaged schools to advance the programs of school reformation and therefore, teachers in this research need to realize the importance of the school having strong leadership to improve school's quality.

**Student level.** Teaching disadvantaged students is a big challenge for teachers in this research. There are three main student factors noted as of influence on teachers' learning, namely students' malicious behavior, students' low learning motivation and students' low achievement. Each of these factors will be explaining in the subsequent paragraph.

Teachers in this research experience much anxiety from students' malicious behaviors that then raises the issue of teacher-student relationship and its effect on teachers' learning behavior. Doni explains that he has to bring a stick in the classroom to scare his disobedient students. Kristin tells that she once cried because of her disrespectful students. Ahmed reports that there is always at least one student fighting every month. Students' malicious behavior obviously influences teacher-student relationships at school, as Hadi says, "Don't be too close to your students unless they will disrespect you." It is clear to see that teachers choose to build a gap between them and the students as responses to their students' bad behavior. Here, teachers seem less aware of the importance of teacher-student relationship in supporting teachers' learning. Research from Shulman (1986, 1987) suggests that teacher-student relationship is a means for teachers to learn and build a better understanding about their students (as cited in Lampert and Ball, 1999). Moreover, according to Payne (2008), teachers' knowledge about students helps them to develop more effective teaching practices in order to meet students' needs and to improve students' achievement.

Students' low learning motivation is noted by teachers in this research as the biggest issue that

influences teacher learning. Most teachers report that the students' low engagement in classroom activities discourages them from improving teaching quality. Teachers believe that their efforts to learn and improve quality would not have a significant influence on the students' achievement, as these students do not really care about the importance of education for their life. Moreover, teachers argue that teaching in a disadvantaged school does not need careful teaching preparation, as most students are passive and uncritical. Therefore, they believe that relying on previous teaching materials are enough for these disadvantaged students. Looking at these comments, teachers seem to have negative stereotype towards their disadvantaged students and thus develop what Collins (1988) calls "deficit theory" – focusing on "defining students by their weakness rather than their strengths" (as cited in Gorski, 2008, p. 34). According to Still (2006), believing that all students are able to learn and improve is important for teachers to maintain their motivation to learn. Teachers who have positive expectations about their students will also have optimistic beliefs that their attempts to improve teaching quality through learning engagement will benefit students' learning.

Teachers in this research argue that teaching underachieving students influences the quality of their teaching practices. Doni admits that he needs to set up two different teaching standards for students in this disadvantaged school and the other school in which he teaches. Doni argues that teachers need to deliver easy materials for disadvantaged students due to students' inability to grasp teaching contents. Based on this argument, Doni believes that he is competent enough to teach these students and does not really need to learn and improve his teaching quality. Teaching advantaged students, on the other hand, requires higher teaching standards since they are more critical and active. Therefore, Doni argues he needs to continually improve his teaching materials in order to meet these students' needs. Based on Doni's comments, again, he seems to underestimate the disadvantaged students' ability – refer to Collin's deficit theory – and thus discriminate them by delivering lower teaching standards.

The analysis of student level factors suggests that students' disadvantaged conditions reduce teachers' motivation and expectation to learn and to improve their teaching practices. Yet, teachers appear to be unaware of the opportunities to engage in learning about their pupils in order to improve teaching practices. Still (2006) strongly argues that teachers' ability to learn about their students, including understanding why students are mischievous, unmotivated and underachieved, would act as a benefit to developing teaching quality.

**Government level.** The discussion of the government level factors of influence on teachers' learning is based on Foley's (2004) argument that highlights the influence of political context and government's policies on teachers' work. In this research, two themes emerge as government level factors of influence, the first relates to the government's policies and the second to the support government provides for teachers' learning.

In general, all teachers in this research show their respect for the government. Teachers believe that the government has enacted many good policies for them, although most of these policies are still difficult to implement especially in disadvantaged schools. Some problematic policies are mentioned in the interview, but the most two problems stated by teachers are the issue of state-based examination and teacher status, including status as PNS and certified teacher. State-based examination is nationally required examination for all schools across Indonesia as standardized evaluation to determine students' success or failure.

