Multicultural Education: Academic Approach on the
ASEAN Economic Community

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General Out-look

"Education for All" has become the core of public education development, where the education system enables each of citizens of the country to enhance the same right of getting education. In a more homogeneous society, such an education system won't be difficult to carry out, but in the country, like Indonesia, it needs more thorough consideration and preparation, because the socio-cultural nature of Indonesia is very complex, with more than 300 unique ethnic groups or precisely 1,340 (BPS census, 2010). The current global flow of information and mobility of people, like AEC, on the other end, can become one more problem which makes complexity in many socio-cultural aspects of the nation. The educational system proponents should be aware of all phenomena so as to fit them into educational system to prepare the nation's human resources to stand out in the crowd.

Why Multicultural Education?

The evidence shows that Indonesia is one of the most heterogeneous countries all over the world. 1,340 ethnic groups with their respective socio-cultural background characterize the different habits, languages, norms and values. They have consequently the different perspectives and attitudes against education and learning. Bound to their own cultures, even the educational awareness of the people is different to each group of society. They talk differently, they judge differently about education that they come across. This heterogeneous society has become the strongest characteristics of the Indonesian society. There are many crucial problems generated by such differences, like social harassments, disintegrations and so forth.

Education takes charge of all social problems arouse in the society, where "education for all" is critically needed as the new paradigm of the national education system. As the function of public education is to assist the citizens to enhance the future better opportunities, educational reform should be aimed at equality in education, whatever socio-cultural background they have. The education system is therefore attempted to allow every single citizen to enhance future opportunity for his own and others' well being as the element of the nation. This educational framework is the familiarly called as the educational democracy, where education is "from people, by people and for people". Every citizen will have the same chance to get education, without discrimination.

Indonesian educational system have also addressed this paradigm, where public schools should have functioned as the "the great equalizer", as labeled by Nieto (1992: 20). As the great equalizer, public schools serve education with no regard on the different social background, race, sex, religion, ethnic group, etc. Undang-undang Dasar 1945, article 31, verse 1 states that "every Indonesian citizen has a right to get education". It has been loud and clear, that the country gives a place for the heterogeneous pluralistic society to have the same chance in education. Although in some extent the system often fails to carry out the mission of the constitution, where problems of racism, classism, ethnocentrism, or sexism still exists. For example, a certain ethnic group fees that they are superior to others in terms of culture, welfare; which creates social jealousy pertaining to social fraction. It needs hard work to implement and assist the schools as the great equalizers.

Multicultural education is then understood as the education for equity and democracy. This offers educational strategies which address the inequalities and attempt to reform them in classes. As it is stated by Parker (2003) in the book *"Teaching Democracy Unity and Diversity in Public Life",* the central purpose of multicultural education is as follows:

"the purpose of multicultural education is to improve race relation and to help all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to participate in cross-cultural interaction and in personal, social, and civic action that will make our nation more democratic and just." (Parker, 2003: 1)

It is clearly stated by Parker (2003) above that the duty of public schools is to carry out the democratic education in the form of multicultural models of teaching and learning. Everyone in the schools can get and develop not only knowledge, attitude and skill but also interactional skill within plurality in which they stay. Interdependency among the students of different socio-cultural background will become the parameter of the success of the multicultural education. Inclusiveness becomes the essence of the teaching and learning activities which brings about the democratic citizens. The failure of interdependency among them may lead tentatively to gaps and disintegration. This failure is the mirror of failure of the education in return. EDUCATION IS ALWAYS TO BLAME.

The duty of the educational representatives and proponents in effort of integrating the multicultural education principles into curricula is to foster multicultural values into teaching and learning strategies. According to Banks (2004: 4-6), there are five dimensions of multicultural education which should be integrated into curricula, i.e.:
1. Content Integration

Content integration covers the use of varieties of information adopted from the different cultures and groups of society to bring in the key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in subject areas.

2. Knowledge Construction

Knowledge construction is the ways how the teachers help students understand how knowledge is created and how it is influenced by socio-cultural class and groups.

3. Prejudice Reduction

Prejudice reduction covers the strategies of understanding the student's racial attitudes and how they can be modified.

4. Equity Pedagogy

Equity pedagogy copes with varieties of teaching styles referring to different cultural and ethnic groups.

5. Empowering School Culture

Empowering School Culture covers efforts of restructuring and reorganizing culture of schools to include and empower "divers racial, ethnic, language, and social class groups". (Banks, 2004: 4-6).

