

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS INCLUSION IN TEACHING MATERIALS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY IN INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY SETTING

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Abstract

Inclusion in the Indonesian context means the participation of minority ethnic and religious groups within the dominant Javanese and Muslim society. The issues of ethnic and religious inclusion are discussed in a case study: teaching materials in tertiary education context.

This case study looks into how Minahasan ethnic group and Christian affiliated English lecturers in Manado adapt the content of ELT materials in relation to their multiethnic students with different religious backgrounds. Their awareness of the importance of teaching materials adaptation and better interaction between lecturers and students enhance better understanding of what should be done regarding their students' ethnic and religious backgrounds.

In relation to the issues of inclusion explained above, this case study explores how within the dominant Javanese and Muslim society of Indonesia, a region where Minahasan and Christian majority still prevails. This study shows how local Minahasan and Christian ELT teachers perceive the appropriate and relevant cultural values contained in teaching materials and implement the materials adaptation for their multiethnic students in university context.

Introduction

This article looks into issues of materials adaptation in higher degree setting. It deals with Minahasan lecturers perceptions of their students' "multi ethno-religious" backgrounds in tailoring their English teaching materials to suit students' ethno-religious backgrounds. The study emphasises the perspectives of university lecturers who are mostly Christians.

One of the frameworks chosen by the writers to approach the above research question is cultural inclusion in education specific to Indonesian context. One of the issues that researchers are concerned about regarding the national, ethnic and religious identity of Indonesian is the debate on the inclusion of these cultures in education. Banks (2006) and Ryan (1999) for example argue that the recognition of the ethnic variety is important as this can motivate students to achieve better outcomes.

The failure of cultural inclusion in education on the other hand can indicate the failure of "legitimizing learners' diverse and multifaceted identities" (McClure, 2010, p.268) and this may lead into the feelings of "unheard", "misunderstood" or "undervalued" which cause the loss of interest in language learning (McClure, 2010). In addition, Banks (2006) underlines the basic principles of ethnic and cultural diversity such as the recognition of cultural diversities in educational context, within individual and social level, for basis of societal enrichment and survival (p. 314). In the following sections, the context of the study and description of the study will be presented individually followed by bringing together the result of discussion of the studies.

The context of the study

The idea of the writers working together in this project came up from our sharing interests on issues of diversity and inclusion of cultural dimension in Indonesian context. The writers are aware of the complexity of ethnicity and religion in Indonesia. We came from very different areas in Indonesia, one from Manado, Sulawesi Island, practising the majority Minahasan-Christian cultures and one from Yogyakarta, Java Island practising the dominant Javanese-Muslim traditions. We feel that the practice of national and ethno-religious backgrounds affect us in our daily lives including in the education setting, especially in teaching and learning activities.

Therefore, the writers suggest writing this article to capture the complexity of ethnicity and religion in Indonesian context which is reflected in the practice of English teaching materials adaptation for university students. For this reason, the following research question is proposed: How do ethnic and religious notions affect the adaptation of teaching materials for university students? To answer this question, the writers also look at the way teachers promote the equity through the inclusion of Indonesian ethno-religious practices in their teaching materials.

This study takes place in Indonesia which spread across the island are ethnic and religious groups coming from various parts of the country. A census conducted in 2000 identified 101 ethnic groups and number of the people living in Indonesian islands. Although the census is over 10 years old, it is one of the two official censuses (1971 and 2000) which is used repeatedly throughout academic research (Suryadinata et. al, 2003; Aspinall, 2011). With regards to the religious demography, the government of the Republic of Indonesia officially recognizes five religions: Islam, Christianity (Protestant and Catholic), Hinduism, and Buddhism. The Republic of Indonesia is not an Islamic country although 88.22% of the people are Muslims. The Muslim majority coexists with Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and others within the Indonesia nation, the citizens having their freedom to conduct religious affairs (Uddin, 2010).

Considering the nation demography above, the notion of national, ethnic, and religious identities intertwine in ways of being an Indonesian. A national identity upholds the differences of religious and ethnicity identities of the Indonesian citizen by downplaying ethnicity and religion to attract minority ethnics and religions (Jones & Shaw, 2006; Bertrand, 2010) in creating the principle of 'unity in diversity' and practicing it in real life. Dealing with the issues of ethnicities and religions, it can be deduced from multiple sources that multiethnic and religious discourses are made based on cultural, social, and historical reasons (Derichs & Heberer, 2006; Lilley, 1990). Instead of being forced by the colonial country, the multiethnic notion is rather influenced by the individual decisions made by the members of a particular social group. In fact, multiethnic discourses in Indonesia involve richer processes dealing with its geographical features, the national ideology, and the uniqueness of diverse cultures possessed by each ethnic group. In practice, this diversity and the multiethnic discourses produced from this heterogeneous society trigger two opponent reactions, such as the sense of separatism and of nationalism (which was reflected in the event of Youth Pledge in 1928). Later, realizing the potential threat of Indonesian integrity, the Indonesian state established the philosophical foundation of the Five Principles, Pancasila, belief in one God, humanity, Indonesian unity, democracy, and social justice (Soetjipto in Manning and Van Diermen, 2000). One of these principles emphasises the unity of the nation, which involves the need to avoid disintegration by promoting the concept of nationalism.

