



## The Reinforcement of Multiculture-Based Curriculum For Students of Foreign Nationalities In Indonesian Schools

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### Abstract

*Multicultural curriculum in Indonesia is developed for students with multicultural backgrounds to internalize multicultural values without having to lose their own cultural identity. A multicultural curriculum is designed to promote teaching methods developed based on the diversity of the students themselves with the purpose of educating them to understand pluralism, humanism, and democracy and to respect each other both inside and outside the school. Such a multicultural curriculum proves to be a barrier for students with non multicultural backgrounds. Their different backgrounds limit their understanding of the diversity. This situation requires a new curriculum. This article is the result of the Competitive Grants research regarding multicultural curriculum for students of foreign nationalities. The interviews with the participants of IACS (Indonesian Art & Culture Scholarship) program in 2013 and 2014 have indicated that classroom discussions and direct interaction with the local community could become some kind of reinforcement for the formation of a new curriculum for students with foreign nationalities to better understand the diversity of Indonesia instead of art and cultural education.*

**Keywords:** *multicultural curriculum; nonmulticultural student; direct interaction; class discussion*

### INTRODUCTION

The International-based schools in Indonesia have been required to incorporate four subjects, namely, the history of Indonesia, the Indonesian Language, religions and civic education in their curriculum (ROL, May 12, 2014). Serving as a small window to the world, they in fact have the opportunity to provide insights to their students about cultural and religious diversity as well as to make efforts to manage such diversity (Milner 2010). These schools also have a great opportunity to produce a far more democratic and tolerant generation that understands multicultural characters of Indonesia. Moreover, the multicultural education construction could be seen as a comprehensive and systematic effort for preventing ethnic conflict, religion conflict, social segregation and disintegration (Sutiyono 2010,

p.166)

The official data of the Ministry of Education and Culture showed that there were 111 international schools in Indonesia. These schools are composed of students of different backgrounds which are not always the same as those of the students who come from Indonesia. The former come from different countries with different backgrounds and they even may be only monocultural (Turner and Brown 2008). Based on this fact, a multiculture-based curriculum that caters to the needs of the students with diverse backgrounds (Yakin 2005) is not very relevant for the purpose of multicultural education for foreign students (who are not multicultural). This refers to the initial assumptions which are based on the premise that "individual experience is the primary reference for someone to respond to a pheno-

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menon". This refers to the phenomenology of Schultz which states that someone's actions which are common in the world of life cannot be separated from the influence of his or her biographical situation. The meaning constructed from each interaction cannot be separated from the biographical background (Stephen Nindito 2005, p.89, Herbert Blumer 1966, p.591). Salimanet.all, explains that one community could see something as a normal culture but for another community with different norms will see it as something peculiar or even awkward (Salimanet et al. 2014, p.393). Thus, multicultural education should be focused on how implanting consciousness of differences and respect each others (Salimanet et al. 2014, p.394).

Considering the magnitude of the opportunity to educate generations of the world to better understand the diversity of Indonesia, the international schools are in fact strategically valuable. As valuable assets, they should develop a curriculum that helps students understand and appreciate the diversity of Indonesia (Aydin 2012). This article seeks to find out the important factors that could provide some kind of reinforcement for a multiculture-based curriculum for students who do not necessarily carry multicultural backgrounds. This article give a new addition to the existing literatures on the practice multicultural education. This study is important in the way it develops a model of multicultural education.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research was carried out with a phenomenological perspective which bases itself on the personal experiences of the participants explored through interviews. The basic assumption of phenomenology is that humans actively interpret their experience by giving meaning to something that they have experienced. Therefore, the interpretation is an active process that gives meaning to something experienced by humans. In other words, understanding is a creative act that leads to the creation of meaning (Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen Foss 2009, p. 38). A phenomenological perspective bases

itself on rigorous and thorough testing of the awareness of humans' experience. The main concept in phenomenology is meaning. Meaning is an important content that emerges from human experience of consciousness. The identification of the essential qualities of the experience of consciousness is done thoroughly and meticulously. Still, according to Smith *et al.*, the essence of experience is built on two assumptions: firstly, every human experience is actually an expression of consciousness. He or she is aware of his or her own experience which is subjective. Secondly, every form of consciousness is always a consciousness of something. A phenomenological research focuses on something experienced in an individual's consciousness called intentionality (description of the relationship between the processes that occur in the consciousness with the object of concern in the process).

