

Mapping Primary School Leadership in a Post-Conflict Context

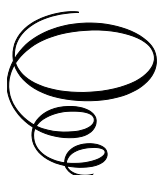
Mapping Primary School Leadership in a Post-Conflict Context:

The Case of Timor-Leste

By

Shayla Maria Babo Ribeiro,
Simon Clarke
and Tom O'Donoghue

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAVR	Timor-Leste Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation – <i>Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade e Reconciliação de Timor-Leste</i>
CNRT	National Council of Timorese Resistance – <i>Conselho Nacional da Resistência Timorense</i>
CFS	Child Friendly Schools
EBC	Basic Education Central – <i>Ensino Basico Central</i>
EBF	Basic Education Filial – <i>Ensino Basico Filial</i>
EFA	Education For All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FALINTIL	The Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor – <i>Forças Armadas da Libertação de Timor-Leste</i>
FRETILIN	The Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor – <i>Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente</i>
GoTL	Government of Timor-Leste
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
INFORDEPE	National Institute for Training of Teachers and Education Professionals – <i>Instituto Nacional de Formação de Docentes e Profissionais de Educação</i>
INTERFET	International Force East Timor
JAM	Joint Assessment Mission
MECYS	Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports (Timor-Leste)
MoE	Ministry of Education, Timor-Leste
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PCD	Primary Curriculum Development
PLMP	Professional Learning and Mentoring Program
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SDP	Strategic Development Plan
RDTL	Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
TNI	Indonesian National Armed Forces – <i>Tentara Nasional Indonesia</i>
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNMIT	United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor

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ABSTRACT

Based on the premise that leadership can only be understood within the context in which it is exercised, the study reported in this book aimed to develop an understanding of leadership at the primary school level in the post-conflict and developing country of Timor-Leste. In particular, it investigated the historical background to, and recent developments in relation to primary school leadership, as well as the current concerns encountered by primary school leaders and the strategies adopted by them in order to deal with those concerns. A review of the school leadership literature indicated that it has been dominated by perspectives generated from western and conflict-free environments. At the same time, there has been a dearth of research and associated literature relating to leadership at the individual school level in post-conflict societies. Similarly, only a limited corpus of research exists on school level leadership in developing countries. The study reported in this book is one contribution to addressing these deficits.

The reported study was guided by the theoretical underpinnings of interpretivism. It employed qualitative methods of data collection, including semi-structured interviews, document analysis and unstructured non-participant observations.

The results pertaining to the historical background to primary school leadership in East Timor from colonial times to 2002 revealed that promoting and/or developing Timorese primary school leadership was not an education objective of the three distinct foreign administrations (Portugal from approximately 1515 to 1975, Indonesia from 1975 to 1999, and UNTAET from 1999 to 2002) in East Timor. The results pertaining to the recent developments in relation to primary school leadership in Timor-Leste from 2002 to 2016, revealed that there were some developments aimed at increasing access and improving the quality of Basic Education, while simultaneously recognising the important role that effective primary school leadership has in sustainable and incremental improvements of the education system. The results pertaining to the current concerns encountered by primary school leaders in Timor-Leste, revealed that they encounter challenges related to 'teaching and learning', 'infrastructure', and 'leadership development'. Some of these can be attributed to the

legacies of historical foreign administrations and war, while others are better understood in relation to the context of a country that is transitioning from post-conflict stabilisation to development. The reported study also revealed several strategies that are pursued by Timorese primary school leaders in order to deal with their concerns.

Overall, the book is pertinent to the academic literature and future research on educational leadership. It also outlines implications for policy development and practice. In particular, these should be useful for researchers in the field of educational leadership, for school leaders, for education policy makers, and for those in charge of preparing, developing, and implementing professional development programmes for primary school leaders in Timor-Leste, as well as in other post-conflict and developing countries.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Principal leadership is a critical component in the quest for school effectiveness and improvement internationally (Bush & Glover, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Furthermore, in various difficult circumstances, the role of school principals can become even more crucial as they often constitute the leading body charged with initiating positive change to ensure that there are improvements in learning (Alam, 2017). The study reported in this book relates to one such circumstance. It investigated primary school leadership in post-conflict Timor-Leste; primary school leaders have enormous responsibilities in all countries, but in the unique context of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, the country has, and continues to face, exceptionally challenging obstacles.

