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Multicultural Education Approach: Perspectives of Learners on Resolving University Student Conflicts in South Sulawesi

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Abstract

Student conflicts have become a common phenomenon around the globe, especially in Indonesia today with the major causes due to political and cultural reasons. Makassar is considered one of the prone to conflict areas in which students tend to behave aggressively during protests causing conflicts with local law enforcements and heavy traffic jams disrupting the public. Furthermore, internal conflicts within campus between students have been reported to happen occasionally due to cultural conflicts or misunderstandings. Such conflicts may destroy campus academic life as these conflicts damage a university profile. This study aims at investigating the student conflicts happening at a conflict prone university in South Sulawesi and the the institutions' effort in overcoming students these conflicts. This research applied qualitative approach by using in-depth interview, focused group discussion (FGD) to acquire

the data. The obtained data are analyzed qualitatively adopted from the framework developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) which consists of: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The result of the data demonstrated that most of the students' conflicts were dealing with inequality, lack of intercultural understanding, and a very limited space for ethnic and individual expressions as part of academic society. And the institution have repeatedly attempted to reduce these conflicts through interpersonal communication with individuals and communities, general campus-wide lecture on multicultural society, and annual and monthly campus-wide activities to foster students' solidarity. The lack of peace education induced within the curriculum is a major concern in many institutions of Indonesia. Hence, this issue leads to potentially open a space for employing multicultural education as peace education model to resolve university students' conflicts, particularly in Indonesia.

Keywords: multicultural education, conflict management, conflict resolution, higher education.

Introduction

Every year most high school students are admitted into Universities to continue their study. It is a place where they gain certain skills needed to pursue their intended career. These new applicants are chosen equally and with no concern to racial, ethnic, and religion backgrounds. Thus, the composition of the students' campus life are largely diverse and conflicts may sometimes arise with students of different cultural backgrounds. Students in Higher Education would their own social networks, hangouts and engagements which are sometimes left unsupervised by the universities. This may lead to disruptive indoctrination that may arise within campus life due to conflicts. On one hand there are conflicts between students and on another are conflicts between students and university management which worsen when left unchecked.

Universities are places where conflict is a part of the campus life and is essential to the universities as an organization. Conflicts can be dangerous to institutions since it not only threaten campus functioning, but could also affect other educational and social problems which include abuse of office, disagreement, quarrels, hostility and violent fights which may have a negative impact on the successful running of the university. Even though campus life is in essence about discussing and debating ideas, there are some that are disruptive and sometimes lead to violent conflicts among students themselves and with the university. Higher education has constantly attempt to resolve these disputes through mediation and other alternative

methods. In recent years especially in Indonesia, conventional methods of conflict resolution have been questioned in a multicultural setting.

In South Sulawesi, prior research has mentioned that there were more or less 35 students' conflicts occurred with the four biggest universities in Makassar since 1990 to 2008 (Jumadi, 2009). The attitudes of students opposite the academic principles and values of democracy where students should be an agent of social changes and problem solver, but not problem makers. The violent attitude values and identities are seen as social phenomena that are inseparable from human's lives, especially in the multicultural community. To solve these is how to control and overcome the conflicts wisely so they will not result in the disintegration of the nation.

Managing Conflicts Through Multicultural Education.

According to Bambang, multicultural education that is integrated into the educational institutions is one strategic step to provide knowledge and understanding to the community to some extent on the context of multiculturalism, to be applied in the day to day life. "From the differences, we respect the unity. Rudito (2008) emphasizes on the importance of multiculturalism that is to understand how several cultures can live and interact side by side.

The resolution of cross-cultural conflict begins with identifying whether cultural issues are involved. There are three ways of cross-cultural conflict resolution, as Williams (1994) proposal as follows: *first*: Probing for the multicultural dimension. The resolution process should start from the parties' acknowledgment that their conflict contains a cultural dimension. Next, there should be willingness on all sides to deal with all conflict dimensions including the cultural one. Third, systematic phased work on the conflict is needed. Williams identified four phases: (1) the parties describe what they find offensive in each other's behavior; (2) they get an understanding of the other party's cultural perceptions; (3) they learn how the problem would be handled in the culture of the opponent; (4) they develop conflict solutions. Resolution of the conflict is particularly complicated if the conflict arose not just out of misunderstanding of the other's behavior, but because of incompatible values.

The Second, Learning about other cultures. People can prevent cross-cultural conflicts by learning about cultures that they come in contact with. This knowledge can be obtained through training programs, general reading, talking to people from different cultures, and learning from past experiences. Important aspects of cultural education are understanding your own culture and developing cultural awareness by acquiring a broad knowledge of values and beliefs of other cultures, rather than looking at them through the prism of cultural stereotypes.

The Third is altering organizational practices and procedures. Often the organizational structure reflects the norms of just one culture and inherits the cultural conflict. In such cases, structural change becomes necessary to make the system more sensitive to cultural norms of other people (Williams, 1994; pp. 2-6).

