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3 MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

The Indonesian society is marked by many ethnic groups, many diverse cultures and a variety of religions and beliefs. Therefore, in our pluralistic society, intercultural and interreligious dialog is a necessity for building together the society of peace and fraternity desired by all Indonesian people. However, conflict between ethnics and religious sometimes happens in some places in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the fundamentalism and radicalism have arisen, adding the complexity of the problems. The minority groups, like Ahmadis, Shiites, Protestant, Catholic and Chinese, have become the target of the extremists or the fundamentalists. In these situations, we need to develop multicultural education to educate young people to have an openness and inclusive attitude towards diversity and pluralism. Therefore we need to have a new paradigm in developing national education based on multicultural education. This kind of education will help each Indonesian citizen to develop an openness and inclusive attitude so that we can live together in harmony and peace and work together in building the Indonesian nation towards Indonesian civil society.

Keywords: *Pancasila*, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, pluralistic society, religious conflict, radicalism, multicultural education, national education, civil society

1. Introduction

7 Indonesia has about 300 ethnic groups, each with cultural identities developed over centuries, and influenced by Indian, Arabic, Chinese, and European cultures. Along together with cultural influences, big religions have influenced the Indonesian people. Thus, the Indonesian society is marked by many diverse cultures and a variety of religions and beliefs.

There are six religions acknowledged by the government: Islam, Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Buddha, and Confucianism. Beside these official religions, there are many other religions and beliefs. Based on data collected by the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), there are about 245 non-official religions in Indonesia [1].

According to the 2010 national census, 87.18% of the total population (in 2015 approximately 255 million people) are Muslims (with Sunnis 8 more than 99%, Shiites 0.5%, Ahmadis 0.2%), 6.96% Protestants, 2.91% Catholics, 1.69% Hindus, 0.72% Buddhists, and 0.05% Confucians.

The Indonesian leaders have played an important role in the relations between groups, promoting mutual respect by affirming *Pancasila* as the state ideology. *Pancasila*

includes five inseparable and mutually qualifying fundamental principles: (1) belief in one supreme God, (2) a just and civilized humanity, (3) the unity of Indonesia, (4) democracy through deliberation and consensus among representatives, and (5) social justice for all people of Indonesia. *Pancasila*, thus, is the foundation for the social life

Meanwhile, Indonesia thrives on its cultural diversity, which is systematically preserved through a policy of multiculturalism. This commitment to multiculturalism is expressed in Indonesia's national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* – Unity in Diversity.

Pancasila and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* have become the spirit for the Indonesian people to keep harmony and peace in living together. Together with 1945 Constitution, *Pancasila* guarantees religious freedom in Indonesia.

2. Contemporary Challenges

The greatest challenge for the country is communal conflicts which happen every where – clashes between rival villages, clashes between ethnic groups, and clashes between religious groups (especially 13 between Christians and Muslims, known as *SARA* (*Suku, Agama, Ras,*

dan Antar-golongan – ethnic groups, religions, race, and classes).

The most tragic one was the clash between Christians and Muslims which occurred in Ambon and other parts of the Maluku archipelago, where previously the people had lived together peacefully for a long time, making it a symbol of peace and harmony between the two religious groups. More than 700 people were reported killed during the clashes at holy season both for Christians (Christmas) and Muslims (Ramadhan) from the end of December 1999 until January 2000. It was the latest communal bloodshed that had rocked the Maluku for more than a year, killing more than 2,000 people [2].

During religious conflicts, many houses, churches, mosques, and Christian and Muslim schools were burned or closed. According to the Indonesian Christian Communication Forum (FKKI), under Soekarno's government there were only two churches destroyed, during Soeharto's regime there were 456 churches destroyed or burned, while during the one year of Habibie's government there were 153 churches destroyed or burned [3]. These tragedies has continued under President Abdurrahman Wahid, Megawati and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, even until now, under Jokowi's presidency. During the era of President Abdurrahman Wahid, 232 churches have been closed or damaged; in the era of president Megawati Soekarnoputri, 92; in the era of president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, 108 [4].

Related to this challenge is another most fundamental challenge to restore the rule of law. The police and legal institutions have been corrupted. Almost the entire legal system is in need of rebuilding. Corruption, military excesses, mob violence, vigilante law, communal conflict, insecurity of person and property will not be alleviated without thorough-going reforms to restore the rule of law. However, the barriers in the way of such change are great, including tainted judges and police, and large amounts of money in the hands of corruptors [5].

Islamic radicalism has emerged, due to the government's failure to enforce the law and to resolve social ills such as ethno-religious conflicts, increase crime, rampant corruption, widespread drug abuse and the corruption of the police [6].