The name of the nation, ‘Timor-Leste’, is sometimes a vexed issue in English language usage. The long established use of ‘East Timor’ in its stead, however, conflicts with the nation’s official name (Leach, 2017). Accordingly, this book uses the official name of Timor-Leste to refer to the post-2002 nation state, and East Timor, when referring to the pre-2002 territory.

The nation-building challenges have been substantial in Timor-Leste (Leach, 2017). It is a country in transition from ‘post-conflict stabilisation’ to ‘development’. After the 1999 crisis when Indonesia violently withdrew, the education system was left particularly vulnerable. The violence that then gripped the country virtually destroyed an already weak education system. Rampant pro-Indonesia and anti-independence militia wrecked most public buildings, including schools. Indeed, the majority of schools were razed or demolished. The few schools still standing were looted, stripped of all furniture, roofs, doors and window frames, and largely dismantled.

Against this backdrop of destruction, the Government of Timor-Leste (GoTL) and its international donor partners have since faced

substantial challenges in their efforts to rebuild the education sector. An important related issue that policy makers are addressing and which is of significance to the study featured in this book is that of school leadership and teacher management. In this connection, the quality of a school leader can have an impact on the motivation of teachers. This, in turn, can affect the quality of teaching and students' performance (Barth, 1990; Fullan, 1992; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). In addition, as Robbins and Alvy (1995) pointed out over 20 years ago, "policy makers, practitioners, and parents" (p. 1) have long regarded leadership as key to improving education.

Despite a growing realisation that school leadership is important for school effectiveness and improvement, however, little is known about the nature of the context within which school leaders work in post-conflict societies (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2013) and in developing countries (Oplatka, 2004). The study reported here provides one contribution to this area. In particular, it serves to deepen understanding of how cultural context and politics can inform school leadership in post-conflict societies.

Beginning with a description of the post-conflict transition in Timor-Leste, the remainder of this chapter explains the aims of the study. It goes on to provide an excerpt from an interview with a participant, explaining how he, an 'ordinary' Timorese man, became a primary school leader. The justification for the study is then offered. This is followed by a brief description of the research methodology utilised and of the three central research questions that guided the conduct of the study.

1.2 Post-conflict transition

The trail of your passing

You silenced my reason, in the reason of your law
 You suffocated my culture, in the culture of your culture
 You smothered my revolts, at the tip of your bayonet
 You tortured my body, in the shackles of your empire
 And subjugated my soul, in the faith of your religion
 Shackled, murdered, massacred, pillaged
 My land, my people, bathed in blood
 Expelled, drained barbarously civilised in the demagoguery of your struggle
 Brutally colonised in your ambition to greatness
 The tip of the bayonet, marks the trail of your passing
 At the tip of my bayonet, I will mark history in the form of my Liberation
 —Francisco Borja da Costa (cited in Leach, 2017, p. 54).

The history of Timor-Leste is marked by violence, civil unrest and a legacy of underfunding and neglect. All of these have had the cumulative effect of leaving the country with a weak and fragile education sector. On 30 August 1999, 78.5 percent of the voting population voted by means of a direct, secret and universal ballot to begin a process of sovereignty involving separation from Indonesia. The process leading to formal recognition of an independent nation culminated on 20 May 2002, when the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste became the newest nation of the 21st century.

The 1999 ballot results immediately sparked mass violence by pro-Indonesia and anti-independence militias, causing the displacement of thousands of people living in the territory at the time. The violence resulted in destruction of the vast majority of the physical infrastructure and a complete institutional collapse. In addition, it continued after the vote for independence and had a catastrophic impact on the education system in place at the time. Indeed, researchers estimated that up to 90 percent of the schooling infrastructure was destroyed as the Indonesians left (Dodd, 2000; UNCESO, 2003; UNICEF, 2001). Additionally, 20 percent of primary school teachers, many of them Indonesian, departed the education system (Butcher et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2010; World Bank, 2004).

