

Liberal and Multicultural Education Amid Cultural Pluralism in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Education cannot be separated from the ideology that develops in a society, and this is also true of Indonesia's pluralistic society. Education in Indonesia is currently characterized by at least two paradigms, namely Liberal Education, which is based on the ideology of liberalism, and Multicultural Education, which is based on the ideology of multiculturalism. This study aims to describe the suitability of applying liberal education ideology and multicultural education in the midst of cultural plurality in Indonesian society. The results of this study begin with a description of several concepts, including: the understanding/ideology of liberalism and liberal education, and the understanding/ideology of multiculturalism and multicultural education, and cultural plurality. The next discussion is the core of this research, namely regarding Cultural Plurality in Indonesia and the Role of Liberal and Multicultural Education. At the end of this research, the fundamental similarities and differences between these educational ideologies are concluded, in relation to the pluralistic cultural conditions in Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Education has an important role in developing a person's abilities. Education is one of the means to gain knowledge that will later become a provision in people's lives (Eikeland & Ohna, 2022). Education is an important, strategic and determinative factor for society (Eikeland & Ohna, 2022). The progress and decline of the quality of civilization of a society/nation is highly dependent on how the quality of education is organized by the community (Alshumaimeri, 2022). However, education is the most effective tool for change and the achievement of progress in various dimensions of life (Haleem et al., 2022).

Education also cannot be separated from the ideology that develops in the midst of society. This ideology also colors education so that education carried out in society has certain characteristics that are identical to certain ideologies (Dery & Reingold, 2021). In this study, it is discussed about two different types of ideologies that affect the pattern of education in Indonesia, namely: liberalism and multiculturalism.

As an ideology, or set of views, multiculturalism simplifies complex realities. Multiculturalism is not a unified reality and therefore is not ideologically cohesive. This means that there is no one "standard path" that everyone can follow equally in every situation (Mansouri & Modood, 2021). In the world of education, these two ideologies form two types of education: Liberal Education and Multicultural Education (Daniels & Enslin, 2023).

Liberal education does not see problems that develop in society because of the social system of the society, but because of human unpreparedness in dealing with the system (Sturrock, 2022). Therefore, Liberal Education advocates learning that provides as much useful knowledge and skills as possible to students, knowledge is doctrinal and assesses things only by looking at the intellectual intelligence that students have. Today, Liberal Education has developed in the midst of a global society (Sturrock, 2022). Meanwhile, multicultural education is a set of beliefs and explanations that recognize and assess the importance of cultural and ethnic diversity in the form of lifestyles, social experiences, personal identities, and educational opportunities from individuals, groups, and countries (Lai, 2023). Multicultural education respects the differences contained in the types of cultures that exist in society (Cathrin & Wikandaru, 2023).

Some of the results of the research that are in line include the plurality of ethnicities, religions, races, and groups, which should be the capital of development, are often manipulated by the rulers to achieve their political interests. Therefore, when conflicts break out in the regions, the state seems to cover up the reality of pluralism in the name of "national unity and unity" or "national stability" (Hesti et al., 2022). The study then puts forward the argument of multiculturalism as a possible approach to overcome the complexity of societies such as BRICS, taking Brazil as a case study. This study argues that the knowledge gained from such research can be beneficial for the Social Sciences and Humanities around the world, especially given that cultural diversity is increasing due to globalization, internationalization and the increasing mobility

of community groups, including refugees around the world, which requires new epistemologies and narratives in research (Ivenicki, 2020). As well as critically examining the current scientific literature on liberal nationalism and multicultural nationalism. The report argues that both projects have developed the necessary responses to (1) evolving diversity and (2) forms of nationalism that are ethnonational and populist-majoritarian, and therefore, welcome. However, there are two substantial shortcomings that need to be addressed. The first is the relationship between education-nation-building and the boundaries of multicultural education (e.g., history teaching), and the second is the relationship between nationalism-transnationalism or the normative desire to have two citizenships (Dikici, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Liberalism and Liberal Education

On the one hand, 'Liberalism' is seen as a social ethic that advocates freedom and equality in general (Suriyati et al., 2022), and on the other hand, 'liberalism' is also seen as the highest political goal, and not merely as a means to achieve higher political goals ("Liberalism and the Moral Life," 1990). Liberalism is a view that emphasizes capacity building, protecting rights and freedoms, and identifying problems and efforts to change social in a systematic manner in order to maintain long-term stability.