Teachers believe that the school has to carefully prepare the students to succeed in national examination, since this relates to the school's accountability and credibility in the society. This

understanding results in teachers' focus to teach for the test preparation. Doni, for example, argues that giving test exercises everyday will help students to be familiar with the pattern of the test and thus increasing students' possibility to pass. Linking to his learning, Doni prepares his teaching by studying a range of exam questions and anticipating which questions might appear on students' national exams. Doni argues that his teaching style does not require him to study every day, as he has familiarized the patterns of test questions. Doni adds,

> I found slightly similar test question patterns in every year's students' final exam. I have recognized those patterns well and I just need to explain the answers to my students…I will start learning if I find new difficult questions.

Doni's explanations suggest several points. First, Doni seems to link his learning with preparation to teach. By focusing his teaching for test preparation, Doni's orientation of learning is also driven by studying the test questions. This teacher learning model has shifted the complex roles of teacher learning in adulthood learning concept. As adults, teachers are expected to learn in order to answer the challenges in community (Hager as cited in Gonczi, 2004; Merriam et al., 2007), however, teachers' focus on teaching for test preparation has changed their learning to a more practical orientation, which is to answer and predict the test questions. Second, Doni seems unaware that his teaching style does not really help his disadvantaged students to pass the exam, since the school is recognized as having a low students' passing grade.

Here, Doni is unable to see his students' failures on final examination as an important signal for him to reconsider his teaching practices and develop other more suitable methods for these disadvantaged students. His lack of ability to be aware of the students' problems (Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003), his traditional understanding of the role of teachers' teaching and learning (Sachs, 2003), and his negative belief towards disadvantaged students' ability (Collins as cited in Gorski, 2008) influence Doni's attitude towards learning. He seems to have low motivation to engage in learning practices to improve his teaching quality. He also lacks the motivation to learn about his pupils in order to understand their specific needs and to suit his teaching with these needs.

Doni seems trapped into technical and routine teaching (Day, 2004), in which he focuses on giving materials in the classroom and preparing students to pass the exam instead of engaging in deep thinking and reflection in order to evaluate and improve his teaching practices.

Another issue relates to teacher status as PNS/Non-PNS and certified teacher. This status has a huge impact on a teacher's economic wellbeing; therefore, being PNS or certified teacher would be most teachers' expectancy in Indonesia. However, to be granted PNS or certified teacher standing is a long process. Issues such as conspiracy, bureaucratic and discrimination color the process of being PNS and certified teacher. For example, teachers are required to collect certain points in order to get certified. The issue is, not all teachers can easily access the certification, as they need to attend pre-service trainings, workshops and conduct action research as requirements for certification.

The issue is more complicated especially for teachers from disadvantaged schools, as having opportunities to access trainings and doing research are rare and very expensive. There are some available supports from the government to invite teachers in training and seminars; however, teachers in this school do not get invitation to those training and seminars very often. Doni, the only *PNS* teacher at school, admits that the school and teacher status determine available training invitations for teachers. This discrimination towards non-*PNS* teachers at school has reduced their motivation to learn and improve the school quality, as they feel powerless to engage in professional learning without sufficient support from the government. The issues of discrimination and

powerlessness are central to teachers' learning in this research. The discrimination issue links to teachers' opportunities to participate in ongoing professional development while teachers' sense of powerlessness influences their ability to engage in developmental and transformative learning activities. Furthermore, for those who are already granted the certification, another issue raises. Doni, for example, is the only certified teacher in the school and he admits that he has been very busy to collect points for upgrading his teacher level.

> I'm currently a PNS teacher of level 4a and I need to increase my level to 4b. Therefore, I need to conduct at least one action research to increase my teaching level – as required by the government. I plan to study more about this action research through literature provided in a university, and I also need to start thinking of one topic to be written for my action research.

I need these training certificates to collect points for my teacher level. I already got 3 certificates from my last *MGMP* series, and will get the fourth one from the current *MGMP*…

> *MGMP* stands for Teachers' Meeting for Teaching Subject. It is an ongoing teacher training held in Doni's public school by the school district. It provides teachers with information of curriculum implementation in specific topics, various teaching methods that can be implemented in classroom and it also equips teachers with skills of planning, implementing, and reflecting for pedagogical practices.