The immediate response by the United Nations (UN) and other international development partners was to return students quickly to schools, to rebuild school facilities and to recruit teachers to fill the void. Many buildings were reconstructed in haste, leading the World Bank (2004, p. 32) to conclude that although “over 80 percent of the country’s classrooms were restored and useable within 18 months of their destruction, many schools were not in good condition by 2003”. “In many schools”, it went on, “there were no windows that could be closed to prevent rain from sweeping across the room, making the classrooms unusable during the monsoon season. Most classrooms were dark, as few schools had electricity”. In addition, the rush to fill schools led to many teachers being recruited without appropriate pedagogical or educational backgrounds (Nicolai, 2004). In this connection, the World Bank (2004, p. 29) noted that:

Timorese teachers were poorly prepared for their profession for two reasons. First, under the Portuguese and Indonesian administrations, people with limited academic backgrounds were able to enter the profession, which resulted in serious issues of quality. From this pool came the current stock of primary school teachers. Second, due to

historical under-investment in education, the pool of well-educated people in the country as a whole is extremely small, and even fewer are qualified to teach. Several attempts to recruit teachers through examinations have yielded only a very limited number.

Statistics provided by the national Ministry of Education (MoE), Timor-Leste, also indicated that the vast majority of teachers were either unqualified or underqualified for the duties they were expected to perform (MoE, 2011).

Furthermore, primary school leadership was not a priority education objective of the three foreign administrations that operated historically, in other words, Portuguese colonisation, Indonesian military occupation, and the United Nations Transitional Administration (UNTAET), or in the nascent years of independent Timor-Leste. Nevertheless, developments more recently have taken place in relation to primary school leadership. Moreover, the results of the study reported later in this book specifically pertaining to the current concerns encountered by school leaders suggest that these personnel are most concerned with issues related to teaching and learning, school infrastructure, and with lack of opportunities for leadership development. They also reveal a range of strategies that are pursued by school leaders to deal with their concerns, some of which are directly attributable to the legacies of war and violence. Other strategies have been developed because of the demands of the relatively new government navigating policies aimed at achieving a middle-income economy by 2030.

In line with the latter aim, the national MoE has taken action to address the ongoing challenges of the primary education sector, known officially as Basic Education in Timor-Leste. The *National Education Strategic Plan 2011-2030* (MoE, 2011) has highlighted management reform as being an integral part of the overall associated strategy. Having effectively gained political independence only in 2002 and having lost many of its key education managers in the flight to Indonesia prior to that, this situation is understandable. It also explains why management structures and capacity are still in their formative stages.

Capacity for policymaking, planning, programme development and teacher management are elements of the development support provided. As part of this, international donor partners have given capacity building support, including assisting with the design of management roles and skills, and teacher management, all of which are geared towards improved delivery of service (MoE, 2011). Additionally, a number of

measures have been undertaken to improve the skills and professionalism of teachers and school principals working in the primary schools. For example, the legal regime for the administration and management of the Basic Education system and the Statute of the Teaching Career, which were both approved in 2010, represent a major step forward and resulted in an improvement in the quality of education.

The national MoE also developed a *Teacher Training Competency Framework* (Journal da República, 2010) specifying the skills, attributes and qualities of a professional teacher and offering a series of intensive training courses to unqualified teachers. Furthermore, the national MoE has drafted the *School Based Management Manual* (I1.EO.D.JAC) and the *School Based Management Self-Assessment Instrument* (I1.EO.D.JAC) in contributing towards school improvements. However, challenges in the Basic Education system of Timor-Leste remain. In this connection, because of limited government capacity to institute and implement many policy changes, actual shifts in teacher practices and attitudes have been slow (Shah, 2009). Opportunities also for training tailored to the specific needs of teachers and school leaders have been virtually non-existent (Shah, 2009). In addition, Shah (2009) has noted that many teachers in remote schools often have to travel great distances to administrative posts (regional centres) or to the capital city, Dili, to participate in professional development programmes, with deleterious effects on student learning in the interim.