All of the five dimensions above should be integrated into the school curricula in order to foster the multicultural education and democratic theories. The task of the curriculum proponents in this area is to restructure the five dimensions into pedagogical approach, structure of learning, and development of course of study. As teaching is usually defined as the way to make the students learn, the process of fostering the multicultural education should be implemented in the teaching approaches, strategies, and techniques. The development of instructional design which covers the multicultural education should also be carried out based on the unique condition of the people at hand. Current review and development is always needed along the way with the development of the educational environment.

Prejudice Reduction and Justice in Multicultural Education

The most critical question in the discussion of multicultural education is "what strategies can be used to challenge and reform inequalities in the societies and then to bring it into class? Nieto (1992) suggests that the answer for the question is that "multicultural education challenges and rejects…discrimination in schools and society and … affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic diversity) that students, and schools represent" (Mwonga, 2005: 6). All aspects of education should be arranged based on the concept of multicultural nature of society. Antiracist education, education for social justice has to be fostered to educational representatives. Cross-cultural understanding has to be initiated in every class. Let students look, analyze and understand the culture of others, then make them generalize and correlate them to their own. Regardless on which group of society to which they belong, they should be made aware of their own

culture, that of others and then they can make generalization of what is the same.

The implementation of multicultural education can bring about social justice, where the treatment applied to a group of people will be the same as that to other. Superiority vs. inferiority in various social dimensions can be eliminated, because education is for all. Dominance and marginality won't go, as all students have the same chance to get education. In this framework of education, all students do the same process of learning; get the same chances to access the future opportunities. They are together make changes of their own and others. Then, to apply the multicultural education effectively, it should be included into curricular transformation, pedagogical development, and classroom atmosphere establishment.

Curriculum and Classroom Atmosphere

As curriculum is often simply defined as the academic content taught in a school or specific course program, curriculum development must always involve the structure of material content of education. Evidence shows that curriculum in public schools is often developed massively by the government in pursuit of national educational system. This model of curriculum development sometimes fails to address the specific condition of a certain school which may be different with others. In relation to multicultural education, grand curriculum cannot cover any of specific cultures which are available in the province in question; rather it poses only the mainstream cultures of the nation. While the mission of multicultural education is still sound, i.e. addressing the democratic principles of education and opportunities, recognizing the need for diverse perspectives in education and social justice. Although there is no exact answer to fill in the gap, Banks (2004) suggests that there are four approaches to adapt multicultural content in the curriculum.

Level 1: The Contributions Approach

At the level of contributions approach, teachers can only introduce heroes, holidays, cultural elements to the mainstream curriculum. This can be carried out by posing famous people in teaching about other cultural food, music and so forth.

Level 2: The Additive Approach

At the level of additive approach, teachers add and integrate multicultural content, concept, themes, and perspectives without changing curricular structure. For example, teachers add books by African-American writers, or include a unit/ course on covering African - American history.

Level 3: The Transformation Approach

At the level of transformation approach, the structure of curriculum is changed to

enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from different ethnic and cultural perspectives. Students and teachers work together and share knowledge to understand the varying multicultural perspectives.

Level 4: The Social Action Approach

At the level of social action approach, students make decision on important issues affecting multiculturalism and take action to solve them, by bringing in social issues, racism, classism and sexism into curriculum. Use the students as the resource to cover the topics. Textbook is viewed as a single, biased perspective, and classroom interaction are emphasized to address those issues.

The four levels of approach can be adapted into curriculum varying based on the multicultural perspectives available in question. Level 1 and 2 do not involve structural change of the curriculum, and involve only very least amount of multicultural materials. While in level 3 and 4, the integration of the multicultural issues needs a change in the curriculum structure. In these two levels, students involve systemized learning activities under the guidance of the teachers as to follow the standard process of learning. The multicultural content of learning is arranged in the curriculum which gives rise to students to analyze, to discuss and to understand the content systematically.

Most of teachers are reluctant to consider differences which belong to students just because they attempt to get *far, impartial and objective* view (Nieto in Mwonga, 2005: 11). By neglecting the difference of gender, race, religion, ethnic etc., the teachers lose sight of students' unique learning styles, since such a different socio-cultural background mostly leads to different perspectives against learning. The paradigm of "education for all" and "equality" do not mean that teachers can ignore students' differences. Rather, in the pluralism, students obtain the same right of getting equal education by certain strategies which teachers should arrange. Teachers should be able to see the differences and to exploit the strength of each student to gain optimal learning outcomes.

