

**EXPLORING MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION  
IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE STUDY PROGRAM  
OF YOGYAKARTA STATE UNIVERSITY**

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**Summary**

This paper is to explore the extent to which multicultural education is or can be implemented in English Language and Literature Study Program of Yogyakarta State University. This study is considered worthwhile regarding a fact that intercultural interactions among nations in the present global world are unavoidable and Indonesia itself is a multicultural country, in which racial, ethnical or religious issues often trigger conflicts. By self-reflecting, observing and interviewing some lecturers and students about what have been done so far in term of multiculturalism in their classes, the writer can get a general picture of the implementation of multicultural education in this study program.

English Language and Literature study programs, including that of Yogyakarta Sate University, generally offer some courses that are relevant to multicultural issues. British, American, and Australian studies in different names of courses can be taken as examples. Even though multiculturalism in the Great Britain and United States of America is not an official policy, the two countries have a number of programs that support the goals; Australia on the other hand has most fully adopted Canada's view of multiculturalism.

To be responsible to generate Indonesian young people with understanding and skills about building interactions with people from other countries and living in harmony in diversity, English Language and Literature Study Program of Yogyakarta State University should also educate their students to be multi-culturally adaptive. One action that can be taken as an example is developing

curricula that embody multicultural education. Positive values that contribute to developing broad-minded ways of thinking, understanding cultural differences, shaping cultural tolerance, carrying on effective intercultural communication and coping with cultural problems are important to be grown in students' mind. Through some particular courses in the curricula, students should be introduced to multicultural ideas and therefore can be trained to be aware of important aspects of multiculturalism.

This paper explores multicultural education in English Language and Literature Study Program of Yogyakarta State University in terms of what courses, how multicultural education is embodied in the courses, what activities are usually done during the courses, what relevant tasks are given to the students and how significant multicultural education is according to the lecturers' and the students' opinion.

## **A. BACKGROUND**

Almost all countries, including Indonesia, are culturally or ethnically heterogeneous. They have to be careful in dealing with cultural and ethnic diversity because among the existing ethnics, there is often one which dominates others and takes more advantages from the less dominant. The dominant group is often associated with the majority while the less dominant is labeled the minority. The dominance of the majority often creates gaps in economic, politic, social and cultural aspects of life. In the next turn, the gaps trigger conflicts and put the countries in disharmony.

Considering that cultural diversity is potential to harm a country's harmony, many developed countries make great efforts to minimize its negative effects. The attempts are also done with regard to an understanding that multicultural phenomenon is unavoidable not only within but also across countries. Therefore, harmonious intercultural contacts are to be manifested. Scollon and Scollon (1995) state that cross-cultural understanding, cultural tolerance, effective intercultural communication, and social cohesion are some aspects to be developed among nations. Some of the actions taken to reach the

aims include establishing laws to enforce equality among different races or ethnics and promoting multicultural education to create unity in diversity. In this context, the word multiculturalism becomes an important point of discussion.

The term **multiculturalism** (or in the USA was firstly known as cultural pluralism) generally refers to the acceptance of various cultural divisions for the sake of diversity that applies to the demographic make-up of a specific place, usually at the scale of an organization such as a school, business, neighborhood, city or nation. **Multiculturalism** is also defined as a policy, an ideal, or a reality that emphasizes the unique characteristics of different cultures in the world, especially as they relate to one another in immigrant receiving nations. The word was first used in 1957 to describe Switzerland, but first came into wide circulation in the 1970s in Canada and Australia as the name for a key plank of government policy to assist in the management of ethnic pluralism within the national policy ([http://blackwellpublishing.com/newkeywords/PDFs\\_Sample\\_Entries-New\\_Keywords/Multiculturalism.pdf](http://blackwellpublishing.com/newkeywords/PDFs_Sample_Entries-New_Keywords/Multiculturalism.pdf)). It quickly spread to other English-speaking countries.

Some countries such as Canada, Australia, South Africa and China have official, or *de jure* policies of multiculturalism aimed at recognizing and allowing members of distinct groups within that society to celebrate and maintain their different cultures or cultural identities as a way to promote social cohesion. In this context, multiculturalism advocates a society that extends equitable status to distinct ethnic and religious groups, with no identifiable ethnic, religious, and/or cultural community values around which to unite.

