

# Indigenous Knowledge: Develop Cross-Cultural Literacy and Character of Indonesia in Multicultural Society

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**Abstract**— Indonesia is a great nation with cultural diversity. This diversity is a potential and uniqueness of Indonesian society. However, the potential and specificity are not getting the chance to develop and manage itself based on the wisdom and the will to coexist peacefully. Indigenous Knowledge is an ancestral cultural heritage, which is the nation's wealth and strength. This paper explains the importance of Indigenous Knowledge to strengthen national identity and develop cross-cultural literacy in multicultural societies. This ability will involve the ability to cross-cultural literacy. Cross-cultural literacy includes cultural competence but adds to it the ability to critically reflect on, and if necessary, bring about change in, one's own culture. Based on the conditions of Indonesia's multicultural society, a strategy is needed to form a stable and tolerant Indonesian state. One such approach is to develop cross-cultural and character literacy in Indonesia through the integration of Indigenous Knowledge in primary school education.

**Keywords:** *cross-cultural literacy, character of Indonesia, indigenous knowledge*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. The reality of Cultural Diversity

Indonesia is a big nation with cultural diversity. Indonesia is a community unique and highly multi-ethnic, religion, culture, and language. Indonesian society has always been diverse. That our society has become and will continue to grow more pluralistic and diverse is evident in any number of ways, from the amounts reflected in the data of census BPS. There are more than 300 ethnic groups or tribes in Indonesia or according to the poll of 2010 BPS, precisely 1,340 ethnic groups.

Diversity, in Indonesia, is a potential and uniqueness of the Indonesian nation. This identity is the pride selfhood and threats for the country Indonesia as a nation participating in the arena of globalization. Indonesia has a lot of diversity, including diversity of cultures, religions, ethnic groups, customs, and regional languages. This diversity can be the basis for building the spirit of nationalism and patriotism to become a large and sturdy nation. But on the other hand, conditions of diversity can trigger conflict, which eventually split the unity and integrity of the country.

Just look at the events in Aceh, Sampit, Sambas, Ambon, and other areas where clashes between groups with primordial ties fanatical and blindly has claimed lives and property. Other examples, Madurese and Dayak tribal conflict in Sambas Central Kalimantan, conflicts with religious issues in Poso and Maluku, movement Aceh separatists that were triggered by a lack of knowledge fair

[1]. Clashes between cultures, between race, ethnicity, religion, and values taking place in society in the inlet would threaten the integrity and resilience of the Indonesian people. In line with this, it is normal if we as a multicultural society wary of the clash of civilizations, as stated by Samuel P Huntington [2].

The motto of “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” is multicultural face manifests a reality. The slogan “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” accommodates diversity Indonesian people in the tribe, race, language, customs, and religion. However, ironically, diversity in the cultural unity of the nation on the way independent of the country/nation is more focused on aspects of similarity to forming solidarity of the nation. Above a pluralistic society is the Republic of Indonesia successfully built and can stand upright, sturdy until now. The term “unity” in the Republic of Indonesia as the embodiment of “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” does not merely connote physical, but psychological and cultural. This union is not only in the sense of atomistic aggregation and structural integration. However, unity has the highest level of cultural assimilation. The Indonesian agreement in question contains national solidarity. National solidarity based on essential values of shared life since ancestors. The fundamental values of ancestors that have become the principle of life and even outlook on life. Objectively the plurality face of the Indonesian society has a unique shape and structure because the national education must have an insight into the development of a plurality of the Indonesian community.

### B. A Growing Challenge

The Indonesian nation is experiencing many challenges, challenges both domestically and from abroad. Bappenas shows the following problems [3].