If this *MGMP* does not provide a certificate, I don't think teachers are interested to attend *MGMP* or they will possibly still attend the training but with many absences, because our attendance is recorded to get the certificate. Furthermore, Doni explains that leveling up his teacher career will financially benefit him, as he will receive higher salary and bonuses. Linked to Sach's (2003) old teaching paradigm, Doni's focus of learning is centered on concerns to meet criteria required in teaching standardizations, curriculum or other government's standards in order to obtain additional benefits, including higher incentives or salary. This old paradigm of teacher learning would shift teachers' concerns of learning from improving quality and enhancing students' achievement to meeting technical standards in a teaching career.

**Other level.** This other level category refers to support available for teachers' learning through engagement in partnership programs with other organizations in society, including the school foundation and other organizations, such as universities, non-government organizations (NGOs), or companies.

It was mentioned before that the school is owned by a family foundation, however since the foundation faces many internal conflicts which then reduce its ability to run the school. Some teachers believe that although the school foundation has limited ability to support the school due to financial problem, the school foundation's support is still a significant factor for teachers and the school. Moreover, teachers also believe that small attention from the school foundation would psychologically influence them. Hadi explains,

> We really need emotional support and encouragement from the school foundation. They don't have to give us big money or salary, but just visiting us every month would be enough to know that we are not neglected.

Merriam et al. (2007) consider support as a central dimension in ALT. According to them, most participation in adult learning is voluntary, which means teachers' intrinsic motivation plays

a greater influence on their own learning. However, the impact of external support is also fundamental for teachers' learning to succeed. Various researches (Brandt, 1998 as cited in York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2001; Day, 2004; Gradet, 2006) highlight some external factors that need to be properly supported for improving participation in learning, including financial support, available time and opportunities for learning as well as social, emotional and personal support. Adequate support for these factors will promote a conducive learning environment for teachers.

*The Internal Factors*

The internal factors discuss factors related to teacher personal level, which include teachers' experience, characteristics related to learning, and perspective towards teaching and learning. Each factor will be discussed in the following paragraph. Teachers' experience is a crucial dimension in teacher learning. In discussion of ALT, Merriam et al. (2007) notice the importance of experience as a dimension in adult learning. The exploration of teachers' experience begins with the story of each teacher's first reason for becoming a teacher. Acknowledging teachers' first reason for becoming a teacher is important to see their motives in teaching and how these motives influence teachers' expectations to teach and develop (Lamb, 2006). All teachers in this research claim that teaching is not their preferred profession.

> "I never thought of becoming a teacher before. I had a dream to be an economist…unfortunately I had to bury my dream as I had no money to finish my study in economics", Hadi explains

> "…I canceled my dream for being an army and pursuing a teacher degree study instead to reduce cost…my parents had another child to support" Doni says

> "After quitting from my previous job and being unemployed for almost 6 months, I decided to teach rather than having no job at all", Ami argues

When looking at these reasons, it is very interesting that poverty issue becomes the background for these teachers to decide to be a teacher. Reasons such as financial constraints and job scarcity have forced these teachers to choose teaching for their final career. Therefore, the experience of poverty has been long accompanying these teachers, even from the beginning teachers start their profession. However, teachers' decision to stay teaching in disadvantaged condition is a great commitment, as there should be a long process of accepting the condition of poverty and keep working on it. All teachers learn to shift their negative experiences of being teacher into a more positive value by connecting it to religious concepts, such as seeing teacher profession as noble job from God or thanking God in order to accept and cope with their inevitable poverty.

According to Boud, Keogh and Walkers (1985, 1996), the ability to transform the negative feelings from previous experiences into positive beliefs would help teachers to survive in their learning process and even more to move onto a new learning process (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007). In this research, this religious belief seems to be an important factor that helps teachers to survive in their profession, yet not powerful enough to motivate teachers to engage in transformative learning. The issue of religiosity will be discussed more in next part about teacher's characteristics.

Exploration of teachers' experience is also done through experiences on pre-service and in-

service teacher education. In general, teachers' experiences in both pre-service and in- service teacher education have not given adequate knowledge and skill for teachers to teach in deprived condition. For example, Ami explains her experience in pre-service teacher education as follow:

All teacher candidates learn the same materials written in our teaching booklets, assuming that we all would face the same students and teach in the same school conditions. And the first time I came to this school, I felt completely helpless. I had no idea what to do. For example, I have to teach my orphaned students about the role of family members in this modern world. I have no option but to teach them about this topic unless they will fail in their test.

