Exploring Teachers' Perception on the Teaching of Multicultural-based Religious Education

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Abstract

Multicultural-based religious education becomes very important to be applied at schools as well as in society. It is because its present can be a solution of varied disintegration problems in our country. In addition, religious education should strengthen brotherhood among religious society. It means that all schools in Indonesia should provide space and high attention to religious education as well as arising the attitude of respecting each other, because without religion as basic element in life and involve it in conflicts is a contradictive problems based on the principle of religion itself. The objective of this research is to figure out the importance of development of Multicultural-based religious education, its implementation as well as forms developed at schools at SMPN 1 Samarinda and SMPN 1 Sangatta, East Kutai, East Kalimantan. Moreover, this is a qualitative research where it studies about natural phenomenon which rely on fact. In this case, the researcher uses semi-structured interview to capture the teachers' of religious education subject perception. The result of the study shows that both teachers at SMPN 1 Samarinda and SMPN 1 Sangatta, East Kutai, agree that Multicultural-based religious education in very important to be applied in education, especially to the lower level such Junior High School. The shortage of the application of multicultural aspect in religious education is pointed out in this research as well as the future implication related to Indonesian curriculum.

Keywords: Teachers' perspective, religious education, multicultural aspect

A. Introduction

Many years ago, before information and technology developed, people can limit to whom they what to communicate and associate, but it is no longer working since the era has changed where people communicate in a wide range and many platforms of communication (Asmani, 2011). It is very easy find any information we need where it becomes social transformation happened during this modern era. In the same time, there are many varied and complex challenges appear because of the transferability of information nowadays and world has become a borderless state (Hamka & Rafiq, 1989). Modern technology to access information is like two sides of a coin where it can be an advantage or disadvantage for people who use it. Even though many problems are possible to be faced because of the challenges of information and technology era, we should act as a kind, respectful, thankful, and appreciate one to another in order to build convenient and peaceful atmosphere. In this case, we cannot leave aside multicultural aspect where it is also related to religious education especially Islam. This phenomenon needs to be investigated, studied, as well as discussed in detail to avoid hesitation and misunderstanding (Suprayogo, 2009).

Religious education such as Civil Education at schools often assume as a social system which is responsible for building society's multicultural awareness. Religious education in many years is always considered as dogmatic, doctrine, monolithic, and leave aside the multicultural aspect. In one side, religion can drive people to build society's cultural types, even to a certain and special culture that makes it appear in a very exclusive form sociologically. Consequently, this phenomenon will also happen to any religion where people with certain religion will have specific characteristics in their religion that makes it different among others. Therefore, this exclusiveness is potential to trigger conflict among society with different religion, ethnic, tribes, and culture. That is what happened in Indonesia where those kinds of elements, or what so called by *SARA* often create contraventions in many contexts of intercommunication among society.

In context of nationalism, Indonesia has its slogan which can unite people with different background of religion, ethnic, tribes, and culture, which is "Bhineka Tunggal Ika". This slogan represents the unity of this beloved country with pluralism and multiculturalism based. Nevertheless, we still find certain conflict arises because of religious and cultural grudges which become barriers to applied that slogan in this plural country. The matter of pluralism in terms of religion and culture are sometimes still considered as threat for society. Therefore, this problem should be managed and solved in varied strategies, one of them is through the teaching of Multicultural-based religious education. The mind-set that religious education is very static, dogmatic, monolithic, and monoculture should be changed in terms of our students' point of views by using proper approaches and methods. Specifically, the researcher expects that religious education, whatever the religion is, should provide religious knowledge as a whole, or what so called by pluralism of religion and also with multicultural aspect growth in our students' thought.

If we do research on conflicts happened in Ambon, Poso, apua, Sanggau Ledo, Sambas, Sampit, Aceh, and may other conflicts, which happened with different factors, we can see that people who have certain religion with them still cannot bear for avoiding conflicts. In the name of truth and justice, they fight for everything in front of them. They become stronger than ever and kill each other. In this case, this conflict can be

caused by diverse factors such as economics, politics, and also religion aspects (Naim & Sauqi, 2010).