1.3 Aims of the study

The study reported later in this book sought to understand leadership at the primary school level in post-conflict Timor-Leste. It had three aims. The first aim was to generate an understanding of the historical background to leadership at the primary school level in East Timor from Portuguese colonisation (1515 to 1975), during the Indonesian military occupation (1975 to 1999), and during the UNTAET period (1999 to 2002). This was deemed important not only because such history is interesting in its own right, but also because contemporary issues are more easily understood and interpreted when the past is taken into consideration (Aldrich, 1996). Analogously, one cannot understand school leadership issues and practices in Timor-Leste without an understanding of how education in the country has evolved over the years. Therefore, a description and analysis of events and policies that governed the way primary schools were historically led were also undertaken.

Secondly, the study sought to generate an understanding of developments that have taken place in relation to primary school leadership, in post-conflict Timor-Leste, from 2002 to 2016. The rationale behind the pursuit of this aim arose out of a recognition that it is enlightening to know what the Timor-Leste government did to resuscitate and develop the primary education system, and, in particular, to shape primary school leadership after the country gained formal independence in 2002.

The third aim of the reported study was to generate an understanding of the issues of current concern to primary school leaders in Timor-Leste, and of the strategies adopted by them in order to deal with those issues. The justification for pursuing this aim is that primary school leaders' concerns play an important role in guiding their actions. In similar vein, it is arguable that any attempt to improve primary school leaders' leadership could fail if these concerns were overlooked.

1.4 An example of the path to school leadership

In an attempt to provide insight into how one ordinary Timorese man rose to become a primary school principal in Timor-Leste, a summary of an interview response follows:

I have been a leader in schools for many years. During the Portuguese colonial rule, I was a native here and in 1974, I graduated from my studies and at the same time I started to teach at this school, until the Indonesian invasion in 1975. When the war happened, I ran to the jungle and there I taught the alphabet to people who didn't know how to read and write. I also taught older people like grandparents. I taught in the jungle for three years from 1975 to 1978. I taught in Tetum.

Then in 1979, the Indonesian army captured us from the jungle and we could not run or hide, so then we were sent back to the city. The Indonesian army took us to the central village camp. At the same time, Indonesian soldiers were looking for teachers to teach the local people, so the community pointed out the teachers who had been teaching during Portuguese colonial rule. It was really difficult to teach people in a new language and it was a different teaching method under Indonesian occupation. Because we were afraid to die, we just followed the Indonesian commands to teach using the Indonesian language and curriculum. I taught in Bahasa Indonesia from 1979 to 1999 and from 1983 to 1999, I was elected as the leader of this school.

At the time of the vote in 1999, on referendum day, I placed my vote and then I again fled to the jungle where we hid for two months. When I came back to the town, the Indonesian teachers who had taught here had all returned to Indonesia, so only the Timorese teachers who had taught during Portuguese colonial rule and during Indonesian time were left.

There were only a few teachers and students left at this school. Then in 1999, we started to gather the students who were in Grade 1 to Grade 9 in one place and we provided them with general training programmes using the Portuguese language that we knew because the Indonesians had gone and we did not want to use the Indonesian language. At the time, we taught the students in general and we didn't distinguish which students were in Grade 1 or Grade 5 or Grade 9. Then in 2000 and 2001, we started to separate students based on their Grade level.

