Inclusive-Dialogic Religious Education:
A Model for Cultivating Multi-Religious Character in Early Childhood Education (ECE)

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers the concept of inclusive-dialogic religious education model that can be used as an alternative to contrive mutual understanding and respect among pupils in early childhood education. This model is developed on the basis of experience-based learning which puts emphasis on the reflection and internalization of righteous virtues of religious traditions. Conceptually, it can be incorporated through learning activities by elaborating learning materials and contextualizing them through observations and visitations. To endorse its implementation, this model requires some pre-conditions, such as teacher creativity, appropriate method, and stakeholder support. Methodologically, this paper employs library research or content discourse analysis. This paper argues that amid the increasing practice of religious education that exclusively focuses on mono-religious model, inclusive-dialogic model can be an alternative to cultivate multi-religious character that values diversity.

Keywords: Inclusive-dialogic religious education model, multi-religious character, early childhood education

1. INTRODUCTION

Besides being acknowledged as the largest Muslim state in the globe, Indonesia is also well-known as a multi-religious country where various beliefs can co-exist. Although Indonesia is constitutionally neither a religious nor a secular state, it is hard to isolate religion from the society's life. Religion undoubtedly has constructive power to make harmony, but it paradoxically is often abused to ignite cleavage and animosity (Kimball, 2009). Such destructive potency has actually been main a concern, especially after intolerance, discrimination, and violence increased in the reformation era, (van Bruinessen, 2013; van Klinken, 2007).

Some efforts have continually been addressed to solve those issues, including by re-evaluating religious education practice at school. It is because it has not only contributed as shield of anti-tolerant attitude protection, instead, but it also becomes a fertile medium to deploy exclusive deed and world views, (Suhadi, 2014; Salim, Kailani, & Azekiyah, 2011). Some surveys have shown the findings of research in the last decade. Wahid Institute (2016), for instance, reported that of the 1,626 students surveyed, 33% admitted religion becomes the main consideration to select friends; even 60% of them were willing to be martyrs in Syiria and Poso.

In the same vein, Maarif (2015) also pointed out that from 98 students surveyed, 25.51% deemed religions outside Islam as the real enemy. Likewise, the latest research held by Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat (2018) noted that Islamic teachers consider Islam more superior (62.1%), and accuse non-Muslims to be responsible for multi-crisis in the Muslim world. Those phenomena alarm that religious education and school stakeholders have not provided inclusive atmosphere in responding to differences in a multicultural context.

Religious education is clearly not one-single factor evoking the rise of intolerance among students. However, it is noteworthy that it plays significant role to shape respectful and tolerant character, particularly since early childhood education. In this stage, pupils are entering what so-called "golden age". Research demonstrates that 50% of pupil's intelligence capability occurs when they are four years old, and it is going to reach out 80% when eight years old (Fadlillah, 2017). It implies that early age is the precise time to stimulate pupil awareness on behaving the diversity.

However, the question that should be proposed is whether the education system has provided inclusive atmosphere in religious education practice? Needless to say, existing religious education models still heavily emphasize on mono-religious model. It means that students only learn their own religion, and have no chance to know others. If students are Muslim, they merely study Islamic doctrine without having to introduce the other teachings (Nasution, 2017). This exclusive tendency gives little experience for the students to encounter potentially opposite perspectives of other religions (Almirzanah, 2014).

In case, such as in public school that does not affiliate with certain religions, religious education practice commonly follows the manners of the dominant religion. In this context, the school even serves as place for producing inequality. Many students who come from certain religious

minority groups often receive bad treatments, and are socially marginalized and discriminated. They do not gain the basic rights to learn their own belief and, instead, they are often stigmatized as deviance or uncivilized. For these reasons, the minority groups are often enforced to adopt the mainstream ways, including the rights to learn their own faiths at school (Kuusisto & Lamminmäki-Vartia, 2012).