The method used is interview is the art of asking questions and listening. Interview is a device for producing situational understanding derived from specific interactional episodes (Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln 2009, p.495). This method allows the interviewees to define themselves and their environment and to use their own terms about the phenomena being studied (Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey in Norman, Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln 2009, p. 504-507).

This article is the result of the Competitive Grants research which took the students of IACS (Indonesian Arts & Culture Scholarship) program as its respondents. In fact, since 2002, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia has organized the IACS program for youths who come from various countries to get to know Indonesia better ("2015 Indonesian Art and Culture Scholarship (Regular Program)", September 23, 2014. The participants who attend the program come from different cultures and backgrounds, nevertheless not necessarily be multicultural. They live in Indonesia for three months to learn and get to know Indonesia.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The studies on multicultural learning were preceded by the development of multiculturalism learning in the United States of America. According to James A. Banks, the development of multicultural education in the USA coincided with the emergence of the civil rights movement in the 1960s (James A. Banks 1993, p. 3-49). This movement encouraged the changes in the educational program by adopting a multicultural approach that was, according to Bank, carried out through 1. *The contributive approach* (focusing on history, heroism, etc.) 2. *The additive approach* (focusing on the content of learning materials, concepts, themes and perspectives added to the existing materials without changing the structure), of the curriculum so that students were able to look at the issues, concepts and events from a different perspective upon the existing ethnics) and 4. *The Social Action Approach* (providing the opportunity for the participants to be involved in making decision on particular social events).

As for the Indonesian cases, multicultural education serves as one of the important input to the social conditions in Indonesia as what Choirul Mahfud states:

“...the multicultural education discourse is intended to respond to the phenomena of ethnic, social, and cultural conflicts, which often appear in the middle of the society with multicultural faces. The multicultural face in this country up to now is like a fire in the husk, which one day can smolder when triggered by the heating political, religious, cultural and social climates which then allow conflicts to resurface. Certainly, the causes of the conflicts are various, but they are mostly caused by political, ethnicity, religious, race, ethnicity and cultural differences. Some cases have occurred in this country, involving community groups, college students, and even high school students, and they have occurred because of social and political differences or because of ethnicity, religious, and race differences.”(Mahfud 2009, p.4).

In line with this condition, then multi-

cultural education is developed with diverse insights therein. According to Banks (James A. Banks 1993) the multicultural education aims to achieve equality in education regardless of race and gender. Meanwhile, improving the ability to respect the cultural diversity of a society as the purpose of the multicultural education refers to the opinion of Karmanto Sunarto and is as a response to demography and cultural changes (Farida Hanum 2008). The multicultural education also aims at empowering students to develop respect for different cultures and to give them the opportunity to work together with people or groups of people whose ethnicity or race is directly different from theirs or *mutual respect*. The multicultural education also helps students to recognize the accuracy of the views of a diverse culture, helps them to develop their pride in their cultural heritage, and help them realize that the conflict of values often becomes the trigger of conflicts between groups of community.

The development of research on multicultural education in Indonesia is constructed by two things: firstly, by changes in social and political conditions which are increasingly sensitive to political, ethnicity, religion and race differences. Secondly, there appears awareness that education on cultural diversity becomes very important to deal with the social conditions. Based on these two things, the research on multicultural education in Indonesia is devoted more to the efforts to raise awareness of diversity and tolerance among students. And it is highly recognized by Hoon on his research at the Chinese Christian School in Jakarta. On his research, he concludes that schools should actively implement multicultural education in order to build an empowered, tolerant, active, and participative young generation (Chang - YauHoo 2013).

Knowing the importance of multicultural education and the purpose of the implementation of multicultural education, some researches have worked on the formats of multicultural education (Hopkins-Gillispie 2009). The key to multicultural education lies in the commitment of educators and educational institutions to incorporate

multiculturalism to their educational curriculum and also to enrich the competence of their educators in employing multicultural-based curriculum (Newby 1996). A multicultural education curriculum referred to is the subject material that contains the efforts to reduce prejudice, to improve interaction among groups, and to develop an intercultural program with a global perspective. The method used to enrich the ability of the educators is to put them in group work to get a collaborative environment to gain knowledge and skills (Abrams and Gibson 2007; Resnik 2009).