Then during the UNTAET period, we started to do administration management in Timor-Leste. When the Minister for Education was appointed, all the teachers started to teach again, but the schools and the educational materials were all destroyed. So, we taught the students in the places that we felt comfortable, for example, under the trees was sufficient for us to teach. During this time, we did not have educational materials to use; we didn't have chalk or a blackboard because sadly the Indonesian army destroyed everything before they left. So we did our best to teach, despite the difficulties we faced, and then when UNICEF came to this country, they helped us with a lot of educational materials such as books, notepads, tables, chairs, blackboards, chalk, pens, pencils and other things. We felt very grateful that UNICEF was able to help us. UNICEF did not just help the schools; they also helped to provide some school materials to the students.

From about 2001 until 2005, we used a temporary curriculum. The curriculum was adapted from the Indonesian one. The Minister for Education at the time gathered people together who had graduated with a Bachelor degree for a meeting. During our discussions, it was decided to use the Indonesian curriculum temporarily and then in 2002, it was approved that we should use that curriculum until we had to change to the new Timorese curriculum. The Timorese curriculum has been modified over the years and it is the curriculum that we are using now.

The above testimony highlights the daily challenges that school leaders and teachers alike encountered in a post-conflict Timor-Leste immediately after the withdrawal of the Indonesian military occupation from the territory. Reflections by others are described in Chapter 7, which provides an exposition of the current concerns of primary school leaders and the strategies adopted by them to deal with those concerns.

Based on the results of the study featured in this book, it can be argued that some of the education challenges that were prevalent immediately after independence in 2002, are still evident. Macpherson and his colleagues (2011), for example, interviewed school leaders in remote villages of Timor-Leste and argued in response to what was seen and heard, that school principals across the country could significantly improve their effectiveness if some simple changes were made. These included having a generic job description for school leaders, annual induction/professional development workshops in educational management and educational leadership skills, training in building effective relationships with students, parents and teachers, increasing school grants to better meet the learning needs of students, implementing educational leadership training into research-based degree programmes, and introducing salary incentives to match responsibilities and to encourage a professional leadership service. The study reported in this book also indicates that some of the primary school leadership challenges identified by Macpherson et al., (2011) continue to be valid.

1.5 Justification for the study

Undertaking the study reported here on primary school leadership in post-conflict Timor-Leste has proven to be important and relevant for both academic and practical reasons. Amongst these is that, first, the quality of school leadership is critical to achieving the all-round development of children. Secondly, such leadership is fundamental to achieving universal compulsory primary education.

In Timor-Leste, achieving universal primary education requires, among other factors, that primary schools throughout the country are also effectively led. The importance of this requirement is amplified by the significance of school leadership. In this regard, the role of 'quality' school leadership in promoting students' learning and organisational/school success is clear from the results of educational leadership research (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003; Watson, 2009). Other benefits include promoting the alleviation of poverty and economic development (Hannum & Buchmann, 2005). Psacharopoulos (1985) referred to these benefits over 30 years ago when he pointed out that primary education is the most profitable educational investment opportunity that exists in developing countries.

The all-round development of children can also lead to the promotion of peace and tolerance that are desperately needed in a post-

conflict society like Timor-Leste. As Paulson (2011b) has pointed out, the provision of education in such settings is crucial to promoting reconciliation and peace building. The World Bank (2005) also commented on this as follows:

Education has a critical role to play in the wider reconstruction of the society, from building peace and social cohesion to facilitating economic recovery and getting the country on to an accelerated development track (p. 27).

An additional justification for investigating school leadership in post-conflict Timor-Leste relates to Clarke and O'Donoghue's (2013) call for more research into school leadership in post-conflict societies. They (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2013) have pointed out that very little empirical research has been undertaken on the status of school leadership in such settings. This observation suggests that there are not enough examples of school leadership in post-conflict societies that can be drawn upon to help develop theoretical models for informing leadership development within them.

