

Multicultural Education for College Students: New Perspectives in Indonesian Context

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Abstract

The present study discusses the conception of multicultural education induced to college students with different backgrounds. On the basis of Berger and Luckmann's views on social construction of reality, the study is concerned with the importance of multicultural education and approaches to develop multicultural competencies expected, required, and experienced in socialization process by Indonesian college students in recent global access. The study offers critical analysis of the current situation and alternative best practices in and out of classroom to promote multicultural education in different social contexts. The study suggests that multicultural education play a vital role in promoting unity in diversity of race, religion, culture, and life dimensions.

Key words: social construction, multicultural education, diversity

Introduction

The issue of character building at college levels deserves serious attention. Our attentions are usually centered on the educational practices at the lower levels for certain reasons. For example, sometimes people think that character building is usually mostly given to younger students since college or university students have reached their own maturity. This study is concerned with strategies that possibly drive college students to be more individually and socially engaged in life process improvements. In addition, the present study has to do with the implementation of 'Mata Kuliah Berkehidupan Bermasyarakat/MBB' (Social Participation Studies) in Indonesian higher education. The implementation of the subject is relevant to Indonesian context with its diverse backgrounds in terms of cultures, races, tribes, religions, and other life dimensions.

Pancasila, the state philosophical foundation, guarantees its people in running out their 'limited' freedom in construing life values. Their different backgrounds, yet, should drive socially constructed cultural boundaries of lives. Through multicultural education each individual should always try to adjust their own freedom to the close community, and later in the broader shaping contexts. Through social construction of civilization (see Berger and Luckmann's 1966, with their sociology of knowledge) each member of community collaboratively get engaged in committing their shared interests.

The implementation of MBB in Indonesian context needs critical views. The decree of Directorate General of Higher Education, Republic of Indonesia, concerning the guidelines of

mandatory implementation of MBB covers the salient points related to how to educate college students to successfully live individually and together in socially and culturally different contexts by means of their critical and creative thinking, appreciative and sensitive to the existing social and cultural values. Indonesian college students are thus demanded to get engaged in social process of learning to ‘live together’ by participating in classroom community events.

The teaching material of MBB covers such issues as: human as cultural creature and as an individual and social agent, human being and civilization, human with diversity and equity, and some others related to morals, science, and technology. The suggested teaching models include tutorials, lecturing, dialogue, discussion, case studies, individual assignment, small seminar, and co-curricular activities. Yet, the MMB teaching pedagogy still lacks more critical, creative and constructive approaches through social construction of ‘meaningful life harmony’.

Multiculturalism, ‘the gifted’

Human beings were born with universally different nature. They are now shaped by their different time and space so that they tend to be different in their ways of behaving. Each individual, yet, get involved in building community for the same dimensions of developing cultures to reach life harmony. As such, each community tends to be different to one another in their beliefs (in God, religion), races, tribes, cultures, and other social backgrounds.

Approaches to educating multicultural classes: shifts in pedagogy for Indonesian self-identity

The non-threatening classroom practices of MBB will be dependent on how teachers/instructors create appropriate approaches to teaching pedagogy. The best selected ones will entail multilayered functions enabling the subjects to reach their best personality to harmoniously live together with peers or other people. The suggested teaching models, yet, still lack samples of best practices in real contexts and cooperative learning.

The appropriate model refers to the so-called ‘equity pedagogy’ as suggested by Banks (1995). It offers its basic classroom procedures (strategies and environments) that help students from diverse backgrounds create and perpetuate a humane and democratic society. Cooperative learning is suggested. Banks (1995, p. 153) argues, “Equity pedagogy actively involves students in a process of knowledge construction and production”. The characteristics of equity pedagogy include the students’ roles in generating knowledge and creating new understandings, and relating their ideas and perspectives, and making judgments and evaluations.

In the same direction, multicultural knowledge includes key concepts (Banks, 1995, p. 156): culture, immigration, racism, sexism, cultural assimilation, structural assimilation, ethnic groups, stereotypes, prejudice, and institutional racism. Thus, classroom practice includes teaching strategy as a multicultural encounter, both teachers and students belong to diverse groups

differentiated by variables such as age, social class, gender, race, and ethnicity (Banks, 1995, p.157).

Basically, there five components of multicultural education practice (Banks, 2004) that offers student-centered demanding teachers to:

1. expose students to a wide variety of materials, information and ways of being
2. help students learn to question and consider how knowledge is constructed
3. learn about other groups and explore similarities and differences between people in an open and reflective way
4. teach students in a way that empowers them as constructors and explorers of knowledge, and teach them in such a way that diverse learning styles are accommodated
5. create schools and classrooms un which students feel empowered to achieve their best

Best practices in Galuh University

Galuh university's best practices include 'ISBD'(of MBB) lecturers' creativities in carrying out democratic and conducive classroom practices. The lecturers or instructors try to make the students active in critical discussions, peer-sharing, and collaborative works in solving problems of social and cultural issues. The university also offers academic and student exchange in and off campus, which include visiting overseas universities (through Student Exchange and Academic Sharing/SEAS Programs), sending students to summer camps to overseas universities.

Conclusions and further directions of teaching and researching

The present study sees that multicultural education offers alternative rooms to humanize students and make them best educated and civilized figures and social agents. Consequently, teaching pedagogy for multicultural education needs creative breakthroughs. In addition, studies on social interactions among different students from different ethnical backgrounds need exploring. For the sake of institutional benefit, empowerment of the role of international relations office in engaging students to learn foreign languages and cultural exchange is central.

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