The backgrounds of the students have a relatively dominant role in perceiving a social phenomenon as explained by Peter L. Berger through his inter subject process. He states that the experience that an individual has gone through settles in his or her memory. The inter-subjective settlement will occur if some individuals experience a biography together in which the experiences will then become their shared knowledge.

The inter subjective settlement will only be called social if it has been actualized in a coding system. This system will facilitate a subjective experience to be easily transferred and accepted by another individual (Berger and Luckman 2012, p. 92). This shared experience can be a strong foundation for a person to interpret and to respond to every phenomenon that exists because the biographical experience that occurs in each individual will serve as a shared experience and will help elicit shared memory or collective memory. Alon Confino simply defines a collective memory as the '*representation of the past and the making of it into a shared cultural knowledge by successive generations in "vehicle of memory", such as books, films, museums, commemorations and others*' (Green 2004, p.27). Thus, a collective memory requires the existence of a common understanding of past experience that has occurred among individuals. An individual may not always have directly gone through the past experiences or has a biography that is the same as that of other individuals, but he or she can have the same collective memory. According to Ollick, this is because a

group can provide a memory for an individual about an incident or a case where he or she did not directly experience it (Jeffrey K. Ollick 1999, p.335).

An important note about *collective memory* is made by Kansteiner who states that *collective memory* is not merely a historical record, although it is constructed from the same material or object. *Collective memory* is a conscious reinterpretation of the meaning of a phenomenon that occurs and is unconsciously absorbed back by the society so that they have the same interpretation on a phenomenon. This is, according to Kansteiner, manifested in the form of statements and actions (WulfKansteiner 2001, p. 180). Individuals can access and ultimately have a collective memory and also can absorb a reinterpretation of a phenomenon through communication. Thus, more than just a record of historical facts, *collective memory* binds the members of a society to feel that they have a common past (Schoorman and Bogotch 2010).

The notes from Berger, Green and Ollick reinforce the idea that an individual's background can provide a significant influence in defining and providing a response to a phenomenon. Those who live in a monocultural and monoreligious community tend to have a biography or a referral and also values which are in line with their social background. They may frequently have different perceptions of a multicultural phenomenon. Consequently, their views on Indonesia may also be shaped by a particular biography which is often found different.

The background of the participants of this research indicates that they have no idea at all that Indonesia is a multicultural country, as stated by Stephanie Darlequin of Suriname, "*Before this program I did not know that there is multicultural in Indonesia*" (Interview with Stephanie Darlequin participant of IACS program in 2014). There were also some who thought that Indonesia was not a multicultural country in the New Order period as stated by a participant from Italy, Marco Calvi, "*I've been many times in Indonesia during the New Order and I can remember it was not a multicultural count-*

ry. *There was only one powerful party and almost everything was owned by one family.*" (Interview with Marco Calvi a participant of IACS program in 2013). Others also viewed the multicultural issue of Indonesia similar to that of their of origin which comprises several groups of different nationalities or immigrants. Kevin Hower of America and Brett Kallis of Australia assumed that their countries had similar multicultural background as that of Indonesia, despite the fact that the cultural differences emerged from the groups of immigrant communities.

Some researches on the cultural and social gathering of this kind have noted that the process of acculturation and enculturation give different implications depending on the background and process of the cultural and social gathering (Gil S. Epstein and Ira N Gang 2010), on economic conditions, on age (Amado M. Padilla and William Perez 2003), and on level of openness of groups (Sanjay Jain, Sumon, Majumdar and ShurunMukand 2009). This is certainly a important record for a multicultural curriculum in providing a picture of diversity in Indonesia, which is different from that of those influenced by the arrival of immigrants. In Indonesia, the diversity can in fact be traced back since the beginning of the establishment of this country. The awareness of the differences in cultures, religions, ethnicity, and languages have served as the foundation of the establishment of this country.

IACS program at Universitas Pembangunan Nasional which has been held twice, namely, in 2013 and 2014, has provided ways to introduce Indonesia through such materials as those of political, economy, and social aspects of Indonesia in general and also the Indonesian language. In practice, the multicultural learning materials about Indonesian applied in IACS program received a very positive feedback from the participants of IACS program. In general, the participants were very satisfied with the introduction of the material on the political, social and cultural conditions in Indonesia, those which have given them a broader picture about Indonesia. Hai Nguyen of Vietnam, Marco Calvi of Italy, Daniel Krausse of Germany

and Stephanie Darlequinn of Suriname, said that the material was more than they had expected. Hai Nguyen revealed *"It is actually beyond my expectation. I learned a lot more than I expected."* (Interview Nguyen Thant Hai with a participant of IACS program in 2014).