Other countries such as Great Britain and the United States of America do not have official policies of multiculturalism but they have many programs supporting the idea. According to Executive Committee, Association of College Unions-International, July 1987 (in Jandt, 2004: 451) multiculturalism does not simply mean other races and nationalities but virtually every conceivable human grouping that separates from the norm, develops a separate identity as well as its normative identity.

Based on the facts above, a discussion on multiculturalism, especially in education, is considered worthwhile because harmonious and effective intercultural interactions among nations in the present global world must be realized.

## **B. MULTICULTURALISM IN INDONESIAN CONTEXT**

There are more than 700 living languages spoken in Indonesia and although predominantly Muslim the country also has large Christian and Hindu populations. Indonesia's national motto, "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" ("Unity in Diversity" or "many, yet one"), articulates the diversity that shapes the country. Due to migration within Indonesia (as part of government transmigration programs or otherwise), there are significant populations of ethnic groups who reside outside of their traditional regions.

Soon after Abdurrahman Wahid, the fifth president of Indonesia, came into power in 1999, he quickly abolished some of the discriminatory laws in efforts to improve race relationships. Chinese Indonesians are now in the era of rediscovery. Many younger generations, who cannot speak Mandarin due to the ban in decades earlier, choose to learn Mandarin, as many learning centers open throughout the country. Some traditional Chinese ritual and practices also become very common to be performed in front of public.

Despite those efforts, there is still much disharmony in some areas around the country. Many conflicts happening in the country were triggered by cultural misunderstanding. Ambon in Maluku and Poso in Sulawesi are the sites of some of the worst violence ever taking place caused by religious or ethnic conflicts. In politics, many political parties have both internal and external conflicts. Respecting national leaders from the past is often forgotten or neglected by people of political parties. Therefore, multiculturalism values need to be grown again and again in the hearts of Indonesian people now.

### **C. METHODS**

This preliminary study is qualitative in nature. The object is the implementation of multicultural education in English Language and Literature Study Program of Yogyakarta State University. The data were collected through self-reflection as a lecturer in an English Language and Literature Study Program, observations to several classes, and interview with some students and lecturers selected as samples.

Some questions asked are 1) whether students get or teachers give multiculturalism in their courses; if yes, whether multiculturalism is discussed explicitly, 2) what subjects/ courses are relevant, 3) what topics in the subjects are closely related to multiculturalism, 4) how multiculturalism is incorporated in the courses, 5) what activities or methods are applied and 6) whether discussion on multiculturalism is significant to them?

### **D. MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE STUDY PROGRAM OF YOGYAKARTA STATE UNIVERSITY**

According to Ameny-Dixon (<http://www.nationalforum.com>) multicultural education is an approach to teaching and learning that is based on democratic values that affirm cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies in an interdependent world. There are currently two viewpoints or perspectives of multicultural education in the United States, namely the assimilation or “melting-pot” perspective and the pluralism or “global” perspective. The assimilation perspective of multicultural education is that microcultures must give up their original culture and identities in order to blend in or become absorbed into the predominant Anglo-Western European culture. The global perspective is that the microcultures can retain many of their traditions such as language, religion, and social customs while adopting many of the aspects of the predominant Anglo-Western European culture.

Regarding the explanation about multicultural education mentioned earlier, the implementation of multicultural education in English Language and

Literature Study Program of Yogyakarta State University can be categorized as having the global perspective. The details are explained as follows.

Based on the data collected, it is found that there are around 11 courses which are relevant or potentially can be utilized to integrate multiculturalism topics and perspectives in the teaching and learning processes. One of courses is compulsory in university level, two are compulsory in faculty level and the rest (8 courses) are offered by the study program, which can be categorized in cultural and literary and linguistic fields. The names of the courses in university and faculty levels are in Bahasa Indonesia while those in study program level are in English. The names of the subjects, and when they are given to students can be seen in the following table (Kurikulum 2002 Revisi Kedua, 2006):