#### 1) The challenge of domestic.

- The nation's ability to manage cultural diversity is still weak. The symptoms can be seen from the strengthening of group orientation, ethnic, religious, and social potential conflict and even the disintegration of the nation. This phenomenon is worrying because Indonesia consists of approximately 1,340 tribes. This problem is also increasingly serious due to the most limited public which can be accessed and managed jointly by multicultural communities for channeling aspirations. Currently, there is a tendency of shifting the public to the private sphere of economic necessity.
- National identity crisis. National identity crisis was reflected in almost all fields and layers in the life of society, nation, and the state. So, it can say that our country is facing a crisis of culture. The principles of

social solidarity, kinship, social hospitality, and the love of the motherland disappear along with the strengthening of the values of materialism. These values were once regarded as a unifying force and characteristic of the Indonesian nation.

- Similarly, pride in their national identity as the use of Indonesian well and correctly, increasingly eroded by the values that are considered superior. The decaying national identity by the rapid absorption of negative global culture and the inability of the Indonesian people adopt a global lifestyle that is more relevant to nation-building efforts and the character (nation and character-building). The pace of economic development less offset by national character-building cultural crisis has resulted in further weakening of customs resistance.
- The nation's ability to manage tangible and intangible cultural assets is still lacking. In the era of regional autonomy, the management of cultural property become the responsibility of local governments. Low-Quality management is not only due to this fiscal capacity, but also a lack of understanding, appreciation, awareness, and commitment of local government cultural property. Management of cultural assets is also still not fully applying the principles of good governance. Meanwhile, the appreciation and affection of the people of the culture and products in the country remain low.

## 2) *The challenges from abroad*

- The unceasing globalization followed by the presence of advanced technology of the application that hit Indonesia, making the cradle of civilization moving towards the western world. "Globalization has become a force that requires the right response because it forces a survival strategy and a strategy of accumulation of wealth (accumulative strategy) for various groups and communities" [4].
- Globalization imbued with liberal ideology keeps expanding towards new world order. Indonesian society has embraced modernity lifestyle that emphasizes the exclusive lifestyle, consumerism, and materialism. Social inequality and social resentment are getting sharper, and temperature trigger social life become temperamental. Through impressions, electronic or nonelectronic media have always encountered violent incidents, lies, murder, etc. Some of these events have caused the fundamental values of Indonesian society to be eroded by developments. Though these fundamental values have long been a grip and way of life of the people.
- Threats from abroad in the form of business support separatist movements in other countries, then the claims of neighboring countries to some of the islands of Indonesia. Since developing education in Indonesia must be sensitive and anticipatory. Multicultural education emerged as an alternative solution to overcome the problem of the diversity of the Indonesian nation, which will continue to develop.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Indigenous Knowledge Concepts*

Human life is surrounded by culture. Because humans always try to maintain their existence in life, which requires them to be still confused with the physical and non-physical environment. The process of cultural formation takes place

over the centuries and is tested to form a reliable component. The culture is believed and proven to bring physical and spiritual well-being. This component is often called identity. In character contained Indigenous Knowledge, which is the result of local genius from various ethnic groups. Indigenous Knowledge is what should be woven in a unified culture to create a nation, namely the Indonesian Nation.

Culture is a product of human reason. The culture referred to in this paper is closely related to the community. Indigenous Knowledge that already exists in Indonesian society is communicated from the previous generation to the next generation. Conceptually, Indigenous Knowledge is part of the culture. Brata said that Indigenous Knowledge (local genius) is the same as cultural identity, which means the cultural character or personality of a nation [5]. Local genius is also a cultural identity, a national identity that causes the country to be able to absorb and process foreign cultures following its character. Potential regional cultural elements as local geniuses have proven their ability to survive.

Indigenous knowledge is a view of life and science as well as various life strategies in the form of activities carried out by local communities in answering various problems in meeting their needs. According to Rahyono, indigenous knowledge is human intelligence possessed by certain ethnic groups that are obtained from the community experience [6]. That is, indigenous knowledge is the result of specific communities through experience and not necessarily experienced by other communities. Indigenous knowledge systems have been a part of human life since the past, and this practice is essential because it has shaped the way people interact with their environment [7]. Melchias suggests Indigenous knowledge is the knowledge that refers to what indigenous people know and do for generations, practices that develop through trial and error and prove to be flexible enough to cope with change [8]. Indigenous knowledge (IK) is expressed as a unique collection of cumulative experience that is generated and evolved and is owned by people belonging to a geographical area [9, 10].