To get teachers keep in touch with the class' pluralism, multicultural content should be put into curriculum and implemented in teaching strategies. Teachers provide instructional design, so that the discussion of multicultural content will be systematically included in every class. The objective of every class is then to establish the multicultural intelligence of the students. In order to build the cultural awareness, schools and teachers can design activities to develop education.

Linking School and Home Culture through Teacher-Student Interaction

- Teacher should be knowledgeable on sociolinguistic communication (Fishman: how, about what to whom and when)
- Teachers should convey rules (formal and informal) for communication to students.

Learning Style Characteristics to Students

- Visual/ global, rather than verbal/ analytical
- Reasoning by inference rather than formal logic
- Focus on people and relationship
- Energetic involvement in several, simultaneous activities
- Step-by-step learning
- Greater dependence on non-verbal communication

Culturally Relevant Teaching Strategies for Students

- Use appropriate nonverbal cues, gestures, and eye contact
- Allow equal "talk time" for teacher and students
- Emphasize small group learning and hands-on contact with the teacher
- Use a variety of learning activities that include movement, games, poetry, and music. (Woolfolk in Mwonga, 2005: 12)

The implementation of above strategies can engage teachers and students into cultural-responsive class. Any student will become the member of class community which discuss, review, and understand each culture in pluralism. Cultural prejudice can be eliminated in every class activity so as to obtain socio-cultural justice in the paradigm of "education for all".

ASEAN Economic Community in Cultural Perspectives

As stated in the book *A Blueprint for Growth ASEAN Economic Community 2015: Progress and Key Achievements,* AEC was initiated at the 38th ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting (AEM) in Kuala Lumpur. The AEM agreed to develop a single and coherent plan progressing step to the AEC. The AEC Blueprint is built on four interrelated and mutually-reinforcing pillars: (1) a single market and production base, (2) a highly competitive economic region, (3) a region of equitable economic development, and (4) a region fully integrated into the global economy.

The key achievements targeted by the AEC are: (1) single goods market, a single market and production base are the central themes of the free flow of goods, services, investment, skilled labour as well as freer flow of capital, (2) bolstering productivity through skill mobility, facilitating the free flow of skilled labour across the region,

taking into account domestic regulations, and market demand, (3) a world class investment destination, building a collective identity as a single investment destination, (4) integrated regional financial system, well-functioning regional financial system with more liberalized financial services, capital account regimes and inter-linked capital markets, to facilitate greater trade and investment in the region, (5) connected EAC, (6) inductive and participatory AEC for enterprises of all sizes, (7) globally engaged ASEAN.

In a little glimpse, the AEC is established for the sake of economic development alone. But the economic development never leaves the people who carry out. The nature of people and society must be brought everywhere they go. If ASEAN now becomes a single community, it will also mean that every people can freely go everywhere without border. As a single community, people all over ASEAN will inevitably share values and norms, whatever it is. They bring their own to others, and they also realize others contrasting their own. The people mobility always results in cultural mobility, in return. The problem of multicultural interaction hereby becomes the matter of essence, although the pillars of AEC do not even include cultural content. Multicultural awareness now becomes an important issue although it is not planned and designed.

Cultural elements are as important as the people's interest, also in AEC. Communication, way of thinking, decision making process, appreciating, and politeness strategy are some cultural elements which cannot be separated from the people. When people in the AEC interact to each other, they will induce they cultural values in it. The success of communication is often determined by this awareness of values in interaction. A certain people have to be aware of other people's cultural values, or they will fail in the communication. To support the engagement of success, cultural awareness has also to be encouraged to these people.

Academic Adaptation to AEC

AEC has brought about changes, in many sectors. Not only in economic affairs, but also in some other aspects, like culture, art, security and defense, and belief are affected significantly by AEC movement. People in AEC membership are obliged to be aware of **shared values** that AEC suggests. The most effective way to build up such awareness is to bring it into academic design. Educational institutions, especially higher education institutions should put forward this issue in the academic conducts. The following proposal could be discussed and enacted in academic design:

- International curriculum redesign (at least some international content)
- Internationally recognized academic notification
- Cross-cultural Understanding
- English

- International academic networking
- International apprenticeship
- Etc.
  Such changes in academic conduct are not easy and cheap, but it has to be started immediately to meet the demand of current opportunity. This discussion is ended up with insight: "which of changes we have made".

Further Readings

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