The notion of equity within broader literatures and in the present day of Indonesia

National, ethnic, and religious identities intertwine in ways of being an Indonesian. A national identity upholds the differences of religious and ethnicity identities of the Indonesian citizen by downplaying ethnicity and religion to 'invite' minority ethnics and religions (Jones & Shaw, 2006; Bertrand, 2010) in creating the principle of 'unity in diversity' and practicing it in real life. Therefore, equity within the present day of Indonesia means restraining differences of ethnic and religious identity. This means that ethnic and religious cultures are allowed to be practised by

individuals however the practise should be minimized within official government settings.

Within the present day Indonesia, the diversity of ethnicity, religion, and interclass is silenced under the homogenized national identity such as the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, to be a tool to 'unite' the Indonesians regardless of their diverse practices of ethnic groups and religious affiliations. Bahasa Indonesia is a language which is chosen not from any ethnic languages existing in the nation.

However, the silencing of ethnic and religious identities does not work out smoothly as instructed within the policy. Access to governmental institution (state elites) and wealth are among the major factors that shape the markers of the national identities of the people. This state formed accumulated, complex political and economic problems which led several ethnics to be concerned about the development of regions outside Java. For example, the Minahasan, who fought side by side with Indonesian nationalists to achieve the Indonesian independence, felt that the development of their region was being neglected to the benefit of that of the Javanese (Scheffold, 1998). There was a growing local discontent of ethnicity in Sumatra because of Jakarta's Java-centric economic policies, heavy Javanization of the governmental administration, and a lack of effective regional representation in the capital (Triastuti & Rakhmani, 2011; Rose, 2010).

Within the context of Indonesian education, students' achievement is used to determine students' intake selection to higher level of education, such as secondary and tertiary level, within the Indonesian education system. Both young boys and girls are discriminated not against gender, ethnic or religion but against their 'intelligence'. Boys and girls who obtain high scores during the final examination of primary school have more privilege to choose a secondary school they prefer. The same is true with those who graduate from the secondary school. The Indonesia education systems discriminate against scores that students achieve in the final examination which influence the intakes of the schools.

Learning from the government's efforts in creating the harmony within Indonesian diverse ethnic and religious society, lecturers are encouraged to preserve the ethno-religious related equity in their ways of adapting materials to accommodate the needs of their multiethnic and religious students. The next chapter discusses further the inclusion of Indonesian contexts and values in teachers' practices of English teaching materials adaptation.

Ethnic and religious inclusions in adapting teaching materials in Indonesia

In the introduction, it is stated that national, ethnic, and religious identities intertwine in ways of being an Indonesian. A national identity upholds the differences of ethnic and religious identities of the Indonesian.

This case study was located in the capital of the province of North Sulawesi, Manado, in which Christian population dominates the region enclave within Indonesia with its Muslim majority population. The non-homogeneity of ethnic demography in this region is presented by Babcock (1982) who stated that the major ethnic groups in North Sulawesi province are Minahasans, who are "overwhelmingly" Christian, followed by Sangirese groups, who are also mainly Christian, and Muslim Bolaang Mongondow. Besides these three ethnic groups, there are Chinese and Arabic descent immigrant groups. The other ethnic groups who populate this province are people from Java and Gorontalo.

In response to such diversity, it is expected that higher institutions would provide better quality and more importantly, can prepare the students, regardless their socioeconomic status and ethnic backgrounds, to be more competitive in the job market. The increasing numbers of students coming from many areas outside Manado or North Sulawesi province to study English in a state university in this city have triggered new challenges for educators. One of them deals with teaching materials, which have an important role in English language education when these are used for creating students'

enthusiasm and increasing students' better comprehension.

The researchers on material development have placed greater emphasis on the local contents in textbooks and whenever the content of available textbook is not desirable, they find the educators' greater roles take place in the process of selecting and adapting the teaching materials. As Harmer (2007) stated, since teachers have important roles in choosing the contents of the coursebooks and making them relevant to students' interests and knowledge, one of the lecturers' challenges is to provide English teaching materials that are culturally appropriate and engaging for their multi-ethnic background students.

Such ethnic complexity in Indonesia arguably has an impact on the proactive of the country's educational system in the sense that this ethnic complexity has urged the government to accommodate this diversity into the educational policy in order to promote the recognition and appreciation of this diversity. In particular, multiethnicity might become an opportunity for educators to consider about the inclusion of Indonesian diverse socio-cultural representation in the curriculum. In English language education, the awareness of ethnic cultures can also be initiated in the forms of balanced representations in the textbook content.