No	Categories/ Levels	Names of Courses	Credit Point	Semester
1	University	<i>Pendidikan Agama</i> (Religious Studies)	2	1
2	Faculty	<i>Apresiasi Budaya</i> (Appreciation of Culture)	2	1
3	Faculty	<i>Apresiasi Seni</i> (Appreciation of Arts)	2	2
4	SP: Cul & Lit	British Culture and Literature I	2	2
5	SP: Cul & Lit	American Culture and Literature I	2	4
6	SP: Cul & Lit	Australian Culture and Literature I	2	5
7	SP: Ling	Sociolinguistics I	2	4
8	SP: Ling	Sociolinguistics II	2	5
9	SP: Ling	Dialectology	2	5
10	SP: Ling	Pragmatics	2	6
11	SP: Ling	Discourse Analysis	2	6

Note:

SP : Study Program

Cul : Culture

Lit : Literature

Ling : Linguistics

It can be seen from the table that courses having contents of multiculturalism are distributed almost evenly since the first semester until the sixth semester. Two courses are given in semester 1, two in semester 2, two in

semester 4, three in semester 5 and two in semester 6. There are no courses relevant to multicultural issues are offered.

All lecturers and students contributing to this paper stated that multiculturalism is taught through implicit ways, meaning that the lecturers do not explicitly explain about the term multiculturalism with all its aspects and dimensions. Some of the materials, however, are about multiculturalism.

Some topics relevant to each of the courses are as follows. In *Pendidikan Agama* (Religious Studies) students are taught about religious tolerance and how to respect people of other religions. Through *Apresiasi Seni* (Appreciation of Arts) and *Apresiasi Budaya* (Appreciation of Culture), they are given materials about how Indonesia is very rich with arts and cultures (the various arts themselves indicates various cultures). Many examples are taken from Javanese arts and cultures since most of the students and lecturers are from Java and UNY's location is in Yogyakarta, which is considered as one of the centers of Javanese cultural heritage.

In courses like British, American and Australian Culture and Literature, most lecturers emphasize that even though the majority of people in the three countries are Anglo-Saxon they in fact are not exactly the same in culture. For instance, they have different Englishes as their national identity and celebrate different cultural ceremonies or events. The countries' differences are shaped by – one among many- the different ethnics and races living there. Some lecturers also explain the countries' characteristics despite a fact that they are similar in their having blend of cultures: basically Great Britain has English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh cultures, the USA has English, Indians, Black, Afro-American, Chinese and Hispanic cultures and Australia has English, Aboriginal and Asian cultures. In short, the lecturers often highlight the uniqueness of each country in holding and in implementing multicultural values in their aspects of life. More specifically the topics of each subject are discussed one by one.

The lecturers of British Culture and Literature I and American Culture and Literature I tend to arrange the topics based on aspects of a country's life, namely geography, economy, government and politics, religions, social aspects and

education. They often compare and contrast between the two countries themselves or the two countries with others, especially Indonesia. The goal of doing comparison and contrast is to make students aware that every country is unique in its own sense and to share the countries' experiences so that they can learn and utilize their knowledge in the future.

For example, the lecturer of British Culture and Literature I compares democracy in Great Britain and the United States of America. GB, being a monarchy, does not seem to be democratic. Vice versa, the US seems to be much more democratic than GB. In fact, the people in GB accept their country as democratic since they have parliament representing them. So they feel democracy in their own sense.

Another example is when talking about British government and politics the lecturer gave illustration of how British government negotiated with Japanese government to solve problems of unemployment in London after industrialism. At that time being Japan really wanted to market their industrial products, especially cars but could not afford it since taxes for imported products to England were so high. What was done by the British government was giving permission to this developed Asian country to establish a car manufacturer and erasing all taxes for the establishment. In return, the Japanese car industry recruited many Londoners and people around this city to work as its employees. What can be learnt by students is the win-win solution made by these two countries to solve their each problem. Since the two countries have different socio-cultural backgrounds, it can be imagined how hard it was to get a deal during the process of negotiation.

In American Culture and Literature I, multicultural topics are also often given even though they are not discussed explicitly. One example is in discussing religious aspects in the US, which is known as a secular country. It is explained by the lecturer that this country has religious tolerance in a way that the citizens are free to choose any religions they believe in. This is at least symbolized by what is written in one of their coins, saying "In God We Trust".

Another example can be given in political aspects. People of America give high respects to their heroes and national leaders, such as presidents. Even though



they do not have the same political aspiration with one elected president, for instance, still they mostly respect him. One recent reality about the elected president from the Black, Barack Obama, shows that to certain degrees multiculturalism is implemented in the heart of American people.