In general, liberalism aspires to a free society, characterized by freedom of thought for individuals. This understanding rejects any restrictions, especially restrictions by the government and religion. Liberalism is also closely related to democratic systems and modernism. Liberalism in modern society can grow in a democratic system, this is because both are based on the freedom of the majority. There are three basic things of the Ideology of Liberalism, namely Life, Freedom and Property Rights (Roelens, 2024).

Below, are the main values that originate from the three basic values of Liberalism 1). The same opportunity, that is, human beings have the same opportunity, in all areas of life, both political, social, economic and cultural; 2) every solution to the problems faced, whether in political, social, economic, cultural or state life, is carried out by discussion and carried out with approval; 3) The government is not allowed to act according to its own will, but must follow the will of the people; 4) The function of the State is to defend and serve the people, so that in order to create the rule of law, there must be a benchmark for the highest law (Law), equality in public, and social equality; 5) the focus is the individual; 6). The state is only a tool, it is only a mechanism used for purposes greater than the state itself; and 7). that in liberalism it cannot accept the teachings of dogmatism, which is based on the philosophical view of John Locke (1632 – 1704) who states that all knowledge is based on experience. In this view, the truth is changing (Roelens, 2024).

Liberal Education

Because of the liberal view that emphasizes capacity building, protecting rights and freedoms, and identifying problems and efforts to change social in a

timely manner in order to maintain long-term stability, for liberals education is an effort to preserve and improve the quality of the existing social order by teaching each student how to deal effectively with his or her own life problems (Roelens, 2024).

Thus, ideologically, liberal education is a belief that considers that the best education is education to train students to be able to think critically and objectively, follow the basic form of the scientific process, and train the student to believe these things based on scientific knowledge. This educational ideology was introduced and advocated by thinkers such as John Henry Newman and FD Maurice in the XIX century (Jazilah, 2022).

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (1998), later defined Liberal Education as an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity of change, and. It provides students with extensive knowledge of the wider world (e.g. science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth research in specific areas of interest (Rudolph, 2023).

The influence of liberalism in education can be seen in its components. The first component is the influence of western philosophy on the model towards a universal human being, namely a "rational liberal" human being. This liberal influence can be seen in education that prioritizes achievement through the process of competition between students. Ranking to determine the best students is an implication of this understanding of education; The second component is positivism. Positivism as a dominant social science paradigm is also the basis for the liberal education model (Wenneborg, 2023).

There are several foundations for liberal education, namely: 1) All learning activities are relative to the characteristics and content of personal experience; 2) arise from the processes of personal development, and all learning actions that have significance tend to be subjective; All learning activities at their peak are rooted in involvement in an active sense of the senses; 4) All learning activities are basically a process of testing ideas, in practical problem-solving situations; 5) the best way to learn something and by implication, also the best way to live; 6) The earliest psychological experience is the experience experienced by a person who learns when he is a child, including emotional and cognitive exercises; 7) learning actions are controlled by emotional consequences and personal behavior (Jazilah, 2022).

Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education

Multikulturalism

According to (Pipit Mulyah, Dyah Aminatun, Sukma Septian Nasution, Tommy Hastomo, Setiana Sri Wahyuni Sitepu, 2020), multiculturalism is a perspective that explains cultural policies that emphasize the acceptance of diversity and different types of cultures (multicultural) that exist in people's lives regarding the values, systems, cultures, customs, and politics that they adopt. This concept runs counter to the idea of assimilation and monoculturalism, which has been the standard in the nation-state paradigm since the early 1800s. Normative cultural uniformity is necessary for monoculturalism (the word "monocultural" can also refer to pre-existing homogeneity). Assimilation, on the other hand, is the goal of bringing two or more distinct cultures together by

minimizing their distinctions in order to establish a new culture. Beginning in Africa in 1999, multiculturalism became an official policy in English-speaking nations (Teo, 2021). Later on, it was accepted by the majority of EU members as both an official policy and a social consensus among the elite.

