

Intercultural Communication in the Implementation of Multicultural Education Performed by Islamic Religion Education Teachers of Senior High Schools

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Abstract

The occurrence of intercultural communication in multicultural education is indicated by the sense of equality in the education process, regardless of ethnicity, social class and the gender of the students. The dynamics of Islamic Religion Education, which was executed through an approach so-called 'multicultural education', combines traditions and learning process. Thus, the teachers were supposed to be the communicators who underline some particular factors such as readiness and empathy. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to describe the dynamics of intercultural communication in the settings of multicultural education performed by High School's Islamic Religion Education (PAI) teachers in Makassar. This qualitative study found that teacher's readiness was changing every time they taught another class with another academic major. A practical approach was the one preferred by the students of all kinds of academic majors, unlike the discussion and lecture approach. The other finding of this study was that teachers were more likely to show cognitive empathy rather than affective empathy.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Multicultural Education, Islamic Religion Education

Abstrak

Komunikasi antarbudaya yang terjadi dalam konteks pendidikan multikultural diindikasikan oleh rasa kesetaraan dalam setiap proses pendidikan tersebut, terlepas dari perbedaan etnis, kelas sosial, dan afiliasi gender dari para siswa. Dalam hal ini, dinamika pelaksanaan Pendidikan Agama Islam yang diterapkan berdasarkan pendekatan pendidikan multikultural mengkombinasikan antara tradisi dan proses pembelajaran. Oleh sebab itu, para guru diharapkan untuk menjadi komunikator yang mampu menekankan pentingnya sejumlah faktor penting seperti kesediaan dan empati. Tujuan dari penelitian ini, dengan demikian, adalah untuk mendeskripsikan dinamika komunikasi antarbudaya para konteks pendidikan multikultural yang dilaksanakan oleh para guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di Sekolah Menengah Atas (SMA) di Kota Makassar. Penelitian kualitatif ini menemukan bahwa kesiapan para guru berubah-ubah mengikuti perubahan kelas di mana mereka mengajar. Pendekatan praktek adalah pendekatan yang paling diminati oleh para siswa dari seluruh kelas (pilihan jurusan) lebih dari pendekatan ceramah dan diskusi. Temuan lain dari penelitian ini juga menunjukkan bahwa para guru lebih cenderung untuk menunjukkan empati kognitif dibandingkan dengan empati afektif.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi antarbudaya, Pendidikan Agama Islam, dan pendidikan multikultural.

A. Introduction

Islamic Religion Education, which is being taught in schools, can be regarded as the medium of ethnocentrism that could be indirectly bequeathed to the young generations. It will occur when the education process of Islamic Religion Education introduces religious exclusivity. Islamic Religion Education usually enforces this theory that Islam is the best religion of all. It is so often that Islamic Religion Education suggests the students to ignore other religions. One example of 'ethnocentrism-triggering' learning materials in the Islamic Religion Education, as mentioned by Nuryanto, includes the Theology which is taught merely in order to strengthen students' faith and their effort to reach paradise. The teachers do not teach the students that they should build communication with other religions too. This condition would generate the streak of exclusivity in the Islamic Religion Education, and this education subject would be considered as the intolerant one.¹

¹ M. Agus Nuryatno, *Mazhab Pendidikan Kritis: Menyikap Relasi Pengetahuan, Politik, dan Kekuasaan* (Yogyakarta: Resist Book, 2008), 77

From the perspective of intercultural communication, this reality is regarded to be the effort to cultivate ethnocentrism.

Quoted in Nanda and Warms, Samovar et al suggest that ethnocentrism is a kind of view that proposes the idea that one culture is superior to other cultures. Ethnocentrism assesses other cultures according to the view of the preferred culture. A person would be considered ethnocentric when they are more likely to judge other cultures by using their own personal view or social position.² In spite of the fact that ethnocentrism is universal and containing some positive values, like tightening the relationship within a society, the perspective of intercultural communication suggests that we avoid ethnocentrism because it would prevent people to be a competent communicator. In fact, we learn how to be ethnocentric unconsciously. For example, we learn our own language, geographic condition, and history, and we rarely learn about the language, geographic condition, and history of foreign nations. This condition would generate an exaggerated feeling of pride in our own homeland, and we would assess other nations' values according to the personal standard of our nation.