The lack of attention devoted to primary school leadership in post-conflict situations is particularly attributable to the neglect by scholars of the importance of considering context and its influence on leadership practices. Indeed, the role of contextual influences in informing leadership practices has seldom been taken into account. As Vroom and Jago (2007, p. 22) have argued, "the field of leadership has been identified more closely with the field of individual differences and has largely ignored the way the behaviour of leaders is influenced by the situations they encounter". Nearly a quarter of a century ago Gronn and Ribbins (1996) made a similar point in calling for further research aimed at elucidating the relationship between school leadership and cultural, situational, and historical contexts. Partly, this can be seen as having been a response to a related consideration that studies on context in leadership have the benefit of generating local knowledge that can temper reliance on western knowledge and principles of leadership that may not be applicable to all situations (Miller, 1985).

There are also some practical justifications for undertaking the study reported here. In particular, it can help provide insights to guide and refine educational leadership practices in Timor-Leste and elsewhere. This suggestion aligns with Harber and Dadey's (1993) point expressed over 20 years ago when they argued that it is desirable to understand the issues and problems faced by school leaders operating in different contexts in order

to design leadership development programmes that meet their real, rather than imagined, needs.

1.6 Research methodology

The study featured in this book aimed to generate theory on leadership at the primary school level (known officially as Basic Education) in post-conflict Timor-Leste. Basic education is compulsory and is seen to have the potential to make a positive contribution to economic and social change in the country. It is defined as the first nine years of school (from Grade 1 through to Grade 9).

Three aspects of primary school leadership that are closely interrelated were investigated, namely, the historical background to primary school leadership in East Timor; recent developments in relation to primary school leadership in Timor-Leste; and the issues of current concern to primary school leaders there, and the strategies that they adopt to deal with these concerns. The research was guided by the theoretical underpinnings of the interpretivist paradigm. The term paradigm here refers to “a set of assumptions about the world and what constitutes the proper techniques and topics for inquiring into the world” (Punch, 2009, p. 16).

The interpretivist paradigm was chosen for the study because ‘interpretation’ seeks to reveal the meanings that people bring to their situations and actions, which they use to understand their world (O’Donoghue, 2007). The meanings are created through social interactions. Accordingly, they have to be understood and interpreted within the context of the social practices in which they are embedded. Understanding these meanings can lead to an understanding of the social phenomena (O’Donoghue, 2007).

Grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis, consistent with the interpretivist paradigm (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011) were employed. The essence of grounded theory analysis is to generate conceptually abstract categories grounded in the data through a process of abstraction in which concepts are inductively inferred and designated to stand for categories induced from the raw data (Punch, 2014). The outcome of using this approach to analysis is often a set of propositions showing connections between concepts, which are more abstract than the data themselves (Punch, 2014).

Consistent with the interpretivist paradigm, qualitative methods of data collection were used, including semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observations. Purposive sampling and maximum variation sampling were the strategies employed for the selection of schools and interview participants. The latter consisted of primary school leaders, representatives of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in schools, and education officials.

In line with the grounded theory approach, data gathering and analysis were undertaken simultaneously (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The researcher went back and forth between the participants, gathered new data and then returned to the evolving theory to fill in the gaps and to elaborate on it (Creswell, 2013). In doing this, she was able to choose participants based on the emerging concepts and to validate the concepts developed (Merriam, 2009). Further, the data were analysed using grounded theory approaches, specifically the use of constant comparison through the ‘open coding’ method.

1.7 The three central research questions

The study reported in subsequent chapters was undertaken by focussing on the three central research questions described below.

1.7.1 First research question

What is the historical background to primary school leadership in East Timor from colonial times to 2002? The pursuit of this question was premised on the assumption that it is not possible to broadly comprehend current primary school leadership in Timor-Leste without a clear knowledge of how it has evolved over time. To put it another way, contemporary issues are more easily understood and interpreted when the past is taken into consideration (Aldrich, 1996). Further, the past regularly has an impact on the present in various ways, including through influencing people’s actions.

A description and analysis of the historical background to primary school leadership from Portuguese colonisation (1515 to 1975), to Indonesian military occupation (1975 to 1999), and during the UNTAET period (1999 to 2002) are provided. In order to construct the exposition data were primarily identified through a review of a wide range of public records and documents, an approach consistent with qualitative research

(Merriam, 2009). An interpretivist frame was applied to examine and gain insights from the data. Regarding this approach, Greene (1994) has explained that document review is a method that is highly consonant with the interpretivist approach to research.