In simple terms, multiculturalism can be associated with the recognition of cultural pluralism. In a multicultural view, cultural pluralism is not a "given" but a process of internalizing values in a community. With this assumption, John Dewey, gave birth to his great work on the relationship between democracy and education, which relates the democratic process and the educational process (Nilawati et al., 2021). For Dewey, democracy is not just a procedural problem or form of government but a way of life and a society or community. Therefore, for Dewey, democracy is impossible to achieve without the educational process. The educational process itself must be a democratic process (Pipit Muliyah, Dyah Aminatun, Sukma Septian Nasution, Tommy Hastomo, Setiana Sri Wahyuni Sitepu, 2020)

Multicultural Education

One of the pioneers of intercultural education is James Banks. According to Banks, teaching students how to think critically is a more important aspect of education. He clarified that knowledge building and various interpretations must be actively discussed, and students must be educated to comprehend all forms of knowledge (Sitepu, 2023). A excellent student is one who consistently acquires all information and actively contributes to discussions about how knowledge is constructed. Additionally, students must understand that the information they are taught can be interpreted in a variety of ways that are heavily influenced by their individual interests. This interpretation may appear to be at odds with their viewpoint. Students must be accustomed to accepting differences that are essentially Multicultural education respects the differences that exist and the types of cultures that develop in society (Sitepu, 2023).

However, Howard contends that intercultural competency is a result of multicultural education. Students spend a lot of time in their own ethnic and cultural communities in their early years. Tribal, religious, and class primordialism are frequently greatly impacted by errors made in changing the ideals, goals, and manners of a certain culture. Antagonism between groups and races arises as a result of this issue. It is hoped that early multicultural education will enable children to accept and comprehend cultural differences that influence usage (individual behavior), folkways (social customs), mores (social manners), and customs (community customs) (Sitepu, 2023).

With multicultural education, students are able to accept differences, criticism, and have a sense of empathy and tolerance for others regardless of class, status, gender, and academic ability. Multicultural education also means as a process of educating a way of life that respects, sincerity, tolerance for cultural diversity that lives in the midst of a pluralistic society, so that students will have the nation's mental elasticity and flexibility in responding to social conflicts in society (Nilawati et al., 2021).

Cultural Plurality in Indonesia, and the Role of Liberal and Multicultural Education

The Concept of Cultural Plurality

Cultural pluralism is a term used to describe the existence of small groups in the larger society that maintain their unique cultural identity, and their values and practices accepted by the broader culture as long as they are consistent with the laws and values of the broader society (Rizal, 2020).

Cultural plurality is often equated with the term multiculturalism, the two terms do have similar meanings. However, multiculturalism is an understanding or ideology that encourages people to accept and consider cultural diversity as something that exists in a region. There is also the term cultural plurality. According to Koentjaraningrat, cultural pluralism is two or more kinds of cultural traditions that divide society into different social groups. Culture is something that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morality, customary laws, abilities, and habits, so with the existence of cultural plurality in a country, cultural values and norms are needed to regulate the elements that are included in the culture (Hermansyah et al., 2021).

One example is the United States which has a relatively strong dominant culture that includes strong elements of nationalism, sports culture and artistic culture. In a pluralist culture, these unique groups not only coexist side by side, but also consider the qualities of other groups as valuable traits in the dominant culture. A successful pluralistic society will place a strong expectation of integration on members rather than an assimilation of expectations. A society that does not have a strong dominant culture can easily go through practicing cultural pluralism with multiculturalism without accidentally taking steps taken by that society (Hadijaya et al., 2024).

The existence of such institutions and the possible practices of cultural communities are accepted by larger societies in a pluralist culture and sometimes require legal protection. Often cultural acceptance may require that new or minority cultures remove some aspects of their culture that are not in line with the laws or values of the dominant culture.

Cultural Plurality in Indonesia

Cultural plurality in Indonesia can have both positive and negative impacts. Positive impacts include local language can provide, additional terms for the Indonesian language, local cultural wisdom can enrich development strategies according to its location, or traditional technology can be an alternative for technological development and correction by the state or natural disaster management (Abduh et al., 2021).

The negative impact of cultural plurality in Indonesia includes the existence of different value systems and religious orientations that can cause social conflicts between ethnicities. Indonesian society is a society with a very complex level of diversity. Societies with various diversity are known as multicultural societies (Watters et al., 2020). If we know society as a group of people who have lived and worked together long enough that they are able to organize themselves and think about themselves as a social unit with certain boundaries (Linton), then the concept of society when combined with

multicultural has a very broad meaning and requires a deep understanding to be able to understand what a multicultural society really is.

Multiculturalism can be interpreted as diversity or differences between one culture and another. So that a multicultural society can be interpreted as a group of people who live and settle in a place that has its own culture and characteristics that are able to distinguish between one society and another. Each community will produce its own culture that will be characteristic of that community (Jayadi et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology and describes the research procedure. This chapter includes details about the research design, subjects, instruments, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques.