This condition would be somewhat intriguing when we bring it to the context of multicultural country such as the Republic of Indonesia. The Republic of Indonesia was composed of a vast array of different cultures. The country, which are separated by the seas ranging from Sabang to Merauke, possesses huge barriers to effective interaction. The people of the country are not separated only by seas and cultures, but we also are separated by the way people communicate with each other.

Politically, the effort to gain national integrity is to be achieved by creating an ideology called Pancasila, the state official ideology, and promoting the motto of 'Unity in Diversity' as the power to unify Indonesian people. This motto explicitly attaches the value that 'we are in the same national frame of Indonesia despite our varied ethnicities, languages, traditions, norms, values, faiths and our

² Larry A. Samovar, Richards E. Potter, and Edwin R. McDaniel (2010) *Communication Between Cultures* (7th Ed.), Singapore: Cengage Learning, 214

views of life'. 'Bhineka Tunggal Ika' is the symbol of an effort to build coexistence, and this symbol should be championed by the entire people of Indonesia (both individually or collectively) and by government agencies as well as social institutions.

One of the institutions that are expected to be the facilitator in reaching national integrity is the educational institution because formal education systems and informal education systems are actually built in order to fulfill people's needs. Schools are the main equipment in bequeathing history and tradition to the younger generations. Schools can be used as the potential agent in socializing togetherness, unity, and cultural diversity. But, on the other hand, schools can be used as a place to indirectly bequeath ethnocentrism.

While schools inherit the younger generation with Indonesian cultures and traditions, every one of the cultures and traditions seems to glorify its own historical, scientific, economic and artistic achievements. This matter also occurs in Islamic Religion Education. Religion Education is generally having the exclusivity streak. This kind of education usually underlines the positive sides of a particular religion and rarely talks about the positive side of other religions. But, ideally, religious education is supposed to be the medium of universal development of morality (which is embedded in the religions) as well as the development of inclusive and plural theology.

This condition is happening probably because the schools are unconsciously teaching the values of ethnocentrism. But, nevertheless, Indonesian schools should be teaching other kinds of values and cultural experiences. Islam, for example, does, in fact, uphold the value of diversity. When we take a deeper look into this religion, Islam is actually a really friendly religion that recognizes diversity as a reality. The education process should be the facility in transferring some values and knowledge which generate students who are faithful, pious and knowledgeable.

This issue is really important since Indonesian schools are considered to be the potential agents in socializing the values of togetherness, unity and cultural diversity. But, the learning process of Islamic Religion Education is still prone to ethnocentrism. That is why evaluating the process of religious education in Indonesian schools, according to the perspective of intercultural communication, is crucial. The context we are talking about here is the learning process with an approach to multicultural education.

Multicultural education, according to Hilda Hernandes, is a kind of perspective which recognizes diversity of political, social and economic reality, and this diversity is embedded in every individual when being gathered along with the complexity of their cultures, and this diversity is a reflection of the importance of discrepancies in the cultures, race, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, religion, social status, economic condition, and any other discrepancies when holding a learning process³. Meanwhile, Yilmaz says that multicultural education is the approach used in a learning process whose main idea is to recognize that all students have an equal chance to gain education regardless of their races, ethnicities, social classes or genders.⁴ Multicultural educations, which was chosen by us like the topic of this article, was considered as an approach, just like what has been mentioned by Yilmaz.