Thus, this study aims to find out the factors causing university students conflicts in Makassar and the efforts that have been done by the university to manage these conflicts.

Method

A case study was employed as the tool for this study. The scope of a case study can be a single unit or multiple sites depending on what is defined as unit of analysis (Yin 1994). This study analyzes conflict management and resolving conflicts of university students to further promote the role of peace education through multicultural education embedded within the curriculum.

The data collected from Universitas Muslim Indonesia in South Sulawesi, representing the Moslem and South Sulawesi cultures and values. This study collected the data from 40 students and are activists from the university.

The data were collected through open-ended questionnaire design. The questionnaire survey is used to obtain information of students' view in the causes of conflicts in higher education and the institutions' effort in reducing the conflicts. To ensure the reliability of the questionnaires, they have an introduction that describes the purpose of study (Williamson et al. 1977, cited in Jazadi 2003, p. 75). They begin with few interesting, 'non-threatening' question because it may reduce the likelihood of the subject completing the questionnaire (Burns 1991, pp. 293-294). The questionnaires should be easy to understand and straightforward (McKernan 1996. p. 127; Wellington 2000, p. 105). The questionnaire design would be pre-testing to minimize potential misunderstanding and to ensure reliability (Anderson 1990, pp. 215-216; Burns 1991, p. 299).

Semi structured interview is more controlled by interviewer, flexible, and not completely pre-determined (Wellington 2000, p. 75). Semi structured interview is used to gain an in-depth understanding of students' conflicts by the university's perspective and how the university manage the conflicts. Theorists define triangulation as the use of "two or more methods to collect data about the same phenomenon in order to enhance the soundness of the findings" (Gall et al. 2005, p. 312; Yin 1994, p. 91; Burns 1991, p. 248). The data were analyzed by using systemic representational analysis (see Gall, et al. 2005). Hence, a study model in the form of multicultural education was taught in

several lecturers and through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) the students were observed to find out further their opinions, standings and solutions to the problem.

Most of the respondents in the research have studied at the university for more than two years. Only a few very of them are very senior students. While the number of females' students less than the number of males, which shows the number of female activists' participation in the students unions.

They come from different course majors as most of them come from social sciences English literature faculty. Students regularly attend the college which shows that they are still active students at the university. Most of the respondents graduated from public high schools; on the other hand, there were equal number of students graduated from both Islamic boarding and vocational high schools.

It is interesting to note that the students' conflicts at the university level in South Sulawesi province may not be a very difficult problem to solve, because the majority of the students believes that the conflicts are manageable and resolvable and seem to be interested discussing the conflicts through FGD after they have learnt Multicultural Education.

Findings and Discussion

Students 'views of the factors that cause conflict in higher education

There were several factors causing students' conflicts ranging from discriminative policies, unequal treatment, cultural misunderstanding, inappropriate language use, as more detail information shown in table, 1 below.

Table 1: Factors causing students conflicts

1	A discriminative policy formed by the government and/or university
2	Unequal services to the poor and students
3	Less understanding of others' culture and tradition
4	Students don't know how to speak the language politely
5	Long-time seniors and alumni maintain their pride tradition

One of the students mentioned one of the reasons of prolonged conflict with government:

“One prime example of conflict with the government was when they raised the petrol prices which many could not afford to expend. We know that that will lead to price increase in other sectors which the poor people unable to cope with”.

The students would always start with peaceful demonstrations and would end with violence not only with the police officers but also with the locals. They were not quite patient when the authority could not accept their opinions and protests. These students (activists) believed that they were protesting for the public to seek justice in discriminate or destructive policies as one student wrote:

“We (students) are the only ones brave enough to face the government when things get out of hand. We stand for the public so that they (government) would heed our plight and fix the problem”.

South Sulawesi is home to many cultures and beliefs. University students studying in Makassar come from all sorts of cultural backgrounds. Hence, a multicultural campus life was inevitable. Conflicts may arise in a multicultural setting due to misunderstandings and sometimes these conflicts would become larger as time goes on. A simple language misunderstanding that are negative to some students can cause conflict in a larger scale and even get into ethnic conflicts. Similarly, ethnic conflicts outside might influence campus life and bring the conflicts into the university. The lack of mutual respect have become an issue for these multicultural students. One particularly alarming case is the senior students' influence on active fresh students inciting them to be aggressive towards issues formed on and off campus as students mention:

“ Sometimes we are helpless in dealing with this issue where seniors and alumni come to the campus and preach us about taking action against injustice in the government and/or university. Indeed, injustice must be dealt with but should be done appropriately and should only take severe but controlled action when the issue is still not resolved or ignored”.

Efforts done by the university in resolving students' conflict

There have been attempts done by the university to overcome the conflicts at the university level. Establishing prior learning contract before their studies began is one such attempt. Another were setting up a very strict academic rules to reduce the conflicts and prohibiting students active on campus overnight to prevent the rise of the conflicts. Table 3 below are the results from the interview after analyzing and coding the data:

Table 2: Efforts by university to overcome conflicts

1	Strict Academic policy and lecturing.
2	Prohibiting students staying in campus at night.
3	Campus-wide general lectures of cultures, tradition and values that promotes unity.
4	Gathering activities to raise the university's solidarity.
5	Facilitate meeting between the two conflicted parties in an attempt to create a win-win solution.