Based on above points, Multicultural-based religious education becomes very important. It means that religious education especially Islamic subject at schools should provide students' awareness of the existence of other religions and make them realize that it is a must to respect each other. In this case, in Islamic teaching and learning, one of materials to be taught is that Al-Qur'an explains about moral aspects which pay high attention to monotheism and social justice (Rahman, 1987). Generally, Suprayogo (2009) points out that (1) Islam is a universal religion. It means that Islam is not only for any particular country or ethnic, but it is considered as *rahmatan lil'alamin*, (2) Islam appreciate others religions and it teaches not to insist any person to choose what religion he wants to follow, (3) Islam is an open-minded religion where the truth of its contains can be tested and proved, (4) Islam has a concrete history of having plural society in the era of Rasulullah leadership where he would like to build civilisation in Madinah. In this case, Madinah is a city with different ethnic existed and protected by Madinah Charter, one of obligations in Madinah, and (5) Islam assumes that diversity is positive and natural in life, starting from the differences of gender, tribes, etc., where in Al-Qur'an, Allah has mentioned it in Al Hujurat verse 13 as follows:

$$\text{يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَٰكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَٰكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَآئِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوٓا۟ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ١٣}$$

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted".

Based on above principles, Islam provide a big chance to the existence of multicultural education. Differences are accepted and explained in Al-Qur'an that Allah makes many clans and communities in order for the human to compete in doing kindness. Therefore, concept of multicultural in religious education is extremely suggested and should be faced objectively and confidently. It is a way for Islam to prove that its religion is *rahmatan lil'alamin*, accommodate all religions with multicultural background (Suprayogo, 2009). In this case, multicultural education not only can strengthen principle of Islamic studies, but also develop the concept of how to socialize among humans. The spirit of multicultural education should be reflected in curriculum content with appropriate approach and relevant methodology applied. Based on explanation above, Multicultural-based religious education is important for us to do deeper research and more discussion, especially in plural society condition, i.e. tribes, religions, ethnic, and culture in East Kalimantan. In order to build harmony life, respect one to another, collaborate and help each other, without looking to the difference of people's background.

To sum up, above background of study indicates that a research conducted towards Multicultural-based religious education is highly urgent. In this research, the researcher conducts this research at two Secondary Schools in East Kalimantan i.e. SMPN 1 Samarinda and SMPN 1 Sangatta East Kutai. Specifically, the researcher investigates one major point as follow:

"How is perception of religious education subject teachers at SMPN 1 Samarinda and SMPN 1 Sangata, East Kutai?"

B. Literature Framework
1. The History of Multicultural Education

The construct idea of multicultural education arose in 1970s in America. If we flashback to the year of 1950s, during that year, America only admitted majority culture and ethnic which is white people ethnic. Meanwhile, other ethnics are grouped into minority and gave only limited rights. Whereas in that era, America already had varied community of citizenship and with different background. Generally, Gonzales-Espada (2004) points out that citizens of America can be divided into two ethnic, i.e. original citizens of America and immigrants. The immigrants came from Africa, Poland, Italy, Germany, and Spain, and in this case, they experienced discrimination in terms of rights equality (Gonzales-Espada, 2004). This act of discrimination attained protest from the minority, especially from African-American. This protest accommodated seven actions, i.e. (1) the murdered of Till, a fourteen years old white kid in 1955, (2) the boycott of Montgomery bus as a public transportation in 1955, (3) the pressure to American government to provide public transportation for African-American, (4) the demand of full rights of using public transportation in 1961, (5) the struggle of Brimingham to push the government to give rights equality for getting jobs for African-American in 1963, (6) the assert that African-American can have freedom of in summer in 1964, and (7) the claim that African-American should have voting rights in constitution, or what so called by Federal Voting Rights Act in 1965 (Miller, 2003).