To deal with such problems, some constructivists propose to change the whole structure of curriculum, while liberalists suggest to erasing religion education subject, particularly from public schools. However, both thoughts are seemingly simplistic and irrelevant. Changing curriculum is ineffective, and not all educational problems can be solved by tampering curriculum. Likewise, abolishing religion subject is not only almost unlikely, but also contradictive with Indonesian principle. Furthermore, what is necessary is to formulate an alternative model that can celebrate religious diversity.

2. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION MODELS

Before going further, firstly it should made clear what the meaning of "model" is in this sense. Bruce Joyce and Masha Weil conceptualize that education model is simply a systematic way to gain learning goal. Ideally an effective model ecompass the elements of "content, process, and social climate", (Anderson, 1998). The strategic role of a model does not only accelerate learning efficiently, but it also allows pupils to engage in alternative modes of inquiry (Joyce, Calhoun, & Hopkins, 2008). Thus, a learning model is a set of strategies that comprise procedure, system, and evaluation to accomplish learning goals.

Theoretically, Michael Grimmit divides religious education models into three categories. The first is "teaching into religion", meaning that the process of religious education only focuses on strengthening student's own faith, and provides no space to recognize other beliefs. The second is "teaching about religion" in which students are given choice to learn their faith, and explore other religions. Beyond both models, the last is "teaching from religion" that gives students freedom to internalize and reflect virtues both from their own and from other religions (Grimmit, 1987).

Similar to Grimmit, Jack Seymour also distinguishes religious education model to be religious education "in the wall" and "at the wall". Seymour explains that "in the wall" model focuses more on learning about one perspective of religion. The aim of this model is to guide students in order to obey the rule of religious teaching and doctrine. Meanwhile, religious education model "at the wall" stimulates students to delve their own belief and at the same time they also can see the complexity of other religions. This model enables students to coexist with those who have different beliefs (Raihani, 2011).

Specifically, Zainal Abidin Bagir highlights some religious education models developed in Indonesia. The first is "mono-religious model", only internalizing religious

teaching by stressing indoctrination and single perspective. Unlike the first model, the second is "multi-religious model" that tries to introduce various faiths objectively without interfering students to select any particular one as reference. Then, the last is "inter-religious model" that endeavors not only to learn other traditions, but also insist students to co-exist (Bagir, 2004).

Based on the notions, it is necessary to examine what kinds of model are applied in today's religious education in Indonesia? Law on National Education System No 20/2003, Article 12, stipulates that "each student must obtain religious education in accordance with his/her embraced religion and be taught by a teacher who has the same belief". It indicates that religious education model implemented is teaching into religion (Grimmit), in the wall (Seymour), or mono-religious (Bagir, 2004). Students exclusively learn their own belief, and there is a little space, if any, for students to have a dialogue in order to build mutual understanding.

Sterkens and Yusuf (2015) affirm that Muslim, Christian and Hindu students in Indonesia are prone to choose religious education that implements mono-religious model rather than multi or inter-religious model. Religious education stressing on mono-direction model does not allow students to have enough knowledge of other religions. When they know and understand their own belief exclusively, they tend to consider that it is only their belief that is absolutely right, while the others are totally wrong. Ignorance and negative stigma as the consequence of less knowledge can be initial roots to evoke intolerance and prejudice among students (Nuryatno, 2011).

3. DISCOURCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Education system always intertwines with knowledge-power relation (Giroux, 2011). It is necessary to see how pupils and education are constructed, understood, and positioned by the state. The way in which state regulates the operation of ECE can be traced through the Laws. Formen and Nuttal (2014) identify that there are three major inclinations that are dominant in ECE regulations in Indonesia. Those are developmentalism, human capital and religious/ Islamic discourse.

As shown by Formen and Nuttal (2014), the language of developmentalism and human capital growth, development task, and economic activity are dominant in some parts of ECE national policy. It can be found that, for instance, in the National Education System No.20/2003, Article 1:14, "early childhood education means educational efforts since birth to six years by giving a stimulus to children's physical and emotional growth and development to prepare them for further education".