Many are new groups. Some observers assert that these groups have been sponsored, or at least helped by certain circles of the Indonesian military. They are led by people of Arab, particularly Yemeni origin, like Habib Rizq Shihab, leader of the FPI (Islam Defenders Front), Jafar Umar Thalib, a former leader of the

now defunct *Laskar Jihad*, Abu Bakar Baasir of the MMI (Indonesian Council of Jihad Fighters) and Habib Husen al-Habsyi, leader of the JAMI (Jamaah al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin Indonesia). These groups share a literal interpretation of Islam and claim that Muslims should practice only *pure* Islam as practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, or Salaf. Thus, they can be included among Salafi activist movements that attack discotheques and brothels. They also take a militant view of jihad as *holy war* against perceived enemies of Islam rather the mainstream view of jihad as meaning 'exerting oneself to the utmost' in Muslim activities, with war as a last resort.

Since last year, the Islamic State movement has emerged as the main jihadist group in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The brutal reputation of ISIS fighters on the battlefield have further inspired radical-minded individuals seeking instant outcomes and combat experience to join the notorious terrorist group. In Indonesia, the operational dynamics of ISIS have had a profound impact, radicalizing local Muslim youths and drawing many to the conflict [7].

According to the latest official estimates, at least 500 Indonesians have joined either ISIS or other militant groups. They travel to Iraq and Syria for various reasons, including fighting the authoritarian regime and eliminating the Shiite population. They are potential leaders of future terrorist cells in the country. This further suggests a potentially growing relationship between ISIS and local militant groups.

Despite significant improvements in counterterrorist capabilities, Indonesia has not made meaningful progress in de-radicalizing home-grown militants and terrorists. The country's lack of de-radicalization programs means its security architecture is ill-prepared to anticipate the future threat of returning Indonesian militants and the further expansion of violent ISIS ideology.

3. The Need of Multicultural Education

The current social problems such as student and youth clashes and other forms of radicalism throughout Indonesia show the social ill, namely the lack of sensitivity and respect toward other people from different groups.

Social conflict and religious disharmony in particular are a challenge for educators in doing their best to prepare the next generation as democratic citizens with good character.

To realize this goal, religious harmony should be developed at school at as early an age

as possible. It is most urgent that we promote creative and innovative programs to support positive civil discourse among students [8].

In a multicultural setting, students come from different ethnic, religious and social backgrounds and their mindset is dominantly shaped by those backgrounds. School programs should deliberately facilitate peer interactions to develop positive civil discourse.

Ideally a policy should be enforced whereby schools are staffed by teachers and personnel of different religions, ethnicities and from different social groups. The campus should also provide places of worship for students of all religions. Students will learn how others perform religious rituals. And this would be an effective form of religious education within a multicultural school setting.

The traditional way of teaching religion has been criticized for emphasizing theological and ritual aspects, while ignoring the social aspects, namely horizontal interactions and tolerance among followers of different faiths.

Therefore, we need to reform our education. As part of its concerns about the real threat against pluralism, multicultural education is the best method to cope the problem. The discourse on multicultural education was voiced in an effort to counteract growing radicalism in the country and to instill a sense of inclusiveness in the young generation. When effectively implemented in a pluralistic society, multicultural education provides the opportunity for young and adult learners to learn fundamental principles that help them critically evaluate and respond to what they see and experience as they live in a multicultural society [9].

These principles include learning to have social skills important for interacting with students from other racial, ethnic, religious and cultural groups; learning to understand universal values shared by all cultural groups such as compassion, justice, equality, tolerance, peace, freedom and care; learning about possible stereotypes and other related bias that could produce harmful effects on racial, ethnic and religious relations.

What is multicultural education? In the next section, I will explore the principles of multicultural education.

4. Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is “an approach to teaching and learning that is based upon democratic values and beliefs and that affirms cultural pluralism within culturally diverse

societies in an interdependent world” [10]. In short, multicultural education seeks to embrace, recognize, and incorporate a multitude of diverse cultural experiences and contributions into the curriculum. Multicultural education thereby provides a vehicle for teaching citizenship to students.

The basic principles of multicultural education offer a way to weave in the ideals of citizenship. Specifically, there are three reasons why multicultural education should be used to teach citizenship: (a) it offers a way to equalize education for all students; (b) it helps students to understand their responsibility to society; and (c) it teaches students to respect the human rights of others [11].