Furthermore, not only social factor, educational discrimination becomes a triggering factor of multicultural education (Aly, 2011). In 1960s and 1970s, educational institutions in America did not apply similar rights between white people and African-American to pursue education. The discrimination is also represented in curriculum and approach used in teaching and learning at schools (Banks & Banks, 1989). The discrimination in education side also caused protest from solidarity actions by society and academic institution who insisted to have educational reformation. In fact, every human being has same right to pursue education, and the discrimination towards it is an action against human rights. Not only in terms of the chance of pursuing a proper education, but also revision towards its curriculum and methodology need to be done, especially in the area of religion, culture, and social aspects. The issue of multicultural education was developed until the end of twentieth century. Nowadays, multicultural education is no longer an issue, but has been applied at schools in America, especially on elementary and secondary levels.

Not only in America, the issue of multicultural education was also arisen in Europe countries such as Belgium, Germany, France, England, Netherland, and Sweden. After World War II, there were more than thirty millions of immigrants who spread out in

those countries (Vertovec, 2010). After becoming permanent residents in those countries, they insisted government to give them the equality of rights such as attaining jobs and careers, obligations in terms of taxes, employment, public and commercial services, as well as social interaction in community. This claim was arisen because during the decade, those immigrants and minority ethnic attained limited access to certain area and also the rules made the government which influenced their existences. This claim made the government gave legal status to the immigrants as local citizens without any discrimination (Vertovec, 2010).

The claim from the immigrants and minority ethnic had obtained positive response by government. In 1990, the government of Germany built schools with cultural background of the immigrants. The implication of this education is based on multicultural education. For example, in Germany, this application this cultural education involved in three aspects, they are (1) all learners are included in target group in education process, (2) the application of education is based on the cultural background differences, and (3) integration became the main goal.

Not only in America and Europe, the issue of multicultural education was also developed in Australia. The needs of cultural education enforcement in Australia was also pushed by immigrants and refugees. In 1945, the government of Australia released a program for accommodating immigrants in big scales in order to build country's infrastructure after World War II. During five decades of the application of immigration program, there were 5,5 millions of people came to Australia who were originally from 160 different countries as new citizens in Australia. In 1960s, Australia accept and accommodate refugees from Europe, England, Vietnam, China, Middle East, North Africa, and Lebanon (Foster & Adelman, 1993).

Regarding with schools in Australia, there are three types of schools with certain ethnic profile, i.e. (1) schools with major students from Australia, (2) schools with different types of ethnicities, and (3) schools with major students from England and Europe (Hudson, 2003). As for schools' profiles, there is an official requirement stating that the curriculum applied should contain multicultural aspect in order to prepare the next generation with multicultural and global readiness in real life.

Furthermore, the concept of multicultural education is also applied in Indonesia since 2000. There are varied discussion, seminar, and workshop are held to support this matter. It is also followed by diverse studies and publications such as books talk about this topic. In 2000, Journal of *Antropologi Indonesia*, Universitas Indonesia conducted an International Symposium in Makassar by raising trending issues related to multicultural education. These issues include democracy, human right, civic education, nationalism, social conflict, and ethnicity. Similar symposium was also held in 2003 by Journal of *Antropologi Indonesia*, Universitas Indonesia, also with multicultural themes, i.e. *Multicultural Education in Southeast Asian Nations: Sharing Experience* (Aly, 2011).