Teachers' sense of powerlessness to make amendments to the curriculum or to fulfill the specific needs of their poor students arouse the feeling of incompetency and therefore influence teachers' motivation to improve teaching practices. Similarly, teachers also receive limited opportunities to engage in various professional development activities to support teachers' learning, including portfolio, action research and lesson study. Doni is the only teacher who receives invitations for various professional development programs, such as training from the school district or the (public) school's partnership programs with several universities. According to Freppon (2001), teacher's opportunity to engage in professional development programs is fundamental for teacher learning. Furthermore, Freppon also links the concept of teachers' opportunity to learn with the importance of building a strong learning community in school. The aim of a learning community is to provide significant opportunities for teachers to engage in a strong learning culture at the school level. In other words, a professional learning community in school is a support system for teachers to engage in ongoing and collaborative learning activities with a goal of improving students' achievement.

The other internal factor emerges in research is teachers' characteristics related to learning. This factor can be grouped in two main characteristics, first is negative characteristics that can hinder learning to happen, and second is positive characteristic that can raise teachers' positive attitude towards their profession. One characteristic that are considered as negative factor is their powerlessness or lack of confidence in developing learning. According to Spicker (2007), vulnerability is common dimension that is always linked with poverty. People who live in poverty would always struggle to stay on their level; therefore, needs about change process would probably cause serious issue among them. As explained above that teachers' lack of confidence emerges due to their inferiority towards the status of non-PNS or uncertified teachers. Teachers' lack of confidence limits their ability to open themselves and build partnerships with other teachers, schools, or institutions.

Teachers' lack of confidence promotes an individualistic learning orientation among teachers in this disadvantaged school. Jonassen and Grabowski (1993) define this characteristic as a factor that arouses teachers' anxiety and frustration to engage in learning activities (as cited in Knowles et al., 2005). Another aspect that is considered as giving negative impact on teacher learning is their negative perceptions on students due to poverty. Thoughts such as blaming their students or cursing their disadvantaged condition for failures in teaching and learning. Teachers' inability to see their own weaknesses and blame all the conditions on external conditions would make teachers depend their learning motivation on external reasons. Lastly, there are some perspectives that are strongly held by teachers that come from old saying of the word "guru" (the word teacher in Indonesian language). The word guru stands for *"digugu lan ditiru."* Javanese language that means to be followed and to be imitated. This word leads to an understanding of the importance of teachers to be a good example for their students. Learning, therefore, is aimed to show teachers' expertise and increase their domination over the students. Hadi asserts,

I don't want to be defeated by my students and I don't want them to know earlier than me…I have to provide my students with answer for every question…that is the reason why I learn.

In summary, teachers' belief on digugu lan ditiru concept results in an understanding that teachers learn to acknowledge more information than their students and show their superiority in class.

However, there is one positive factor that is considered as a supporting factor in teachers' learning, which is religious belief. Teachers argue that although teaching in a disadvantaged school challenges them with many difficult issues to solve and often promotes frustration and powerlessness, they have faith that teaching for needy students is a "holy mandate" from God. Hadi, Kristin and Ami consider teaching as a part of their religious value since they can help and serve other people. Ahmed stresses the importance of giving thanks to God in order to accept and cope with all the condition of teaching in a disadvantaged school. In summary, this religious belief helps teachers to build moral purpose for teaching and cope with the issues of poverty in school. This religious belief does help teachers to build good coping ability to face the condition of poverty in school but does not necessarily encourage them to build developmental learning ability in order to improve teaching quality.

Merriam et al. (2007) suggest the spiritual dimension as an important factor in ALT. This dimension provides positive values for learners to develop learning. However, Merriam et al. highlight the importance of other factors, including supportive learning environment, to facilitate this spiritual dimension to become powerful sources of a developmental and transformative learning in adulthood.

### Relation with Learning

Interaction of each factor related to poverty context in the school results in various practices of teaching and learning. The concept of learning here is not limited only to concepts in adult learning theories, however it refers to any learning activities undertaken by teachers in the school. The reason of broadening the concept of learning in this section is to accommodate teachers' understanding about learning that might not relate to the concept of adult learning theory. Below is explanation of teachers' practices in learning resulted from analysis of poverty context in school.