Relevant documents examined included those related to education policies, those on websites, official statistics, regulations and legislation, as recommended by Fitzgerald (2012) and documents, books and published strategic plans as recommended by Savin-Baden and Major (2013). Data were also gathered from national MoE reports and papers, scholarly articles, as well as documents and reports published on official donor websites.

1.7.2 Second research question

What developments have occurred in post-conflict Timor-Leste in relation to primary school leadership from 2002 to 2016? The rationale behind the pursuit of this question arose out of a recognition that it is instructive to know what the GoTL did to resuscitate and develop primary school education and, in particular, to shape primary school leadership after the country officially gained its independence on 20 May 2002. Thus, a description and analysis of developments in relation to recent developments in primary school leadership from 2002 to 2016 are provided.

In addressing this question, an interpretivist frame was again applied, this time with the objective of examining and interpreting the wide range of contemporary and official records and documents located. These data were gathered by the same methods outlined for the previous research question. They were also supplemented by semi-structured interview questions, conducted with education officials in Timor-Leste.

1.7.3 Third research question

What are the current concerns of primary school leaders in Timor-Leste, and the strategies adopted by them to deal with those concerns? It is likely that education policy and decision making in Timor-Leste can benefit from being informed by an understanding of the issues that are of current concern to primary school leaders and of the strategies adopted by them in order to deal with the daily complexities of their work. The reason for pursuing this matter is that primary school leaders' concerns play an important role in guiding their actions and any attempt to improve primary school leaders' leadership could fail if these concerns were overlooked.

Accordingly, a description and analysis of the concerns and the strategies adopted by school leaders to deal with the issues they encounter in their schools are provided.

Once again, the interpretivist paradigm guided this part of the investigation. A series of semi-structured interviews was conducted with primary school leaders, representatives of PTAs, and education officials. The use of interviews involved the development of open-ended questions, which were posed to all participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). It gave flexibility to the interviews, such that it was possible to be responsive to what participants said and to follow up points, to vary the order of questions, to follow up leads, and to clear up inconsistencies in answers (Bryman, 2013).

The selection of participants for interviewing in relation to research question three was based on two notions, namely, purposive sampling and maximum variation sampling (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Participants were primary school leaders and PTA representatives from 14 government-run schools in Timor-Leste. In addition, education officials with knowledge of primary school education policy were chosen to participate. Individual interviews were conducted in each school selected. Identification of individual participants was also based on their potential to generate further insights about the current concerns of primary school leaders and how they deal with their concerns.

The schools selected to participate in the study are located in two municipalities of Timor-Leste. They are 'Basic Schools' characterised by the national MoE as being large and modern and providing education for the three cycles of Basic Education (Grade 1 to Grade 4; Grade 5 to Grade 6; and Grade 7 to Grade 9). Medium size 'Filial Schools' which are characterised as being traditional primary schools, and providing education for the 1st and 2nd cycles only (Grade 1 to Grade 4; and Grade 5 to Grade 6) (MoE, 2011) were also selected.

This introductory chapter has presented synopsis of the study that is featured in this book. Attention is now turned to providing an overview of the broad context of the Basic Education system and primary school leadership in Timor-Leste.

CHAPTER TWO

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the unique context in which Basic Education and primary school leadership in Timor-Leste exist. For this purpose, the primary school system in Timor-Leste is first described. The Basic Education policy is then summarised. This is followed by a discussion of the primary school cluster-based system, the management structure of primary schools, and the composition of primary school leaders. The remaining sections deal with, international perspectives on colonisation and education, education in post-conflict societies generally, and common challenges for education during conflict.