In accordance with this idea, Zakaria and Hashim (2010) suggested that the usefulness and the effectiveness of ELT materials should not only be aimed at their function of English educational tools but also at the promotion of cultural comprehension and cognition among the learners from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Inevitably, the concept of multiethnicity will be linked up to students' backgrounds which, according to Richards (2007), should be concerned as one of the influential factors in selecting and developing relevant materials for second or foreign language teaching and learning. In addition, such researchers as Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004), McDonough and Shaw (1993), McGrath (2002), and Richards (2007) have pointed out the importance of considering students' backgrounds and needs in their choice of teaching materials. In particular, Gray (2000), Hill (Hill, 2005, September), Bao (2003), Zakaria and Hashim (2010) believe that the appropriateness of course materials can be promoted through the inclusion of relevant cultural topics.

The participants of this case study are eight lecturers who have sole responsibilities for choosing their materials and adapting these materials in regards to their students' needs. They represent full time teachers working in English department with variety of educational backgrounds and length of experiences. Though all the recruited participants in this research are Minahasans, the "ethno-religious" background of the lecturers in Faculty of Letters especially in English department is diverse. The lecturers' demography is similar to students' demography in this institution.

Most of lecturers in English department acknowledged the diversity of their students who come from Sumatera, Kalimantan, Papua, Java and so on. They could identify such students' ethnicities as Batakese, Chinese, Irianese, Sangirese, and so on from informal interaction with their students either inside or outside classroom. Though Minahasans outnumber other ethnic population of English department students, the number of other ethnicities is increasing year by year. This made the issue of ethnic and religion variety inclusion become central in this context especially through the topics in English teaching materials.

In line to the statement, some of participants regarded the inclusion of ethnic culture variety through the topics in teaching materials can motivate their multiethnic students to be more engaged and active. As what has been argued by scholars (Hills, 2005; Richards, 2007) that most effective and relevant materials need to be suited to students' backgrounds and can only be produced by teachers with practical knowledge of their students' profile and learning inclination, the lecturers' interaction to their students enhance the lecturers' awareness on their students' ethnic background and as a result better material selection and adaptation suit to their students' multiethnic backgrounds can be done.

Speaking of cultural content adaptation, teachers were very excited with the idea of localizing the cultural content based on their students' ethnic background. Although some of teachers realized about

the need of cross-cultural learning, they believed that the content of their materials might be unfamiliar to their students' knowledge and this irrelevant content should be minimized by localizing the content. The need to censor the sensitive cultural topics was also highlighted by a participant since these topics might be offensive and irrelevant to her students' ethnic culture.

Complicating issues of ethnic inclusion within educational settings is religion-related matters especially in the educational setting in Indonesia. Religion has been given more attention than ethnicity within the official political dimensions in Indonesia because of the discrepancies of the various religious groups. The Islamic religious group is the majority in Indonesia whereas the Christian and other religious groups are the minorities. On the other hand, none of the ethnic groups can be claimed to be a majority since the majority Javanese constitute 41.71% followed by the Sundanese 15.41% (Suryadinata et al., 2003). In this study, the case of Minahasan-Christian is therefore unique. Christianity is the dominant religious groups in Manado, Sulawesi. Christianity was introduced to Indonesian society, including in Manado, during the three-and-a-half centuries of Dutch colonialization in Indonesia during 1956-1942 (Drakeley, 2005). Since then, Christianity was practiced by the majority of Minahasan society.

Religious topics were considered as the main sensitive issues so that only few teachers addressed these issues in the interview. While one of teacher totally avoided this topic to be included in his teaching material, other teachers were trying to justify the relevancy of specific topic that was related to Christian religious practices or themes to their Muslim students. Due to teachers' heavy workload and lack of fund, the localization of the content was done mostly on the spot during the teaching activities. The variety of teaching strategies have also been applied to overcome the challenges emerged in their classrooms.

Conclusion

In summary, ethnicities and religion are central in Indonesian educational setting and therefore in this paper the issues of ethnicity and religion of teaching materials designed for university level are examined. The research result above shows the complexity of ethnic and religious identity within tertiary education and how this shaped teachers' practices in the field of teaching materials adaptation. The lecturers include relevant cultural topics in teaching materials and do their best efforts in adapting the culturally appropriate and engaging teaching materials for their multi ethno-religious background students. Localizing the contents and censoring the sensitive issues were some ways of adaptation chosen by teachers in order to accommodate their students' needs. With regards to religious identities, the awareness of religious identities is obvious in Indonesian lives. The study shows that the Christian lecturers regard religion-related topics as sensitive topics and therefore, they prefer to limit or exclude the religious content in their teaching materials. The adapted materials can engage students in learning English and motivate them to be more active in expressing their ideas in the classroom.

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