According to James A. Banks, the founder and leading proponent of multicultural education, multicultural education includes five dimensions: (a) content integration: the teachers use cultures in their curriculum; (b) knowledge construction process: the teachers help students to understand the various frames from which knowledge is constructed; (c) prejudice reduction: action or activities that teachers use to help students develop positive attitudes toward difference; (d) equity pedagogy: teachers' modification of instruction to facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse backgrounds; and (e) an empowering school culture and social structure: school culture that promotes equity and empowers its multiple stakeholders to participate in the examination and reform of school practices. In sum, multicultural education is a field of study designed to increase educational equity for all students [12]. These dimensions, conceptualized in teacher behavior, focus on the selection of multicultural curricular content, the implementation of culturally mediated instruction, and the creation of an empowering classroom context [13].

5. Building Up the Indonesian Civil Society

Multicultural education functions to build up a civil society. The civil society has universal values, whereas for Indonesia it has special characteristics due to its diversity of cultures, race and religions, and its population spread over thousands of islands with serious communication problems. Multicultural education plays a very strategic role in building up a democratic, well-informed and tolerant Indonesian civil society.

Based on the Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning (1997), some principles that are relevant to build an Indonesian civil society are

as follows [14]: (a) *education for all*: all members of the society are demanded to be involved and not only just a small group or only just implementing compulsory education for the younger generation; therefore, multicultural education should be developed and enjoyed by all strata of the society; (b) *empowerment of people* to create an independent society, which is not only a society that is free to think, and free to express its opinions but also a society that requires rich and broad information so that mutual understanding and respect will emerge; (c) *a flexible program*: a program that responds to the need of the society; (d) *open to globalization*: multicultural education must give a change to the building of the Indonesian society which has a global perception so that they can live harmoniously in a competitive open world.

6. A New Paradigm in Education in Building Up Indonesian Civil Society

We need a new paradigm in education to build up Indonesian civil society. Some strategies to build national education, based on multicultural education, are as follows [15]: (a) education from, by and together with the society: education must respond to the need of the society, the society is not an object of education, but actively participates in educational programs; (b) the society is involved in the program; (c) education based on national culture which is grounded on local cultures; (d) the process of education is the process of hominization (to educate human beings to be independent) and the process of humanization (to educate human being to be responsible to oneself and to well-being of the society); (e) education of democracy; (f) the institution of education must concretize the values of democracy; (g) decentralization of the national education.

7. The Goals of the National Education

The goals of the national education based on multicultural education are as follows [16]:

(a) *An attitude of democracy*: the national education must form the students to have dignity, rooted in local culture, to have identity as Indonesian nation with *bhinneka* characteristic, and to have an attitude of democracy, such as to have creativity and freedom to speak up opinion, to have different opinion, to value a better opinion of others; this democracy climate must be integrated in the learning process, thus, there is no place for an autocratic teacher or lecturer.

(b) *An attitude of tolerance*: the characteristic of *bhinneka* in Indonesian cultures demands an attitude of high tolerance to each citizen. This attitude must be supported by all Indonesian people to build a harmonious society with variety of religions, ethnics, cultures, full with new ideas. Besides an attitude of tolerance, we also need to develop an attitude of compromise.

(c) *An attitude of understanding to one another*: in a democratic society, different opinions are high valued to build a society that has a wide and rich horizon. Therefore, our national education must be able to develop knowledge and experience of *bhinneka*. Local cultures must be developed and strengthened to become elements to build national culture. An attitude of understanding to one another can be enhanced only if there is free and intensive communication among citizens and inter-ethnics.

(d) *Having good moral, strong faith and piety*: the Indonesian society with its variety of cultures has characteristic as a society with strong faith. Indonesian people are very religious. Variety of religion and belief demands the attitude of tolerance and understanding to one another. Religious education in the system of national education, therefore, has function to reinforce a spirit of tolerance and understanding in living together.

(e) *Having global horizon*: global society is marked by the progress of Information and Technology (IT) and free trade. It gives occasions and challenges to Indonesian people to develop science as well as skill to overcome problems caused by globalization, like poverty, regionalization, polarization, marginalization, and fragmentation. Therefore the national education ought to have a vision to empower the people to have capacity to face the challenges of globalization.

8. Conclusion

The fact that there are many ethnic groups, many diverse cultures and a variety of religions and beliefs in Indonesia, becomes the foundation to develop identity of the Indonesian nation. Amidst the rising of Islamic radicalism that causes conflict between ethnics and religious, we need to develop multicultural education, which should become part of developing our national education.

Multicultural education will help each Indonesian citizen to develop an openness and inclusive attitude so that we can live together in

harmony and peace and work together in building the Indonesian nation towards Indonesian civil society.

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