Hiwasaki state that indigenous knowledge refers to the understanding, skills, and philosophy developed by people with a long history of interaction with their natural environment [11]. Furthermore, Quaritch Wales states that local genius or indigenous knowledge is "... the sum of cultural characteristics which most people have in common as a result of their experiences in early life"[12]. For this paper, the definition of indigenous knowledge will be used: Indigenous Knowledge is a human policy in developing local excellence that relies on traditional values, ethics, ways, and behaviors. The concept of indigenous knowledge in the context of life and social relations in the mid of a pluralistic community has the power in creating a conducive social atmosphere. So, by understanding and elevating Indigenous Knowledge in the context of life in the middle of pluralized society, it can provide a role for harmonious social relations arranged with a spirit of mutual respect and respect [13].

There are various characteristics of Indigenous Knowledge which define its uniqueness. One of the main features is that *First*, Indigenous Knowledge is produced in

the community [9, 14,15]. *Second*, Indigenous Knowledge is rooted in a community and is directly related to the experiences generated by people in that community [15]. *Third*, Indigenous Knowledge is not systematically documented because most are oral [9]. *Fourth*, also state that other characteristics, Indigenous Knowledge experienced are not learned theoretically [9, 15]. *Fifth*, Indigenous Knowledge is dynamic because it is based on practical experiments and environmental innovations [16]. *Sixth*, Indigenous Knowledge is also studied through repetition, which is a significant factor for the retention and strengthening of customs and cultural traditions [15].

#### *B. Cross-Cultural Literacy Concepts*

Each region has a culture of each unique forming differences vary. One individual is not always going to be in a culture that is still the same. When one culture interacts or intersects with other cultures, then that is said to be a cross-cultural or through a different culture. For example, one of the Javanese who live in the area Minang certainly there will be a cultural difference. Cross-Cultural very close to the issues of regional autonomy, pluralism is no multiculturalism that is hot now. It not only contains the elements of the locality but also can be categorized study of international relations if the level is global and cross country. Cross-cultural is the scientific study of human behavior and mental processes, including variability and invariant, under diverse cultural conditions. Through expanding research methodology to recognize the cultural variations in tone, language, and meaning, they sought to extend, develop, and change psychology. Cross-cultural is dealing with or offering comparison between two or more different cultures or cultural areas [17]. Literacy is not all about reading. The characteristic of literate is to be able to understand the spoken and written word can communicate effectively with others across the nation, to have the ability to communicate using stable written forms, to be able to understand more than the surface meanings of words.

Cultural literacy is a term coined by Hirsch [18]. This term refers to the ability to understand and participate in fluently in certain cultures. Cultural literacy can be analogous to the ability to read and write. For example, someone will read starting by knowing the alphabet, grammar, and a set of adequate vocabulary objects. A person is said to be culture literate if he knows the signs and symbols of a culture, including his language, dialectics, stories, entertainment, idioms, and the uniqueness of a specific culture. Culturally literate people can communicate and understand others from that culture very well. Meanwhile, culturally illiterate people are people who fail to understand cultural conditions, past events, idiomatic expressions, jokes, names, and places.

Children from certain cultures usually become culture literate because they go through an enculturation process. Enculturation can occur naturally. Enculturation is related to education, games, family relations, a friendship. Causes of cultural literacy include contact between residents and immigrants, outsiders, minority cultures, foreigners, and guests. Cultural literacy arises because of consistent exposure and participation in that culture, especially certain critical cultural strongholds, such as business, stories, art, education, history, religion, and family. A person can become culture literate because of oral culture (without

written language or recording media) with only a long conversation. r, one can become educated for written culture through dialogue and reading culturally relevant books or exposure to culturally relevant films, dramas, and television shows.