The teachers of High Schools (SMA) would be the subject of our study, and their role would be assessed according to the two aims of education in High School, which are: (1) to improve student's knowledge so that they might proceed their educations in a higher stage, as well as to develop their selves with regard to the development of science and technology; and (2) Improve student's ability in building mutual relationship with other people, cultures and their surroundings as the part of society. To implement the second aim, teachers need to use the skill of intercultural communication because they are considered to be the communicator

³ Choirul Mahfud, 2013, *Pendidikan Multikultural*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 176

⁴ Fatih, Yilmaz, *Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education: A Case Study of Teacher Candidates' Perceptions*, Cogent Education 2016. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2016.117394>

in creating educated people who possess the skill of intercultural interaction. Thus, the observation on how intercultural communication is held in the multicultural education approached used in Indonesian High Schools should be conducted.

Nowadays, the observation of multicultural education is favored by many researchers. In Indonesia itself, the observation on every aspect of multicultural education, such as the purpose, approach, and implementation, is highly noticed by education experts. Amirin⁵ took his interest in contextual multicultural education of Indonesian local culture. Arifin,⁶ on the other hand, observed the implementation of multicultural education. Meanwhile, Zainiyati⁷ observed the implementation of multicultural education as the effort of building inclusive diversity in schools. Other than improving inclusive diversity in schools, multicultural education is also performed in order to minimize conflicts in this era of religious pluralism. It is reflected in the research conducted by Ibrahim.⁸ Besides the implementation and the purpose of Religion Education being taught in schools, the internalization of multicultural values in Religion Education was also taken as the main focus in Sapendi's research.⁹

Although these researches have a quite heterogeneous perspective, in general, they have shared similarities, for which they were observing the concepts of multicultural education such as prejudice, ethnocentrism, and stereotype. Our research was no exception, for which its focuses were not far from the three concepts of multicultural education. However, this research added some more important issues in the approach of multicultural education, the cultural learning

⁵ Tatang M. Amirin, Implementasi Pendekatan Pendidikan Multikultural Kontekstual Berbasis Kearifan Lokal di Indonesia, *Jurnal Pembangunan Pendidikan: Fondasi dan Aplikasi*, Volume 1, Nomor 1, Juni 2012.

⁶ Akhmad Hidayatullah Al Arifin, Implementasi Pendidikan Multikultural dalam Praksis Pendidikan di Indonesia, *Jurnal Pembangunan Pendidikan: Fondasi dan Aplikasi*, Volume 1, Nomor 1, Juni 2012.

⁷ Husniyatus salamah Zainiyati, Pendidikan Multikultural: Upaya Membangun Keberagamaan Inklusif di Sekolah, *Jurnal Islamica*, Volume 1, Nomor 2, maret 2007.

⁸ Ruslan Ibrahim, Pendidikan Multikultural: Upaya Meminimalisir Konflik dalam Era Pluralitas Agama, *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam el-Tarbawi*, Volume 1, Nmor 1, 2008.

⁹ Sapendi, Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Multikultural dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam di Sekolah (Pendidikan Tanpa Kekerasan), *Jurnal Studi Gender dan Anak Raheema*.

option and the learning style called 'relational learning'. Cultural learning options and relational learning styles were observed according to the communication perspective.

B. Notes on Methodology

The aim of this study was to elaborate on the dynamics of Islamic Religion Education which was performed by using an approach called multicultural education according to the perspective of intercultural communication. This perspective of intercultural communications assesses the multicultural education approach by associating it with the relation between culture and learning process. In this case, teachers should be the communicators who enforce a number of particular factors including readiness and empathy. The subject of this research was a number of Islamic Religion Education teachers in the Senior High Schools located in Makassar, South Sulawesi.

Our research was qualitative research because we used theoretical findings, whose concern was more about the perspective of comprehension and subjective interpretation on intercultural communication performed by Islamic Religion Education teachers in their own Senior High School, as the base of this research. Hence, in this research, we chose the paradigm of constructivism.

The epistemology of this paradigm can be considered as a kind of understanding that reality, or research finding, is the product of the interaction between researchers and research subjects. We can say that reality is a social construction. Thus, the purpose of this study was to reconstruct social reality between the researchers and the Islamic Religion Education teachers in a dialectical way. In this research, we were serving as the facilitators who gave a helping hand in handling many kinds of social doer's subjectivities.