Preparing pupils as excellent generation for the sake of of development and global competition is, indeed, one of the long-term educational goals. Yet, it is problematic when putting them as "little adult" only for object of utilitarian desire. Pupils have the special stage of age that should not

be exploited, and instead, need to be optimally supported. Moreover, utilitarian logic is not compatible with the pluralism of Indonesia where children's diverse cultural-religious backgrounds give them their own uniqueness, which cannot be uniformed into a "universal pattern".

The other tendency is the using of religious (Islamic) discourse in policies. Religious lexicon, Islam in this sense, can be easily encountered in the National Education System. It obviously appears in the Formulation of Education Aim, for instance, which states that "education aims at developing learners' potentials so that they become persons imbued with human values who are faithful and pious to one and only God". In the curriculum and content of education, it is also asserted that curriculum development has to be in line with "the enhancement of faith and piety" (Formen & Nuttal, 2014).

As a Muslim majority country, to certain extent, it is understandable if religious education discourse voices Islamic interest to influence and interfere the basic elements of education, including its aim, content, and function. However, what becomes a concern is the implication on the learning process where each child has rights to learn his/her own belief. When the education policy and public curriculum are dominated by certain single perspective, it could potentially cause "religious illiteracy" that exclude the existence of others (Marshall, 2010).

Regarding ECE curriculum standard, according to the Regulation of National Education Ministry No.146/2014, Article 5, the development of ECE program should adhere to six points: religious and moral value, social and emotion, physic and motoric, cognitive, language, and art. In fostering religious and moral values, the state has developed a set of standard competencies.

Table 1 Competency standard of religious and moral value

Religious Moral Value	Age Level		Indicator
	4-5 years old	5-6 years old	
	Recognizing God accordance with their embraced religion	Recognizing their embraced religion	Students can pronounce short praying and do daily worship
	Imitating practice of worship	Doing routine worship	Students can behave in line with their religious teachings (not lie, not fight).
	Pronouncing pray before and after doing something	Understanding noble virtues (honesty, helping, politeness)	Students can realize what they do
	Recognizing good and bad attitude	Distinguishing good and bad deed	Students can differ good and bad attitude
	Inuring good attitude	Recognizing ritual and religious celebration days	Students can mention the names of house of worship
	Saying and answering *salam*	Appreciating the other's belief	Students can retell the story of religious public figure

The domain of learning activity in ECE usually encompasses routine, integrated, and incidental activity. From such standard competencies and indicators, most ECE teachers rely on routine activity rather than integrated or incidental activity to cultivate religious and moral values (Hakim, 2016). It means that pupils are successful when they could fluently memorize short praying or mention the names of Prophets. Yet, it does not mean those accomplishments are not important. The point is while the success of learning is measured quantitatively, it makes pupils have less experience and opportunity for reflection (Purba, Oostrom, Der Molen, & Born, 2015).

4. INCLUSIVE-DIALOGIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION MODEL

When religious education is apparently dominated by mono-religious model and the pursuit of quantitative targets, inclusive-dialogic religious education model can likely be pondered as an alternative. This model focuses on enhancing pupils' experience towards religious diversity that enables them to mutually learn and respect differences (Farikhatin, 2013). From such experience,

pupils can reflect and internalize noble virtues of various religious traditions into inclusive characters.

This model sees religion more than set of strict-comprehensive doctrines. It serves as a special means of communication in which pupils, regardless of their religious affiliations, can interact, recognize, and share their moral, spiritual, or religious preference in a discursive space (Chistyakova, 2016). By learning other beliefs, it does not mean pupils will leave or shake their own faith. Instead, the dialogic interaction with those who have multiple-religious backgrounds can enrich spiritual experiences, and avoid ignorance and misconceptions, which in fact, become the salient roots of hostility and hatred.