Cultural literacy includes the ability to understand other cultures critically and get ideas about the sustainability of their culture. Learning about different cultures can be done using the internet, reading academic literature, or reading popular media [19]. According to Mitchell [20], cultural literacy refers to the level of knowledge that someone can show about being exposed to macro culture or micro-culture. Thus, knowledge of literature, language, history, works of art, customs, and traditions of certain groups is needed. According to Rasmussen [21], cross-cultural competence refers to the ability to understand people from different cultures and participate in their culture effectively. Intercultural skills are not just following and studying people from one culture for years. However, having cross-cultural competence means it can be useful in interactions with people from almost all cultures.

Cross-cultural competence is defined as the ability of individuals who can contribute effectively between various cultures and regardless of the intersection of specific cultures. This cross-cultural competence requires an understanding of aspects of cognition, behavior, or impact that may be very relevant or conflicting in certain countries or regions. Cross-cultural competence proves that a series of cross-cultural competencies requires adaptation to any culture [22]. From some of the theory, it can be concluded that cross-cultural literacy, which includes awareness of one's cultural worldview and attitudes toward the cultural differences, knowledge of different cultural practices, and cross-cultural skills.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the explanation, the Indigenous Knowledge of the community is codified in *adat*. Indigenous people of the archipelago have their concepts in each ethnic group. In the Indigenous Knowledge Archipelago, there are values to shape the nation's character. These values include: leadership systems, social relations, living in groups, the importance of sharing material and experiences with others, learning continuously from nature, cooperation values, how to deal with change and globalization, being aware of creatures starting from childhood, adult, until death, life should not be arrogant, and so on.

Indigenous Knowledge is a legacy from the past that comes from ancestors, which is not only found in traditional literature (oral literature speakers, but there are various views on life, health, and architecture. In dialectics of life and death (something which life will die), without preservation and revitalization, even local wisdom will one day die. It may be that the fate of local wisdom resembles an inheritance of ancestral heritage, which after so many generations will decay by termites. Even now, the signs of weathering of local wisdom are getting stronger. Indigenous Knowledge is often defeated by an increasingly pragmatic attitude of the community, which in turn is more in favor of economic pressures and needs.

Indigenous Knowledge will only last if it is implemented in real everyday life so that it can respond to and respond to the changing times. Local wisdom must also be implemented in learning since elementary school age, for example by integrating into the learning process or curriculum, integrating the character of cooperation, kinship, nationalism, and integrity as a form of Indonesian Indigenous Knowledge. It is necessary to implement state ideology (ie, Pancasila) in various state policies. Thus, local wisdom will effectively function as a weapon — not just a heritage — which equips the community in responding to and responding to the current of the times.

The nation of Indonesia has a definite character that can be extracted the value of the national character from Local Genius (Indigenous Knowledge). Among the nation's characteristics are: socially together and working together, applying truth values based on religion and customs, having leaders, respecting leaders, acting correctly, trusting, maintaining unity, not cursing, and so on. Each region does the character of Indonesia as an effort to build the nation's character throughout the archipelago to advance the part.

The Indonesian nation is indeed destined as a multicultural nation, on that basis all components of this nation are obliged to maintain and educate the public to be able to live together in diversity without losing their cultural identity and be able to guarantee the cultural life of other people/ethnicities. Therefore, proper learning is needed so that the culture of violence that often occurs eroded with a culture of peace.

The Indigenous Knowledge possessed by the regions within the territory of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia is genuinely extraordinary and shows a variety of types. Therefore, it needs to be introduced to the next generation of the nation in order to have cross-cultural competence. Selectively many of the Indigenous Knowledge of the nation can be appointed as assets of the nation's cultural wealth and can be used as an adhesive as well as a basis for strengthening the national identity and shaping the character of Indonesia.

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