The method or the strategy used in this research is called the phenomenology method. We were trying to identify the real experience of the informants in performing intercultural communication when practicing multicultural education. We were also trying to understand the informant's life experiences. Therefore, we were supposed to conduct a review on a number of subjects by directly involved in

their activities, for a quite long time, in order to develop the patterns, relations and the meanings of the activities.

We personally believe that qualitative research, which is equipped with an in-depth interview, would be the right choice when we are intended to explore the meaning of individual subjectivity and perception. This research was directly heading to the subjective perceptions and personal experiences of the informants, as the teachers, when interacting with their students. In addition, we also gathered some data by conducting observation and documentation at the schools. Some of the documents that were used as the source included Islamic Religion Education textbooks possessed by the teachers, the report of learning completeness, the report of student's ability in reading and writing Al-Qur'an and the report of Commemoration of Islamic Holidays (PHBI) implementation. The status of our informants would be State Civil Apparatus (ASN) and they were the members of local Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran (MGMP) in their own regions.

In this research, our concepts had not been yet defined and elaborated precisely. Some of them were sensitizing concepts that can be used only as a preliminary depiction and general concepts. These concepts included multicultural education and learning style.

C. Intercultural Communication in the Multicultural Education

It is almost impossible to separate culture from education. A person who is growing with a particular tradition will be learning in a way their tradition requires them. Cultural experience would differentiate every individual during their growth period. In this context, schools represent one of the human's most important experiences since schools provide platform where socialization and learning processes take place. Schools are the place where students would be facing intercultural experience and they would need the skill of intercultural communication if they want to communicate effectively.

Schools, as one of the most important socialization agents, should promote the awareness of mastering intercultural communication. This fact is happening

probably because a classroom would be an important intercultural scope for the students. In a classroom, they would gain an understanding of whether education is important to them. Students who find that education is important to their life would behave differently from the ones who think that education is merely a stage of life that should be passed through. The difference in the student's perspective about education would lead them to choose their own behavior. Thus, it is expected that teachers recognize this condition as diversity in a classroom.

Generally, when delivering learning material, Islamic Religion Education teachers treat their students in the same way. Speaking of the multicultural education approach, not so many teachers are realizing this fact. Principally, though, they had been implementing the concept of multicultural education.

Multicultural education comprises two main purposes, which are to teach a particular tradition without negative sentiments and to teach other traditions without giving stereotypes.¹⁰ The effort to teach a particular tradition without negative sentiments was implemented by Islamic Religion Education teachers. They were also trying to introduce another tradition without giving stereotypes. Some halfhearted stereotyping appeared when students saw problematic behaviors of the other students even though this stereotyping did not last long. The students immediately showed an understanding after having a talk with their parents.

Intercultural communication has three important concepts that should be avoided by the teachers, including the intention of giving stereotypes, prejudice or the vibe of ethnocentrism. These three concepts would possibly appear if the implementation of Islamic Religion Education is not based on the multicultural reality of nowadays schools. We can take an example from the verses of Al-Qur'an which are discussing this one concept which says 'your religion is just for you, and my religion is just for me'. In this case, Islamic Religion Education teachers could underline the importance of toleration while interacting with the ones who embrace another religion. But, they should also encourage Muslim students to behave

¹⁰ Larry A. Samovar, Richard E. Porter, Edwin R. McDaniel, (2010) *Communication...*, 223.

cautiously so that the toleration would not break their faiths. This kind of toleration might spare them from the vibes of stereotype, prejudice, and ethnocentrism.

The way the teachers teach this concept of 'holding our own personal faith' was rather varied. Some teachers were discussing this concept with their students without looking at the other religion's perspective. Meanwhile, some other teachers were also introducing the perspective of other religions too. Those teachers were usually asking the non-Muslim students to speak up their perceptions about religion.

