
The Importance of Multicultural Education in Indonesia

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Received: 11 December 2018

Revised: 03 January 2019

Accepted: 14 February 2019

Abstract

Indonesia is a multicultural country both ethnic, religion, cultural, regional languages from Sabang to Merauke. This diversity on one hand is a gift for Indonesian people but if it is not addressed wisely, this difference has the potential to be a source of conflict for this nation. Multicultural education becomes a necessity so that people do not only know about the existed diversity but also must be practical and positive towards diversity. Therefore, this multicultural education should be instilled as early as possible in the next generation of our nation in order to maintain the unity of this nation amid the differences that exist.

Keywords: *Multicultural country, multicultural education, diversity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a pluralist country, perhaps the most pluralistic in the world. Indonesia has hundreds of ethnic, religion, cultural, and customs, spread over 13,000 large and small islands, and speaks hundreds of regional languages (Koentjaraningrat, 1970, 21-33; Thohari, 2000: 129). This diversity is a beauty that exists in Indonesia, but on the other hand it can be a potential source of conflict.

Multiculturalism is a valuable treasure of the nation that must be developed and nurtured. Conversely, if this diversity is not utilized, and properly fostered, it will develop into something scary. Therefore, education based on multiculturalism is a must or else it will turn into catastrophe. In the past, diversity was the nation's most proud wealth, built on the purpose and common interest of Indonesia's

independence. Today, diversity is often seen as a difference, the difference being sharpened and often used by some people to fulfill the ambitions and interests of individual or group. This leads to horizontal conflicts that cause the decline of Indonesian nation, riots happening everywhere. In West Kalimantan there were ethnic conflicts that cause countless casualties. In Ambon and Poso there was conflict between adherents of religion that almost dragged the nation to the brink of destruction. In Papua there are frequent inter-tribal wars that claimed many lives, and considered a tradition to maintain prestige (Wihardit: 2010).

Lately the conflict has undergone significant changes, not merely because of differences in religion, ethnic or culture, but conflicts occur because of the differences in ideology and interests. Clashes are everywhere,

between supporters of soccer teams, brawl between students, brawl between college students, and brawl between musical audiences. This shows that the sense of unity has been lost, that there are differences in ideology and interests, people who have different interests and ideologies are considered opponents. This diversity of interests, groups and ideologies is increasingly sharper and leads to conflicts between groups. The group does not want to live side by side with other groups. The diversity that once became the pride turned into a something scary, which are the disruption of national stability and the disintegration of the nation. In Monas incident for example, the groups who had clashes with each other actually had the same belief and religion. There are frequent clashes between one group of villagers and other villagers who are separated only by highways. Aren't the groups of citizens having the same religion, the same language, and same ethnic?

The Indonesian nation is a multicultural, plural society composed of a very diverse community of ethnic, custom, language, culture, religion and class. Each community group has different characteristics and interests. One of the ways is through education. It becomes imperative that the existed multicultural should not be disaster but a useful asset to build the nation.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Multiculturalism is "the concept of civilizing, and because education is the process of civilizing, the multicultural society can be created through the educational process" (Tilaar, 2004). Education and civilizing are a process of

character building of nation and citizen. Multicultural education is education based on multiculturalism. Tobroni (2007) stated that multicultural education can be seen in three ways: 1) Multicultural education as a concept or idea; 2) multicultural education as a movement that requires deep assessment, completion and enrichment of perfect concepts, and thoroughly application.

As has been stated that the Indonesian nation consists of various ethnics, races, languages, customs, cultures, religions and classes. Therefore, the national education system should also accommodate the pluralism and cultural diversity. The success of education is determined by how much education concerns the issue of pluralism and multiculturalism (the diversity of culture, religion and equality). This is because education is a process of civilizing or enculturation, a process for assigning a person to be able to live in a particular culture (Zamroni, 2001). On the other hand education also has a role as culture heritage, as a cultural heritage to the younger generation. Therefore, the older generation must be able to pass on something good to the next generation.

Education must be able to maintain unity amidst diversity. With a multicultural society, education should be able to equip and prepare the next generation of the nation that can maintain the diversity that exists in Indonesia. It is important that the diversity that becomes our nation's identity as an asset to build a great State amidst diversity. Of course this is not an easy thing, recalling there are still encountered conflicts based on

differences in religion, ethnic, race and disagreement or dissent. But that does not mean that we cannot get any better in the future, education must be able to maintain the diversity that exist in Indonesia.

Pancasila and the motto "Bhineka Tunggal Ika" are two fundamental things to maintain unity amidst diversity. Education is obligatory to pass on the values of Pancasila as well as the motto of Bhineka Tunggal Ika in each generation. It is not enough for students to just know Pancasila and Bhineka Tunggal Ika, but also can apply these values in everyday life. Therefore, it is important to instill the tolerance and mutual respect and train children to act wisely in order to minimize the impact of diversity. Of course the purpose of multicultural education should be comprehensive between knowledge, attitude and skills. The aspects of knowledge is important as a basis for them to know the difference around it. After they acknowledge the diversity, then students should be able to behave in tolerance and respect. Furthermore, in order for students to have good attitude then students should be trained to skillfully apply these attitudes in everyday life. This is important because if diversity is not based on these three aspects then our nation will be very easy to be divided; the differences are very likely to have potential conflicts between groups, therefore the cultivation of Pancasila and Bhineka Tunggal Ika can be a foundation to minimize conflict.

Multicultural learning can affect efforts to appreciate cultural differences, as well as triggers in improving student achievement. Ploumis-Devick (1996), a researcher

doing research in US primary schools, has research findings that show that "Provides a general background to cultural diversity and its impact; a successful program description; and strategies, activities, and resources for classroom use". This result is actually not so surprising, because by introducing and teaching students the various cultures that exist around the community, it will make them know and learn the culture, which in turn will appreciate cultural diversity. Multicultural learning is also trying to show the existence of a culture that requires recognition in the social environment. If the statement is related to the opinion of Maslow (1954: 72), known as the "Hierarchy of Needs" theory, it can be categorized as a social "reward" need.

Multiculturalism on the other hand can reduce prejudices against other ethnic cultures. Ponterotto (1995) conducted a study leading to the conclusion that learning multiculturalism contributes to: Describes theories to explain the increase in incidence of intergroup conflicts and the role of teachers in multicultural awareness and prejudice programs. "Studying multiculturalism may be a precaution for the rise of prejudice and intergroup conflicts, because through multicultural learning students learn to appreciate different ethnic cultures, assess their advantages and disadvantages, and in the end they will accept that there is no perfect culture and absolutely with no benefits.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The diversity that exists in Indonesia is a gift that must be maintained as an asset in building the

nation. But on the other hand the diversity that exists also has the potential to become a source of conflict if it is not being managed wisely. To avoid that, the Indonesian people must understand and be wise in dealing with diversity that exists. Multicultural education becomes imperative to maintain the existing diversity to coexist harmoniously. Bhineka Tunggal Ika and Pancasila are the foundation for the nation to keep unity amidst the diversity that exists. Multicultural education can be a means for Indonesia to maintain the unity of this nation. Therefore, multicultural education should be given early so that people can acknowledge the diversity that exists in Indonesia

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