Above seminars are examples of how important multicultural education is to be applied at schools, especially in Indonesia with its citizen's pluralism. In this case, Azra (2002) as one of keynote speakers in one of above mentioned seminars, states that the management of Indonesia which had used mono-culturalism by *Orde Baru* government has destroyed local cultural geniuses. Azra (2002) adds that the lost of the culture of "Pela Gandong" in Ambon and "Republik Nagari" in West Sumatera becomes factual and historical facts which caused by mono-culturalism type of politics in that time. Whereas,

system of local socio-culturalism is a prestigious asset for our country. To discuss further, local geniuses can be a strategic method as well as an early warning system to encounter any frightening issue of losing our traditional cultures. To sum up, the mono-culturalism is a potential reason of occurrence of religious and ethnicity conflicts.

Relying on above facts, Azra (2002) recommends that it is important to reconstruct national culture of Indonesia which is possible to be an integrating force where its existence will unite all diverse culture, religion, and ethnicity in Indonesia. In this case, the establishment of multicultural society in Indonesia is not a *trial and error*, but should be organize in systematic, integrative, and continuous steps. One of strategic movement is by applying multicultural education especially to several subjects or courses in formal or informal institution, i.e. *Bahasa Indonesia*, *Pendidikan Seni Nusantara*, and *Pendidikan Agama* (Azra, 2002; Moeliono, 2002; Pudentia, 2002; and Abdullah, 2001).

Above efforts of gaining green light of conducting multicultural education in Indonesia has attained positive response from Indonesian government. Specifically, *Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republic Indonesia*, as a principle constitution in Indonesia, has released Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia 2003 No. 20, related to the national educational system which becomes a bridge to accommodate the value of human rights and the spirit of multicultural life. These values are set to be one of principles of application of national education system, as mentioned on Chapter III article 4 as follows:

"Education is held in democratic, equitable, and non-discriminative ways as well as upholding human rights, religious and cultural values, and also pluralism of nations".

Above long process until it meets into an official regulation in this country indicates that it is a must to pay high attention to the application of multicultural elements in education. This action will bring our citizen to have self-awareness of our plural nation's condition where we need to respect each other even though with different culture, ethnicity, and religion.

2. The Concept of Multicultural Education

There are four compatible terms in multicultural education, i.e. *interethnic education*, *transcultural education*, *multi-ethnic education*, and *cross-cultural education* (Ekstrand, 1997). Etymologically, the terms of multicultural education are divided into two roots, i.e. "multi-culture" and "education". The word "multi-culture" is respectful action towards culture and variation of it. Meanwhile, the term of "education" is a process of mental and characters development of learners through efforts in teaching. In addition, in terminological meaning, is divided into two categories, i.e. (1) definition based on principles of democracy, equitability, and equality, and (2) definition which relies on social manner such as recognition, acceptance, and appreciation Aly (2011) and Banks & Banks (1989). The first category points out that multicultural education focuses on education given to any person without discriminating to individual background such as gender, social status, ethnicity, religion, and cultural characteristics. In addition, Jackson (2005) supports the point of view of Aly (2011) and Banks & Banks (1989) that multicultural education is reformation movement which is designed to change education environment as a whole so that students with different background of culture, ethnic, and religion can have similar chance to pursue education from lower to higher level of education.

Another concept of multicultural education comes from Dawam (2003) who says that multicultural education is built based on social attitude and point of view which include recognition, acceptance, and appreciation. The present of multicultural education should help students to develop their ability to understand, identify, strengthening of cultural pluralism, and appreciate one to another. In addition, multicultural education is development process of the whole human potential in appreciating pluralism as a consequence of various ethnicity, tribes, and religion. This concept of multicultural education has deep implication in education or what so called by long life education. Therefore, multicultural education teaches us actions of respect to each other in order to build real happiness and peaceful atmosphere in society.

To discuss further in Islamic education context, Islamic multicultural education is inspired by transformative Islamic thought. It means that Islam is always oriented to efforts to actualize future goals of Islam, i.e. to build and change the paradigm in society that Islam is a peaceful religion or *rahmatan lil'alamin* (Nata, 2002). In other words, Islamic multicultural education is a systematic attempt to build students' understanding and awareness though a reality of our country's condition is based on pluralism, so that it is a must for us to accept and appreciate our students' background even though they are from different religion, culture, and ethnicity.