Speaking of implementing effective intercultural communication, these particular factors such as teacher's readiness and empathy would be absolutely crucial. Islamic Religion Education teacher's readiness, in terms of their attitude and behavior, should be adjusted to the applicable approach and they should avoid certain behaviors in order to optimize communication between teachers and their students, as well as to improve teacher's credibility. Generally, students would prefer doing practicums rather than hearing lectures or being involved in a discussion. Practicum is a kind of relational learning. Practicum will help the teachers to build relationships with their students.

An equity pedagogy is generally considered as the main dimension of Islamic Religion Education. A dimension called 'an equity pedagogy' is a member of the four (4) dimensions of multicultural education which have ever been mentioned by James Banks. It is said that multicultural education comprises a number of dimensions, in which the dimensions are related to each other. These dimensions include content integration, the knowledge of the construction process, and equity pedagogy, and prejudice reduction.¹¹

Context integration means integrating some kinds of cultures and groups in order to illustrate the main concept, generalization and the theory of a learning subject/discipline. *The knowledge of the construction process* means leading students to comprehend the implication of cultures to a particular learning subject

¹¹ Chairul Mahfud, *Pendidikan Multikultural*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2013), 177-78

(discipline). *An equity pedagogy* means the effort to adjust teaching methods according to the learning style performed by the students in order to improve their academic achievement, regardless of their races, cultures and social statuses. *Prejudice reduction* means identifying the races of the students and determining the teaching method that would be suitable to them. Teachers could also make student groups, in which these groups will be participating in some sporting events, leading them to have an interaction with the entire staff and other students with different kinds of ethnicity and race. That way, a tolerant and inclusive academic culture will be generated.

Empathy would be the best communication strategy to be used in a complex and heterogeneous kind of society. Empathy, as defined by Allport, is a kind of alteration in the human imagination, in which this alteration takes its place in the other human's mind, feeling, and behavior. Allport believes that empathy should be located between inference and intuition. He also underlines the role of imitation and empathy. Quoted in Taufik, Kohut finds empathy as a process in which a person would be thinking about another person's condition as if they were in that other person's shoes.¹² Kohut confirms this statement by arguing that empathy is a skill of being objective about the truth in other people's life.

Pertaining to the concept of empathy, there are at least four elements that constitute the building blocks of empathy, such as cognitive, affective, cognitive-affective, and communicative components.

Cognitive component is the one that produces an understanding of other people's feelings. A cognitive component is a manifestation of 'multiple dimensions', such as somebody's ability to define human behavior, the ability to remember intellectual and verbal traces of other people, as well as the ability to harmonize their own emotions with other people's emotions. Empathy, as a cognitive aspect, would be the ability to align personal emotional experience with that of the other people. This aspect consists of sympathy, sensitivity and the

¹² Taufik, *Empati, Pendekatan Psikologi Sosial*, (Depok: Rajawali Press, 2017), 40

intention to comprehend other people's difficulties as if they were also experiencing the sorrow.

The cognitive and affective component appears due to the fact that the experts recognize empathy as a multidimensional concept which comprises both affective and cognitive components. Meanwhile, communicative component is invented based on the early assumption that cognitive and affective components would always be separated if communication does not take place. Communicative component means the effort to express empathy. The expression of this empathy (intellectual empathy) and the feelings (empathic emotions) toward other people could be conveyed through words and actions.

The teachers had their very own ability when showing empathy to their students. We found those four components of empathy in all of the teachers. However, cognitive empathy was the one frequently conveyed by the teachers. Cognitive empathy was the one used by the teachers when trying to understand the feeling of their students who were experiencing some problems. Cognitive empathy was also related to the ability of the teachers in choosing their perspectives toward problematic students. Meanwhile, affective empathy is a kind of emotional response toward the emotions of the problematic students. The cognitive and affective empathy was expressed in the form of sympathetic words and sometimes the words were followed by a smooth caress on the student's head. This fact indicated that the teachers also showed a communicative component.