Australian Culture I offers relevant topics such as National identity of Australia, Social Etiquette, Culture of Australia, Australian Traditions and Literature, The new 'unionism' and Education in Australia. In many ways Australia is like GB and US.

Topics which are relevant to linguistic courses can be explained like the following. Sociolinguistics (I & II) are said to have the most among the others. The relevant topics are Bilingualism and Multilingualism, Language choice in multilingual communities, Language maintenance and shift, Linguistic varieties and multilingual nations, National language and language planning, Ethnicity and social networks and Speech function, politeness and cross-cultural communication.

Multicultural topics in Dialectology are Language contact, language shift and identity, Standard and non-standard dialects: attitudes and policies and Linguistic value and aesthetic judgements of dialects (often reflecting how most people from rural/ marginal areas feel inferior towards those from town or cities).

In Pragmatics there is one big topic, namely Societal Pragmatics, which consists of several important discussions on multiculturalism. The topic includes Conversational Maxims: cooperative and politeness principles, including how 'face' is interpreted, Pragmatic presuppositions in culture, Wording the world and Pragmatics and the social struggle.

Discourse Analysis offers at least Discourse routines (showing how people from different countries from different cultural background maintain social relationship) and Intercultural communication and discourse (showing how certain discourses must be modified as to be used in intercultural communication).

In giving materials related to multiculturalism, several methods of teaching are applied. In *Pendidikan Agama* (Religious Studies) the lecturers generally emphasize religious tolerance in Indonesia and how to respect people of

different religions by quoting some verses from the Quran, Bible and other holy books and illustrate some 'religious' conflicts ever happening in the country.

The lecturers of *Apresiasi Seni* (Appreciation of Arts) and *Apresiasi Budaya* (Appreciation of Culture) apply more various methods to promote multiculturalism. Besides giving materials in classes, the lecturers also invite their students to have real experiences by visiting some cultural sites such as Prambanan (Hinduism heritage), Borobudur (Buddhism heritage), and enjoying cultural events such leather puppet performance (which is sometimes a mixture between traditional and modern styles),

In British, American and Australian Culture and Literature classes, the lecturers give lectures and materials (included recorded videos, films or other documentaries, pictures taken from the internet, etc) to be discussed by students. They also ask the students to present papers, to make maps, to draw diagrams of governmental systems, to find pictures of important figures in the countries and to watch movies.

The linguistic courses also offer class and field activities. In Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis, there are some tasks for students to have mini projects related to the given materials. They can take data from literary works, films, leaflets and brochures or the spoken languages of real people. In Dialectology despite having materials in class, the students are also sent to have field investigations into the use of different dialects in the regions around Special Territory of Yogyakarta.

In relation with the importance of having multiculturalism topics, all lecturers and students have the same opinion. According to them, the topics are quite significant since English Language and Literature graduates are supposed to have jobs which are close to people from other nations, who of course have different cultural backgrounds. In a wider context, the topics need discussing since Indonesia is a country which is culturally complex. This implies that the country also has many cultural problems like other countries face. Learning from their experiences, the students can get precious knowledge of how to avoid conflicts, to solve multicultural problems and to live harmoniously in a multicultural society.

## **E. REMARK**

Multiculturalism is a crucial topic to be discussed to improve people's awareness that unity in diversity, living harmoniously in a multicultural society, is not impossible to realize. Educating young people to have this awareness is a big step to the path of creating multiculturalism. In the earlier age they are taught and educated about multiculturalism, the greater understanding they will have and the better they are in absorbing and implementing multicultural values in their life. It is in accordance with what is stated in <http://www.ericdigests.org/1992-5/perspective.htm> that teaching with a multicultural perspective encourages appreciation and understanding of other cultures as well as one's own. Teaching with this perspective promotes the child's sense of the uniqueness of his own culture as a positive characteristic and enables the child to accept the uniqueness of the cultures of others.

Related to several facts of multicultural education in English Language and Literature Study Program of Yogyakarta State University already explained, the teaching of multiculturalism topics in the eleven courses should be maintained and explicit ways of delivering the materials seem to be important as well to increase the students' awareness of the significance of multiculturalism.

## **F. REFERENCES**

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