*Individual Learning*

All teachers in this research admit that they never engage in professional sharing or discussions with other teachers within the school. Some reasons emerge from teacher interviews, such as teachers' excessive workloads in other schools and also different schedules that limit teachers' opportunities to meet each other. However, the main reason of this individual learning happens in school is because teachers' reluctance to share their ideas or thoughts due to the culture of silent that has been unconsciously created in a very long process.

Silent culture is a typical culture in poverty context that is resulted from the ignorance and negligence of the voices of the poor. All teachers in this school have long complained about their poverty condition, their lack of accesses and supports, and discriminations in policies and treatments that then never meet any solutions. This condition results in the feeling of powerlessness and discouragement and creates unwillingness to take action. Moreover, school's unsolved conflict in leadership has also contributed on issue of communication that then inhibits them to develop mutual and supportive collaborative learning culture at school.

*Formal Learning Orientation*

It is clear to see that most teachers in this school link their learning engagement with the focus of attending training sessions held by the school district or participating in formal teacher education programs. Such learning is called a formal learning orientation according to Mocker and Spear (1982) and Crowther (2000 as cited in Merriam et al., 2007). Merriam et al. note some national studies about formal and informal learning participation and conclude that almost all learning in adulthood is of participation in formal institutional training or education programs sponsored by the government, educational institutions or training provider companies. By this personal learning orientation, few teachers recognise the importance of informal learning embedded in their everyday lives, including personal reflection on daily teaching practices. Moreover, this bias of learning orientation closely relates with the issue of accountability or standardization in teacher professionalism (Sachs, 2003).

*Learning for Teaching Orientation*

All teachers seem to focus their learning for teaching orientation – the orientations to follow curriculum standards, to prepare teaching materials or to predict questions that emerge in national examinations. Kennedy (1999, p. 54) explains the concept of learning for teaching orientation that focuses on teachers' role as a teaching material deliverer in classroom, and therefore teachers are required to be knowledgeable in their teaching subject. This concept limits teachers' ability to see their teaching role in a broader sense as educators and also inhibits their engagement in ongoing professional learning. In this research, teachers' concern with learning for teaching preparation is also influenced by the cultural context of the teaching profession in society, in which the belief of teachers as *guru* (to be followed and to be imitated) results in an understanding that the role of learning for teachers is to make them become more intellectual in their teaching subject and able to fulfill the curriculum standards in teaching. Sachs (2003) considers the focus of learning for meeting the standards of curriculum or other formal requirements of the education system an old learning paradigm.

*Adaptive Learning*

As has been explained before that most teachers in this research lack the ability to engage in transformative and developmental learning (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2000), instead teachers' sense of powerlessness results in their efforts to accept and cope with all disadvantaged conditions. The concept of transformative and developmental learning is vital in ALT, as the philosophy of ALT highlights the importance of adults engaging in active and creative learning processes to make appropriate solutions for the issues in education by considering their social, cultural, and political contexts (Merriam et al., 2007; Mezirow, 2000).

Furthermore, Mezirow emphasises the importance of giving adequate support to enhance teachers' confidence to engage in powerful learning – which is considered as weak in this research. He argues (p. 25): Learning theory must recognize the crucial role of supportive relationship and a supportive environment in making possible a more confident, assured sense of personal efficacy, of having a self–or selves–more capable of becoming critically reflective of one's habitual and sometimes cherished assumptions, and of having the self-confidence to take action on reflective insights.

*The Story of Hadi's Learning*

Hadi is a unique subject in this research. He is the oldest teacher and most disadvantaged compared to other teachers. He has the longest experience of being teacher and decides unmarried

due to his poverty condition. Hadi becomes a teacher without a formal teacher education; therefore, he will never have opportunity to become PNS teacher or to be certified. Despite all his disadvantaged condition, he prefers to dedicate all his life for teaching at the school, although he knows that his teaching profession will not improve his economic level.

Hadi has big concern on his teaching. Although he started his teaching profession from unwillingness to be a teacher, but after that, he decides to be total in teaching.

As a teacher, I have to be total. I have to seriously prepare my teaching, because I want to give the best for my students. Therefore, I have to know more than my students by reading as much as I can. For me, it is very embarrassing if I could not answer my students' questions, as, my answer will encourage them to keep asking and develop their curiosity.