Multiculturalism education was indirectly recognized as a part of the curriculum. The multicultural dimension was manifested in every learning subject, including Civics, Geography, Literature, History, Politics, and Economics. Religion Education and moral education should be implemented by introducing plurality without reducing the values of relativism. Therefore, it would be better if it was the minorities who give an explanation about their perspectives. Some of the PAI teachers did this method. They asked the non-Muslim students in their classrooms to speak about their religion.

Multicultural Education could be defined as the medium to gain an equal chance in undergoing education when the students come from a different race, ethnicity, social class, and gender. But this theory was not fully comprehended by the Islamic Religion Education teachers in Samarinda and Makassar. Although their schools are not using the approach of multicultural education, they were giving the vibe that everyone has the equal right to gain education regardless of their social-economic background and their cultures. This was performed in order to fulfill the requirements of the 2013 curriculum implementation. Therefore, in spite of the fact that the schools were not using a multicultural education approach, the teachers were using the approach of multicultural education. This method was also performed by Islamic Religion Education teachers in order to improve student's mastery in learning Islamic Religion Education.

To implement multicultural education, Indonesian schools need to apply effective intercultural communication. It could be manifested by noticing the existed cultures brought by students and to conduct relational learning. According to Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel (2010), culture means the way the students obtain and manage the knowledge for themselves.¹³ In other words, this culture is a kind of method favored by the students in undergoing the learning process, including the process of managing their own minds and emotions.

Learning might occur naturally to every individual. Learning is the most common activity performed by an individual. However, every individual has their own learning method. Every individual has their own way of gathering some information. The way to manage information could also be varied too. We found that some of the Islamic Religion Education teachers realized these facts.

The PAI was performed in two ways, including lectures by the teachers and practicums. In the practicum, the teachers would simply lead the student what to do and ensure the availability of the related practicum elements. For instance, the practicum of '*Salat al-Janazah*' and '*Munaqahat*'. The students were absolutely

¹³ Larry A. Samovar, Richard E. Porter, Edwin R. McDaniel, (2010) *Communication*, 412

glad to attend the practicums. This was probably because practicum is more suitable to their learning choice.

D. Conclusion

The manifestation of intercultural communication in the implementation of multicultural education, in the context of Islamic Religion Education, performed in the Senior High Schools of Makassar, South Sulawesi, is indicated by the existence of equal chance in gaining education regardless of the ethnicity, social class, and gender. The dynamics of Islamic Religion Education in the High Schools located in Makassar (in the multicultural education) associates the relation between culture and learning process. The teachers are serving as the communicators and they should notice the particular factors in their selves, such as readiness and empathy. The level of readiness is somewhat varied when they have to teach in front of some classes with different majors. As for empathy, cognitive empathy is the one used frequently by the teachers when trying to understand students feeling and decide their own perspective toward the students. The effective one, which is the tendency to give emotional response toward student's emotions, is rarely used by the teachers.

The Islamic Religion Education teachers are actually teaching their students without giving negative views and stereotypes to the students, but they are doing it unconsciously. The students are allowed to choose the favorable learning method, and practicum is chosen as the most favorable learning method by all of the students.

The teacher realizes the difference between the student's learning styles. Thus, on several occasions, they treat the students differently. The students who like to undergo the learning process passively get the most attention from the teachers, unlike the ones who like to be active in the classroom. It is because the teachers want all of their students to successfully complete their education at the end of the semester.

When compared to any other learning subjects, Islamic Religion Education is rated as the most prone to ethnocentrism. All of the Islamic Religion Education teachers should be aware of this fact. It is suggested that Islamic Religion Education

teachers not to exaggerate the positive sides of a particular religion. Islamic Religion Education teachers should also elaborate on the positive sides of other religions so that their students could be spared from stereotypes, prejudice, and ethnocentrism.

The competence of performing good communication is not merely about performing open dialogue or building relationships with the students. Teachers should also possess the ability to understand the determining factors of student's traditions in their classrooms. Therefore, it is suggested that Islamic Religion Education teachers improve their ability to comprehend many kinds of cultures of delivering messages and learning materials.

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