Nevertheless, for some other participants who had no prior knowledge about Indonesia, the material about the introduction to Indonesia was deemed less detailed as stated by a participant from Azerbaijan, Narmin,

*"...Actually materials were not enough for me. Because I have background knowledge about Indonesia. During my bachelor's degree besides language, I also studied Indonesian history, literature, geography, policy, economy, culture, ethnography, tourism and other studies about Indonesia and South East Asia"*(Interview with Narmin Hazanova a participant of IACS program in 2014).

The learning material on a general overview of the diversity of Indonesia is very important because so many issues regarding religious or cultural conflicts have been of media highlight. This learning material will then provide a positive reference to build common perception among the students to better understand the issue. The findings in this study indicate that some participants became very interested in the efforts of the country in managing the diversity and the religious tolerance in Indonesia. An opinion about *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) was expressed by Daniel Krausse, a participant from Germany,

*"... that all Indonesian citizen can live after the principle of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity) and still maintain their own culture, the which is a very good thing that many countries lack"* (Interview with Daniel Krausse a participant of IACS program in 2014). Similarly, Narmin, a participant from Azerbaijan stated, *"Indonesia is a country full of diversity, home to numerous different ethnic groups, language and religions. However, there is a common language and the national*

motto of Unity in Diversity help to bind all islands and their inhabitants together. People can find different tastes in this country. Indonesia is an incredibly diverse archipelago and each island has an individual identity, culture and traditions.” (Interview with Narmin Hazanova a participant of IACS program in 2014).

The introduction to the diversity and the efforts made by the country in managing the diversity to some extent will help the participants understand that pluralism has become the major spirit for the statehood of all Indonesian people. The perceptions towards certain radicalism that emerges in Indonesia, which has often been the media headlines both at home and abroad, can be counterbalanced using the materials that talk about openness and tolerance. The discussions about the current issues such as religious and ethnic topics have become the main attraction for the participants to understand that although multiculturalism often resulted in a conflict in the society, the efforts to manage this conflict have always been made either by the state or the people themselves. This in fact has attracted the attention of a participant from Germany, Daniel Krause,

“I liked the class about interfaith dialog with ibu Fatimah from UIN (I think) in Germany or in the western world (as you might know), religion is not important and at the age of 14 everyone in Germany can choose his or her religion, no need to follow their parents, and there is no problems with interfaith marriage except from traditionalist people. But in Indonesia, this is a big topic and I’d like to understand more about it is so important here so the lesson gave me nice insight, there were some classes that were rather designed for students who had no single about Indonesia on their first day, which means absolutely not suitable for us participants, even though the topic might have been quite interesting” (Interview with Daniel Krause a participant of IACS in 2014).

The class discussions on the topic of multiculturalism have provided a broader

overview to the participants on how Indonesia has always tried to protect the right of every citizen to own and maintain their own culture and tried to enforce the law to protect the people’s rights as well. The participants who thought that they had a multicultural background admitted that what had been done by Indonesia in maintaining this diversity was in fact not an easy matter to do since there were so many and so big differences in terms of both cultural and religious aspects.

The material in the classroom has more or less given an overview and perspectives about the diversity in Indonesia to the participants who carry different backgrounds from Indonesia. The overview given in the classroom through discussion has provided them an ample opportunity to ask questions and deeply explore the diversity found in Indonesia. Hai Nguyen of Vietnam stated that the diversity in Indonesia was amazing,

“I definitely think that it’s amazing how one country like Indonesia can have so many cultures within itself and it all works pretty well together. Each region has its own culture that is unique and different with one another but they all live together peacefully. So for me it’s really exciting to experience that multicultural aspect of Indonesia.” (Interview with Nguyen Thant Hai a participant of IACS in 2014).

Nevertheless, the participants also admitted that it took them much longer to learn about Indonesia’s language and cultures in more details. In general, the participants really liked the Indonesian language and dance lessons. As the diversity was not something very easy for them to learn only in the classroom, the interaction outside classroom really helped them to get to know better the diversity of Indonesia. How to interact with those who had diverse backgrounds, especially with using the local language they had just learned became a challenge for the participants. Some participants were very grateful that IACS program was held in Yogyakarta because Yogyakarta

is a city where people with different cultural backgrounds meet. Sarita from Italy was very pleased that IACS program was run in Yogyakarta (Interview with Sarita a participant of IACS program in 2014).