In order to improve his teaching, Hadi likes to ask feedbacks from his students. He considers feedbacks as important lever teacher should have in order to review their teaching impact on students' learning. Hadi also loves to read so much, he reads every book, because he believes that books enrich his knowledge. By reading, I'm step ahead of those who don't, and it really helps me to elaborate my thinking and elevate my teaching…I can't afford to buy books with my salary…I ask the school principal to subscribe a newspaper, so I can read every day…I read book review on newspaper and go to bookstores every week just to read books there

In relation with the school's context of poverty, Hadi argues that his concern is on improving students' motivation. Acknowledging that the impact of poverty is huge on students' resistance in pursuing higher education, Hadi puts more concern on students who have potency and willingness to continue their study in high school level.

I will motivate my students to continue their study at least until they finish high school, because they will get broader opportunity to work…our biggest challenge in this school is students' dropout number that keeps increasing every year…we suddenly miss some students without knowing their existence, and this bothers me…I will use personal approach to my students and guide them until they graduate from here and continue to high school…I'm very happy when knowing that my ex-students have finished their high school, get a job or even continue to the university level…I feel that I have done my job successfully.

It is very obvious that Hadi sees his success as teacher when he can make impact on students' life, and this is undoubtedly the aim of teacher learning. Students' learning improvement is the center of every teacher learning activities. Particularly in disadvantaged context, Haberman (2005) highlights the significance of teachers' engagement in critical reflection to identify the contextual factors that influence students' learning (as cited in Haberman et al., 2008).

In summary, Hadi shows a different learning orientation from other teachers who seeks more on certification matters or teacher status. He appears to have high internal motivation to learn for self-actualisation. Yet, this learning habit seems to bring less impact for Hadi to make progressive changes at school as he mostly engages in personal rather than collaborative learning. Hadi comments about collaborative learning as follow:

It is not an easy task to build discussions with other teachers. I like having discussions, but I have to carefully choose my partner in discussion, thus they will not consider me as being arrogant person. I had one teacher colleague who used to discuss with me, but he has moved to another school. Now, I like to place myself as a listener and keep myself to show off…sometimes discussion leads to conflict, because you tend to force your argument to others…

There seems to be misconception about the concept of sharing knowledge through teacher discussion, in which teacher is reluctant to be criticized or judged when involving in discussion. Moreover, communication issues become a significant factor to explain teachers' lack of opportunities to engage in collaborative learning. This creates a gap between teachers and thus arouses some negative feelings of distrust and competition (Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Cranton, 2006).

**Conclusion**

The issue of teachers' professional learning in a disadvantaged school in Indonesia is complex. Haberman (2005) argues the disadvantaged schools really need teachers who are highly committed to their own professional learning as a vehicle for change and improved quality of education in such schools (as cited in Haberman et al., 2008). However, most teachers in this research had difficulty in engaging in professional learning due to inadequate learning support from the government and the society. Inadequate learning support and opportunity are reported by teachers as contributing to their sense of powerlessness to develop as active and transformative learners. In ALT, the role of learning support is crucial to promoting adults' participation in learning (Cranton, 2006).

According to Merriam et al. (2007), support for learning is provided to create a positive learning environment, to supply the right learning materials, to guide the quality improvements, and to give ample opportunities for learners to engage in learning practices. In this research, teachers lacked the opportunities to engage in a comfortable and supportive learning environment due to issues related to poverty. The issue of leadership was also crucial in influencing teachers' attitudes towards learning and school quality improvement. Teachers implicitly stated that the school leaders seem to have small power to manage teachers' works and guide their improvements. Moreover, teachers also experienced discrimination in receiving financial aids from the government and opportunities to be involved in ongoing professional development programs promoted by the school district or other educational institutions. Given the lack of support for learning, it is not surprising that teachers in a disadvantaged school do not engage in ongoing professional learning in order to make significant change in school. A significant increase in support from the government, the school's leaders and the society in general is considered a crucial dimension that would influence the teachers in this research to engage in more powerful forms of professional learning that could ultimately enhance the school's context and outcomes for its students.

The context of poverty is another significant factor of influence on teachers' learning in this research. There are many contextual issues related to poverty that result in a negative impact on teachers' motivation and attitudes towards learning. Teachers experience difficulty in delivering quality teaching due to limitation of financial resources and poor school facilities. They face pressure from the society who labeled the school with negative stereotypes that gradually decreased the school's popularity in the community. They also experienced much frustration and anxiety from the students' misbehavior and underachievement, which further reduced their motivation to continuously improve their teaching quality. The significance of the level of poverty and the interaction between the poverty-related factors resulted in teachers not believing that they could make a difference to what they viewed as an unbreakable cycle.