2.2 Primary school education system

In order to contextualise some of the views on education found in sections of the primary school system in Timor-Leste, it is useful to examine Basic Education in the country. The background to this system is that after emerging from a long struggle for independence and internal conflicts, Timor-Leste has, with the support of its international donor partners, made substantial progress towards restoring stability and rebuilding the country. In 2011, the GoTL launched its Strategic Development Plan (SDP) to transform the country into one with a middle-income economy by 2030. It recognises that education and training are fundamental to improving the life opportunities of the Timorese people as well as being vital to Timor-Leste's economic development and growth (World Bank, 2013). In this connection, the country's *National Education Strategic Plan 2011 – 2030*, which underpins the SDP, states:

In 2025, the population of Timor-Leste will be educated, knowledgeable and qualified to live a long and productive life, respectful of peace, family and positive traditional values. All individuals will have the same opportunities to access a quality education that will allow them to participate in the economic, social and political development process,

ensuring social equity and national unity (MoE, 2011, p. 7).

In the same plan, in relation to Basic Education, it is stated:

Basic Education is universal, compulsory and free. The reform of Basic Education will incorporate overall and guiding directives based on the following four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and with others, and learning to be (MoE, 2011, p. 9).

At six years of age, all children will have access to Basic Education. After completing nine years of schooling, they will excel in both official languages and learn English as their first foreign language. They will also develop sound literacy and numeracy skills, and acquire the base competencies and the core values of national unity, Timorese history and culture (MoE, 2011, p. 9).

Furthermore, the national MoE has sought to take a holistic approach to improving primary school education with the 'Escola Basica' concept that purports to provide an integral vision to achieving the Basic Education outcomes and targets, including by means of substantially improving the quality of education outcomes, achieving full enrolment, and reducing dropouts, and ensuring that providing quality education for all is affordable and sustainable (MoE, 2011). To this end, the *National Education Strategic Plan 2011 – 2030* states that from an education point of view, important changes will be introduced to the concept of what a primary school should be and how it should work. In order to replace 'outdated' paradigms inherited from the years of Indonesian occupation it will be a school system that:

- Places the child's physical, psychological, social and academic wellbeing at the centre of all school decision-making and operations to ensure the provision of a quality and relevant education.
- Ensures that every child regardless of gender, social or economic status, ethnicity, race, physical or mental ability has a right to, and receives, a quality education.
- Embraces the rights of each child and those who facilitate their rights, to have a say in the form and substance of their education.
- Provides quality education for all children from year one to year nine.
- Is seen by the community as a school whose education

practices are model practices (MoE, 2011, p. 79).

The GoTL, through the MoE, has also set an ambitious reform agenda for Basic Education in its pursuit of moving the country towards having a middle-income economy by 2030.

2.3 Basic Education policy

The Education Act of Timor-Leste (RDTL, 2008) established that Basic Education should last for nine years (with the official entry age being six years and continuing through to 14 years of age) and is universal, mandatory, and free in the sense that there are no school fees, charges and emoluments related to enrolments, attendance and certification. Primary school students are also able to use available schoolbooks and materials free of charge. In addition, transport, food and lodging may be provided, when necessary. Furthermore, the National Education Act, Article 12 states that Basic Education seeks to:

- a) Ensure the full educational development of all children and young people, through the development of the following four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and with others, and learning to be.
- b) Ensure a common basic general instruction for all Timorese, allowing for the discovery and development of their interests and skills, reasoning capacity, memory and critical spirit, creativity, moral sense and aesthetical sensitivity, promoting individual self-actualisation, in harmony with the values of social solidarity and interrelating. This education balances theory and practice, knowing and doing in the context of general as well as school culture.
- c) Enable the acquisition and development of basic competencies and knowledge to enable the further pursuit of studies or the insertion of the student in professional training schemes, as well as facilitating the acquisition and development of personal and group work methods and instruments, valorising the human dimension of work.
- d) Ensure the mastery of Portuguese and Tetum languages.
- e) Enable the learning of a first foreign language.
- f) Enable physical and motor development, valorise manual activities and artistic education, to raise awareness of the various forms of aesthetic expression and detect and stimulate aptitudes in these domains.