The institution has done several attempts to minimize every conflicts that may arise within campus life such as promoting students to learn other cultures, ethnics and even religions. In addition, most institutions haven't yet initiated a sustainable program to resolve and transform conflict into peace, harmony, respecting diversity and acknowledging the similarities.

One such attempt is preventing external influence to disturb campus life as noted by an interviewee:

“We believe that by prohibiting students staying in campus at night, they would not be influenced by external factors since these students are left unsupervised at night. Because sometimes, certain disruptive groups would influence these students to spread their customs within campus and this is what we try to avoid by issuing this policy”.

The diversity of students' backgrounds such as family, races, gender, religion, economic backgrounds, needed to be free of prejudice in Indonesia. Students who are prone to conflicts should be needed to put into an environment where they can learn other cultures and traditions to avoid misunderstanding which cause conflicts rather than moving to warnings or even expulsions. The table above shows the importance of the institutions' understanding and actions taken to resolve these conflicts. According to Newstorm and Davis (2002) prolonged interpersonal conflicts lead to deterioration of cooperation and team work, at personal level some people may feel defeated while the self-image of others will decline and personal stress level will rise. Thus, the university constantly attempts at decreasing these conflicts to provide students with the best learning environment.

“We have often conduct campus-wide general lecturers for all the students discussing issues related cultures, peace and solving conflicts. Also, there's always university-funded activities or gatherings to develop mutual cooperation with student organizations and benefit every student within the campus, interacting with all majors of the university”.

Another interviewee mentioned:

“Well for students who are in conflict, sometimes we see certain communities are in conflict within campus and we try to resolve them as peacefully as possible before it escalates by gathering them in a room to talk out the issue. These things need to be fixed as fast as possible since it may cause chaos if left unchecked.”

The university's attempts at decreasing conflicts within the campus has been limited to change in policies, one-day lectures, and campus events to foster students' solidarity. There has yet been any attempt at inducing conflict resolution through the curriculum and implement it within the core lectures. Therefore, it is necessary to devise a model of multicultural education as part of the education that is concerned with multicultural society who are victims and prone to be discriminated against and well as assaults because of their unique cultural characteristics (ethnic, racial, linguistic, gender, etc.); which includes studying key concepts such as prejudice, identity, conflicts, and alienation, and modifying teaching practices and policies to reflect an appreciation for ethnic diversity (Banks, 2006).

Discussions

One of the key goals of Multicultural education according to Davidman, L., & Davidman, P.T. (1997) is the development of a society that values Cultural Pluralism which in essence can be seen in Indonesia's constitution "bhineka tunggal ika" or unity in diversity. It is evident that Multicultural education should be implemented in all forms of education and levels to foster a society respecting cultural diversity and to expand the knowledge of Indonesia's various cultural and ethnic groups resulting in the acceptance of other groups regardless of cultural differences. The presence of multicultural education embedded within the university curricula would provide a means to resolve internal conflicts in due time.

The present reality of conflicts happening in Indonesia invigorate the importance of multicultural education as the need for people of varying backgrounds to have a better understanding of one another has implications for the current issue and for future generations. Lecturers should be prepared to teach units that fully address the variety of cultures within Indonesia and the world and implemented to the curriculum (Arham & Hudriati, 2018). These units should discuss the food, music, history, stories, clothing and belief systems of these cultures using age-appropriate curriculum. Initial phase of multicultural education may begin by sharing about the cultures, races, and ethnicities already present in the classroom. Furthermore, the curriculum of multicultural education should include subjects such as: tolerance, themes of ethno-cultural differences, and religion; the backwards of discrimination and sectarianism; conflict resolution and mediation; human beings; democracy and plurality; universal humanity and other subjects that are relevant. Hence. To further accommodate the ongoing issue of students conflict in HE institutions, a study model of conflict resolution which is based on multicultural education should be implemented.

Conclusion

Unity in Diversity (Bhineka Tunggal Ika) can only be maintained if diversity, human rights, social justice, and alternative lifestyles for all people, it is necessary for a quality education and includes all efforts to make the full range of cultures available to students; it views a culturally pluralistic society as a positive force and welcomes differences as vehicles for better understanding the global society are done systematically not only in formally but also informally.

Indonesia is home to many cultural diversities, and higher education is where these diversities gather and study. A multicultural university should be aware that conflicts are prone

to happen anytime due to miscommunication or misunderstanding. Universities which has a track record of student conflicts should attempt to resolve these conflicts through multicultural education. The universality of education allows different people from various places to benefit and utilizing multicultural education may create unity despite differences. Incorporating the ethnic diversity in the classroom into the curriculum should not single students out as different but contribute to the whole classroom's understanding of the diversity present in our world.

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