The participants of IACS program favored the out-of-class activities. Shara Arifin, representing the other participants stated that the activities outside the classroom were very fun and could help them understand the values living in the society,

“... A lot the knowledge coming from outside of this classroom, this is the best way to know more about Indonesia. Ya..the given material can provide enough the information about Indonesia, all the ppt provide a lot of information and all lecture have a lot knowledge”(Interview with Shara Arifin participant of IACS program in 2014 ).

The same opinion was also expressed by a participant from America, Kevin Hower,

“I don't think you can ever learn enough Indonesia in the classroom, but we definitely got a good start with learning about Indonesia, especially about Java.”(Interview with Kevin Hower a participant of IACS program in 2014).

Such a direct interaction is considered to help build common understanding of the norms/specific values. The memory or a mutual understanding of a particular phenomenon can be well shared by the members of a community through the process of dialogue or communication. Halbwachs states, “*Individual remembers through dialogue with others within the social group*” (Green 2004, p.38). This view is also supported by Kansteiner as saying that everyday communication has an important influence on the formation of collective memory (Kansteiner 2001, p.181). Coman draw the same conclusion that the ‘*conversation*’ or oral communication will become a bridge for someone to share the same memories as that of his or her group. In other words, ‘*conversation*’ becomes a medium where the memory is

introduced, negotiated, and reframed (Coman, Brown, Koppel, and Hirst 2009, p.139). The same idea is expressed by Hirst and Echterhoff that through ‘*conversation*’ one can shape a reality and share it with others (Hirst and Echterhoff 2008).

Direct interactions within the activities of IACS program were found in a variety of outdoor activities such as in cooking activities, visiting traditional markets, and also in performing such cultural activities as dancing and playing traditional music. Through this kind of interaction, they could directly learn the values living within the local communities. The activities of IACS program were organized by the International Relations Study Program, UPN “Veteran” Yogyakarta. The activities provided great benefit for the program through the involvement of the students of the university who also had diverse cultural backgrounds. Such a situation could contribute to the revival of a situation expected to be experienced by the participants of the program, namely diversity. Students who became the partners for the participants for both inside and outside the classroom activities also functioned as a small social laboratory for the participants of the program.

For the participants, the materials about Indonesia provided either through the interaction inside the classroom or through the activities outside the classroom were also found to be very satisfying. However, the materials on the diversity of Indonesia provided through the tutorials and open discussions as well as through the practical introduction about the culture and values in the society did not seem to make the participants satisfied. Some of them said that they wanted to know much more about Indonesia. One of them, Stepanie Darlequin of Suriname, stated,

“Yes, all learnt here about Indonesia means a lot to me. But for sure it will be better if I will learn more. So I hope will get another chance to come here again and continue it.” (Interview with Stephanie Darlequin a participant of IACS program in 2014).

## CONCLUSION

The research conducted through the interviews to identify the important factors required in preparing a multicultural-based curriculum for students of other nationalities has been intended to determine the needs of the participants over the multicultural curriculum. Slightly different from the multicultural curriculum that aims to instill the values of pluralism and tolerance on the basis of diversities that the students have, this multicultural-based curriculum for students of foreign nationalities in Indonesia is intended to provide knowledge and understanding of multicultural life in Indonesia. The knowledge and understanding of multicultural life and the efforts of the state in managing multicultural society are expected to foster appreciation among international people towards the dynamics that occur in Indonesian.

The students' background differences which were not always multicultural and multireligious have hindered the participants from understanding the dynamics of multicultural and multireligious society of Indonesia. Through the interviews, this research found two important factors that could help the students understand the values of multiculturalism in Indonesia, namely: 1) in addition to providing tutorial materials on the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of Indonesia, such activities as classroom discussions on the issues of cultural and religious diversity in Indonesia were found to be very fruitful. Such discussions were found to be more attractive to motivate the students to know the background of an issue and to further learn the efforts to take care of the issue done by the state and those carried out by the community members themselves. 2) in addition to the cultural aspects (dancing and traditional music), the activities outside the classroom that focused on direct interaction with the local community to know more about the values of the local culture could help them understand the values practiced in the day-to-day life of the community.

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