This lack of agency for change leads to a sense of coping with current conditions rather than a commitment to make a change through their own personal learning and action. Interestingly, teachers seem to link their coping behavior with their religious value by accepting all the disadvantaged conditions through gratitude to God. Teachers' religious values are considered as a

positive characteristic in this research that enables teachers to teach with a moral purpose – helping disadvantaged students to get an education. However, this characteristic does not encourage teachers to build a transformative learning ability that requires them to be active, self-directed, creative, motivated and independent (Merriam et al., 2007; Mezirow, 2000). These learners' characteristics are highlighted in ALT to enable teachers to become a change agent in school but were not evident in the teacher in this research due to the complex nature of the poverty conditions.

Teachers' capacity to reflect and acknowledge the contextual factors that influence teaching practices is vital to make a significant change in school. Hoffman-Kipp et al. (2003) emphasize the importance of teachers in disadvantaged schools engaging in a critical reflection in order to acknowledge the issues of social justice that affect pedagogical practices. Recognition of contextual factors related to poverty should help teachers to develop and improve teaching practices more suited to specific needs of disadvantaged schools and students. However, teachers in this research rarely spent their time in engaging in critical reflection in order to identify the contextual factors that influence educational outcomes at school. And as with other research findings, teachers continued to blame their poverty conditions, including criticizing their students' low achievement, thus concealing their inability to bring a quality change at school (Day, 1999). This external locus of control limits teachers' ability to engage in self-reflection practices in order to evaluate their personal weaknesses and strengths (Gordon, 2006).

There are two other factors that also inhibit teachers' ability to engage in critical reflection in this research. First, teachers' excessive workload in other schools has been noted as an obstacle for teachers to engage in personal or group reflections. Limited time is a common issue as Rodgers (2002) and Day (2004) argue with the high teaching demands often trapping teachers into routines and technical work and thus overlooking the importance of engaging in deep thinking about their teaching practices. Teachers in this research seem unaware of the central role of reflection as a process to assist in addressing critical issues of poverty, teaching quality and improved student behavior and outcomes (Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003; Merriam et al., 2007).

In addition, teachers' focus on learning for meeting formal requirements of the system (i.e. curriculum standards) or fulfilling the role as a *guru* have lead to an orientation of learning for teaching preparation rather than on student needs. Teachers were focused on learning for improving their teaching knowledge, preparing teaching materials, meeting standards in national examinations and curriculum, or enhancing their teacher career or prospects. This suggests teachers lacked the awareness of the importance of teacher learning for improving students' achievement (Deojay & Pennington, 2004; Peery, 2004; Rodgers, 2002).

Rather, teachers in this disadvantaged school are likely to focus their learning on satisfying their personal or professional benefit. Furthermore, teachers' concern of learning for meeting formal requirements of the system promotes a task oriented approach to learning rather than viewing learning as a way to support the challenges faced by their students and society in general (Merriam et al., 2007; Sachs, 2003).   However, it is difficult to expect the teachers in this research to shift their learning orientation when the government's focus is still heavily weighted towards certification.

An interesting outcome in this research was teachers' preference for engaging in individual rather than collaborative learning. Teachers' lack of confidence about their non- *PNS* or uncertified teacher status was cited as a factor that raised anxiety levels about engaging with colleagues in teacher discussions and reflection (Jonassen & Grabowski as cited in Knowles et al., 2005). There are also some misconceptions about teacher collaboration that result from the issues of limited communication at school. Teachers seemed to have a lack of quality time to share their reluctance

to engage in teacher collaborations or group discussions, rather believing that engaging in individual learning would avoid them from having conflicts with their colleagues. Once again it appeared that the teachers in this research lacked awareness of the importance of teacher collaboration in solving school-based issues (Collinson and Cook, 2004; Goodnough, 2005; Kelly, 1999). Limited knowledge of the power of collaborative learning together with a lack of support for learning and anxiety about their status has resulted in the teachers in this research engaging in isolated learning (Collinson and Cook, 2004) which in turn limits the opportunities for school improvement and enhanced outcomes for students.

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