Research Design

In this study, the researcher applied a qualitative method design. Qualitative method research design is a procedure of testing, analysis, and qualitative methods in a single study or series of studies in understanding research problems (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In this study, qualitative data is used to determine liberal and multicultural education in the midst of Indonesia's cultural plurality.

Data Analysis

(Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) explained to analyze liberal and multicultural education in the midst of Indonesian cultural pluralism. The researchers first identified the problem and then collected data through interviews with students. The researchers recorded interviews, created transcripts, and analyzed transcripts to understand liberal and multicultural education amid Indonesia's cultural pluralism. Furthermore, data reduction involves the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstraction, and transforming data. The researchers organized and reduced the data to make it easier to manage. Then, data display involves presenting information that is organized and summarized to facilitate the drawing of conclusions. In this study, data is presented in the form of narrative texts. The narrative provides a detailed explanation of the classified information. The final step in the data analysis process is the drawing of conclusions. This involves interpreting the analyzed data to answer the research question. In this step, the research derives meaning from the data displayed and presents findings based on the research problem.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Liberal Education in the Midst of Indonesian Cultural Plurality

As discussed above, liberal education emphasizes capacity building, protecting rights and freedoms, and identifying problems and efforts to change social indiscriminately in order to maintain long-term stability.

The end of liberal education is the creation of a democratic society and prioritizing plurality in decision-making. One of the elements of education for democratic citizens is knowledge of human values. If the end of liberal education

is the birth of a society that prioritizes plurality in decision-making, then in the democratic process itself, it can cause social vulnerability. The different value systems and religious orientations of the 800 or more ethnicities in Indonesia are very vulnerable and have the potential for conflict for social occurrence between ethnicities. Indonesian society is a society with a very complex level of diversity, different from other nations (Mor, 2018).

Although Liberal Education is said to prioritize cultural plurality, in fact Liberal Education has ignored plurality and replaced it with a doctrine of universal human values, derived from Western thought and sourced only from the first philosophers they first knew, Aristotle with the concept of moral virtue, or intellectual virtue (Patrick, 2002). Given that Indonesian society is a society with a very complex level of cultural diversity, it may be that all of them have unique and locally applicable human values, which may be contrary to the uniform values brought by liberalism through liberal education, which originated in Western countries.

The "Siri" culture that prevails in almost all regions of South Sulawesi, for example, is a concept or value system that includes aspects of shame, self-esteem, honor and truth. That transgression in this "serial" culture by one person can result in another person being able to legitimately take revenge, or kill that person. This culture is a form of local general culture of the traditional Bugis-Makassar community in South Sulawesi. In other regions in Indonesia, there are also hundreds or even thousands of forms of local culture that are unique and do not apply in general, let alone universally.

Liberal education emphasizes the formation of wise people, that is, people who have an intellectual view or vision, who know well the basics and the pinnacles of science. A wise person is a person who is able to carefully examine fundamental principles of thought and action while maintaining a view of the world, including what will and should happen (Clough et al., 2007). The behavior that leads to wisdom in this sense is found in the study of sharp analyses and great visions, which are usually studied by philosophies known to European nations, and may not be known at all in the philosophy of life of traditional societies that number in the hundreds or even thousands (Nugroho, 2020).

In line with the results of the research with the analysis of various references, it is stated that the problems of multicultural education in Indonesia include: the diversity of regional cultural identities, the shift of power from the center to the regions, narrow fanaticism, the lack of solidity of nationalism, the conflict of national and multicultural unity, the unequal distribution of economic prosperity between cultural groups, the low quality of educational facilities and infrastructure, the unclear objectives of education, improper measurement, and curriculum inconsistencies (Hesti et al., 2022); (Agusniati, 2022); (Elpisah & Saripuddin, 2023).

The Role of Multicultural Education in the Midst of Cultural Plurality

Building a multicultural democratic society certainly requires a national education system that can build such a society. This means that the national education system must refer to and implement processes to realize the goals of democracy. In Indonesia today, quite a lot of efforts have been formulated and tried to realize these ideals. Its realization has been supported by the recognition of the existence of a pluralist Indonesian society and nation as well as the recognition of regional autonomy, which is a new experience that needs to be observed and refined continuously (Andiani et al., 2023).