Based on above broad explanation regarding with the concept of multicultural education, it can be concluded that there are three multicultural education characteristics, i.e. (1) multicultural education based on democracy, equality, and equity, (2) multicultural education is oriented to humanity, togetherness, and peace, and (3) multicultural education develop students' characteristics such as how to admit, accept, and appreciate each other with different background of culture, ethnic, and religion.

C. Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative study since it investigate natural phenomenon happened in real life context (Biklen & Casella, 2007; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; and Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Subject of this research is two teachers of religious education subject at SMPN 1 Samarinda and SMPN 1 Sangatta, East Kutai.

Moreover, in qualitative research, a researcher can use several types of techniques interview, questionnaire, examining records, observation, and field notes (Gay et al., 2006). In this research, the technique of collecting data includes semi-structured interview to explore teachers' perception towards teaching of religious education subject with multicultural based.

Regarding with technique of analysis data relies on the theory of Miles & Huberman (1994) which contains three steps, i.e. data reduction, data display, and data verification and concluding. Particularly, in data reduction, the researcher reduced the part of interview script and take only the answer from the subject which is related to the findings he focuses on. Moreover, the data which have been reduced is displayed and then verified as well as concluded.

D. Findings & Discussion

In order to explore the teachers' perception towards Multicultural-based religious education, the researcher conducted semi-structured interview with six questions. The details is explained on below quotation of excerpt of interview from SMPN 1 Samarinda and SMPN 1 Sangatta:

Remarks:
Q1   : Question 1
T1   : Religious education subject teacher from SMPN 1 Samarinda
T2   : Religious education subject teacher from SMPN 1 Sangatta

Q1   : Do students at this school come from different background of religion, ethnicity, and culture?

To sum up that question, both teachers of religious education subject at SMPN 1 Samarinda and SMPN 1 Sangatta said "yes". It means that at both schools, the students are from different background of religion such as Moslems and Christians, different ethnicity such as Banjarnese, Bugisnese, Javanese, etc., and of course with different culture.

Q2   : Is there any problem among students which caused by the difference of religion, ethnicity, and culture? Please explain!

T1   : *Samarinda is the capital city of East Kalimantan, which means that any type of problem is potential to be happened, especially due to the status of its capital city makes it has more various population comparing to other cities in East Kalimantan. Nevertheless, problems which caused by the difference of religion, ethnicity, and culture never exist.*

T2   : *Based on my experience in teaching, problems existed among students only in terms of small fighting towards small issue which usually happen among the age of that school year.*

Q3   : Is the teaching of Multicultural-based religious education important? Please explain!

T1   : *In my opinion, it is important because our country in general, and our city in specific, relies on pluralism. We should teach the students religious values such as to show respectful attitude even though we are different in many aspects.*

T2   : *Our students are still in lower level of education. It means that we can shape their thought and attitude better. In other words, of course it is important to involve multicultural aspect in religious education.*

Q4   : Do you always involve multicultural aspect when teaching religious education subject in classrooms?

T1   : *Not always, but it is often to be done when teaching the religious education subject. The aspect of multicultural is represented by giving the students examples to the context of real life because relating theory to real life condition is one of strategies in general strategies in teaching.*

T2   : *Not in every meeting. The values of multicultural education is taught as a manner that the students should apply in everyday life.*

Q5 : **Does the existence of multicultural aspect in religious education subject supported by curriculum?**

T1 : *There is no direct topic or subtopic regarding with multicultural aspect, but in Curriculum 13 (K13), especially to the guidance of religious education in Junior High School by The Ministry of Education mentioned that teacher of religious education subject should shape students' attitude and characteristics such as the act of accepting and respecting.*

T2 : *As I know, no topic provided directly regarding with multicultural education in K13. However, the duty of religious teacher is to build students' behaviour by making sure that they show respectful action among their friends.*