Figure 1 Scheme of inclusive-dialogic religious education model

In explaining ways to incorporate religious and moral values in the learning process, Banks and Banks (2010) propose some approaches. The first is "contribution approach", which adds local value or wisdom as an additional source of learning. The second is by using "additive approach" that renews materials, concepts, and perspectives to adjust with relevant values without changing the curriculum. The next is "transformative approach" that suggests to cultivate religious and moral values in a completely restored curriculum. The last is "social action approach", assuming that pupils can identify the problems, and are able to seek solution through social action.

By following Banks and Banks's offer, in the context of ECE, inclusive-dialogic religious education model can better be adapted rather than the transformative and social-action approaches. It is because this model utilizes rich religious traditions that have existed as ideal religious sources for complementary learning without changing the curriculum, as suggested by transformative and social action approach.

As explained previously, ECE teachers used to develop and cultivate religious and moral values through routine activity. Inclusive-dialogic religious education model aims to complete it by developing integrated and incidental activity in the learning process. In this sense, integrated activity means that a teacher inserts some necessary materials and agenda into his or her daily activity plan (RKH). In its process, integrated activity combines other competencies, such as social-emotion, physical-motor, cognitive and language.

When studying topic of "Religion Names", for instance, pupils are not just theoretically taught to mention kinds of religions, but they should also be invites to observe different kinds of religions by visiting houses of worship or coming to the other kindergartens where there are students of various religions. In the visitation, they could possibly meet and interact with other new friends without problematizing their religious background. From such activity, pupils could internalize the feelings of what they have experienced. As part of reflection, teachers should stimulate sensitivity by asking their impression during visitation.

Table 2 Sample of incorporation through integrated activity

Theme	Experience	Internalization	Reflection
Religion Names (Teacher explains about the various names of religions in the class	-Visiting houses of worship. - Visiting the other kindergartens which have different religions.	-Students are given a chance to observe various houses of worship. - Students could learn, sing, and play with friends of other beliefs.	-Teacher can ask the students: what do you feel when see the other house of worship? -What do you feel after meeting with your new friends?

In addition to integrated activity, teacher could also maximize incidental activity by utilizing certain religious or cultural events as the source of learning. For example, in the Ramadhan month, teacher can add religious education topic like "Sharing Happiness". In the class, the teacher needs to explain why people should share happiness to others. To enrich pupils' experience, teacher could arrange an outdoor activity, such as fasting break with the orphans. The pupils could be encouraged to present a special gift for the orphans. They should also be given a chance to play and sing together. Then, for the reflection phase, the teacher could ask their impression after visiting and meeting the orphans.

Table 3 Sample of incorporation through incidental activity

Theme	Experience	Internalization	Reflection
Sharing Happiness in	-Fasting break with the	- Teacher explains the	Teacher can ask students: -"How do you fell after giving your gift

Ramadhan (teacher explains why people should share happiness with other)	orphans	purpose of visitation. -Students can share their special gift to the orphans directly. -Students can learn, sing, and play in the orphanage	to your friends?"

5. CONCLUSION AND CHALLENGE

Mono-religious education model has been an integral part of Indonesian education system. Although it does not benefit to build multi-religious atmosphere, it does not mean to limit the effort to seek an alternative way to cultivate inclusive paradigm that respects differences. Inclusive-dialogic model is a choice to obtain such goal.

Inclusive-dialogic model puts religion as a means of communication where pupils can interact, learn, and share their spiritual and noble experience, regardless of their religion. It is important to note that each kindergarten has its own dynamics. As a model that offers inclusiveness, this model can vulnerably gain negative reaction and rejection from both educational institutions and the society. It is because this model is still unfamiliar, and could easily be accused as practice of syncretism that mixes religious teaching and doctrine from various religions.

It is also supported by the consideration that it would be dangerous for ECE pupils to learn the tradition of various religions. This fear is reasonable, but it should be noted that there is no one who can live separately and isolated in today's global context. Thus, changing orientation, proper method, and stakeholder supports have to be firstly fulfilled to apply inclusive-dialogic religious education model.

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