Building a democratic society for Indonesia is a task that is not light. Indonesian society is a pluralistic and multicultural society. Indonesia is famous for the plurality of ethnic groups that inhabit the archipelago. In ethnological research, for example, it is known that Indonesia consists of more than 800 ethnicities, with different identities and cultures. Apart from the lives of these tribes which are concentrated in certain areas, there is also a concentration of tribes in other places due to migration or due to rapid population mobilization. Through the 2000 census, 101 ethnic groups were recorded in Indonesia with a total population of 201,092,238 people as citizens (Michalopoulos et al., 2018). The archipelago is a meeting place for the major religions in the world. The spread of these major religions is inseparable from the geographical location of the archipelago in world trade since the beginning of the century. It is not surprising that the influences of the spread of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, and other religions are found in the archipelago. Each sub-ethnic in Indonesia has its own culture (Michalopoulos et al., 2018). The culture of these ethnic types is not only preserved and developed in the territory where the ethnic concentration occurs but has also spread throughout the archipelago.

Building a multi-ethnic and cultural society like Indonesia requires a new view of Indonesian nationalism. Indonesian nationalism, which was born since the rise of nationalists, has undergone changes in subsequent developments, especially in the reform era, calling for a new formulation of Indonesian nationalism in building a multicultural nation state, especially those implemented through national education.

New views or reformulations of Indonesian nationalism need to be supported by intelligent and moral Indonesian citizens. A pluralistic and multicultural society cannot be built without intelligent and moral human beings (Sitepu, 2023).

The question that arises to us is how to build an intelligent and moral Indonesia in a democratic society. This task can only be built through a change in the attitude of every Indonesian person. Attitude change is the result of a coaching, namely through education based on democratic and multicultural principles (Sitepu, 2023).

In line with the results of the research to study the ways in which Brazilian education policies have tried to address international standards and respect for cultural identity as well as an inclusive and multicultural equality-oriented approach. In particular, the report focuses on the National Plan for Education and the latest projects for higher education institutions (the so-called "Future-se"). Finally, the report concludes by pointing out the tensions and possibilities

of Brazil's efforts in the context of the BRICS countries. This kind of study may be comparatively relevant, in the hope that it can provide reflection for new epistemology and potential value for the Social Sciences and Humanities (Ivenicki, 2020). It then concludes that a morally acceptable form of nationalism (e.g. pluralistic, inclusive, or moderate) operating within multinational and multicultural liberal democracies is theoretically possible, but its sustainability is related to the extent to which it addresses the two issues raised, among them (Dikici, 2022); (Iriani et al., 2024).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Both Liberal Education and Multicultural Education have the ultimate goal of leading to the formation of a democratic society. The ultimate goal of liberal education is the creation of a democratic society and prioritizing plurality in decision-making. Meanwhile, the ultimate goal of Multiculturalism Education is also to build a multicultural democratic society.

Although both have the same final orientation, namely democracy, there are fundamental differences regarding Indonesia's cultural plurality. On the one hand, Liberal Education, although Liberal Education is said to prioritize cultural plurality, in fact it has abandoned plurality and replaced it with a doctrine of universal human values, derived from Western thought and derived solely from their early intellectual views

On the other hand, multicultural education emphasizes the habit of being able to accept differences, criticism, and have a sense of empathy and tolerance for others regardless of class, status, gender, and academic ability. Thus, multicultural education is in accordance with the cultural plurality of the Indonesian nation, because it means that it is a process of education of a way of life that respects, sincerity, tolerance for cultural diversity that lives in the midst of a plural society, so that a student will have the flexibility and mental flexibility of the nation in responding to social conflicts in society.

In closing, it was revealed that the education system in Indonesia today has been oriented towards achieving individualistic standards, especially with the entry of liberal thinking and cutting-edge capitalism. The competencies offered in education also tend to be individualistic, no longer communal. Education that was expected to strengthen social relations, drawn from elements of the local common ethnic and cultural culture, has now turned into individual strengthening. This may be a reflection for all of us.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research should move beyond the comparative philosophical analysis of liberal and multicultural education by empirically examining how these competing ideologies shape learning outcomes, social cohesion, and identity formation in Indonesia's highly plural society. A more sophisticated research agenda requires multi-level and mixed-method approaches that investigate curriculum design, teacher ideology, policy implementation, and classroom practices across diverse cultural regions—particularly how universalist liberal values interact, conflict, or hybridize with localized cultural norms and indigenous knowledge systems. Further studies should also explore

the mechanisms through which multicultural education fosters resilience, intercultural competence, and conflict mediation skills among students, while assessing whether Indonesia's education system is capable of integrating communal cultural values without compromising global competitiveness. Such advanced inquiry will generate a deeper theoretical understanding and provide evidence-based recommendations for developing an educational model that balances democratic ideals, cultural plurality, and national identity in the era of globalization.

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