Q6 : **Is this school condition already present religious education in multicultural context? Please explain!**

T1 : *So far I can see that the whole elements at this school respect one to another. There is no big conflict happen at school and we all are in safe and conducive condition.*

T2 : *There is no meaningful matter is raising up at this school. For more information, our school sometimes make Islamic forum once in a month in order to encounter problems that might afflict our nowadays students. In this globalization era, we must prevent our students from outside influence, that is why we should play our role to make better students' characteristics.*

Based on above findings, both religious education subject teachers from SMPN 1 Samarinda and SMPN 1 Sangatta, East Kutai, argue that it is very important to build multicultural aspect in religious education. In this case, those teacher said that multicultural aspect teach students to raise respectful attitude and it is supported by previous research which conducted by Jackson (1995).

Particularly, Jackson mentions that religious education represents the aspects of "religious" and "cultures". In addition, Jackson (1987) also points out on his another research that attitudes can be changed through the religious education to the students, and understanding religious culture is important to encounter the increasing of racial issues happened in the worldwide.

Furthermore, in Islamic education, education relies on a principle that human as social creators. Therefore, education should be equal to every student by giving similar rights such as the right of getting similar education, treatment, facilities, etc. Not only giving the students' rights in learning in classroom, it is a must for teachers to pay high attention the aspect of cultural background in order to create students' personalities as a useful person for their environment and society (Hasyim, 2016).

Moreover, the statement of there is no direct topic or sub topic to be taught by the religious education subject teachers indicates that multicultural aspect is still not clearly stated in curriculum. Hence, the teachers can only accommodate the essence of multicultural aspect in religious education with implied message to students.

In line with this findings, Özturgut (2011) mentions that when talking about multicultural aspects in education, there might be a small changes in curriculum, but above all, total changes should be applied in teaching students in real context. Hence, we as educators can make changes towards future life by producing students with non-judgemental and respectful attitudes. Meaning that multicultural aspects is more important to be explored by teachers when teaching the students directly in the classrooms in terms of delivering hidden meaning regarding with the importance of multicultural elements in life rather than clearly mention about it in the curriculum.

However, an experiment of developing curriculum which contains the element of multicultural aspects has been conducted by Jackson (1997) where The University of Warwick, London, is the place of conducting the research where he argues that there must be a room for wider religious traditions. It is supported by Alismail (2016) who points out that future implication of multicultural studies in education is every teacher should be prepared in teaching so it should be clearly stated in curriculum. By stating the multicultural elements in the curriculum, it will become the focus on school syllabus and lesson plan to teach in classrooms. In addition, Muchenje & Heeralal (2014) argue that it is highly recommend to include the multicultural aspects in curriculum because of its importance in education. Therefore, seminars and workshop for educators regarding with education with multicultural based should be held in order to prepare teachers that ready to teach students with multi cultures.

To sum up, the research related to multicultural aspects involved in education, is considered to be an important study and it is a good preference for our country to be more serious and focus on the development of multicultural aspect towards religious education in our curriculum. The strengthening of the multicultural aspect in curriculum will be a starting point and legal basis to be applied in schools' syllabus and lesson plan.

E. Conclusion

Based on above findings, it can be concluded that the needs of multicultural education to be existed in religious education is highly urgent. This type of education should be started from lower level of education such as in Junior High School level. Regarding with this point, the teachers of religious education from SMPN 1 Samarinda and SMPN 1 Sangatta, East Kutai, believe that involving multicultural aspect in religious education is important in order to build students' characteristics. Sort of students' attitude that should be built is respectful and appreciate to each other, because without those noble personalities, we might not encounter problems regarding with religion, ethnicity, and culture. However, the multicultural aspect is still not a upper focus in Indonesian curriculum, but this research suggests that there must be a serious effort in building students' characteristics by stating the multicultural aspect as one of important point to be reached in religious education subject.

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