



Moderator or Provocator? The Teacher's Contribution of the *Algemeene Middelbare School* AI in Strengthening Indonesian Cultural Identity 1926-1932

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Abstract. This article analyses the story of the teachers of the *Algemeene Middelbare School* (AMS) AI Eastern Literature department in strengthening Indonesian cultural identity in its students from various regions in the Dutch East Indies. Indologists who taught at AMS AI were among others, Dr. W.F. Stutterheim, Dr. Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, Dr. C.C. Berg, Dr. J.H. Bavinck, C. Hooykaas, and Dr. A. Bekker. There were also indigenous teachers, like R. Katamsi and Jasawidagda. Thanks to the indologists and indigenous teachers, the school succeeded in creating an early Indonesian “golden generation”, with the likes of Amir Hamzah, Armijn Pane, Achdiat K. Mihadja, Tjan Tjoe Siem, Jartobitoe, and others. With the historical method, it is known that the teachers did contribute in seeding knowledge which became the foundation for Indonesian nationalism in the cultural sector. This historical reality deconstructs the understanding that not all indologists were ‘evil’ and agents of the colonial government who sought to strengthen colonial power. They were different from orientalists like J.H. Boeke, J.S. Furnivall, dan C. Snouck Hurgronje, because they were brave to open the minds and future in front of the indigenous students which led to Indonesia’s freedom. Concrete proof of the teacher’s role was, among others, creating a Indonesian curriculum, allowing students to indulge in politics outside class, taking students to visit historical sites to get closer to their heritage and appreciating their students’ artistical expressions on stage. The teachers strengthened Indonesian cultural nationalism, instead of killing the anti-colonial ideology.

Keywords: *Teacher, Indologist, AMS AI*

1 Introduction

Many studies have delved into the history of education in the colonial era, such as schools for indigenous medical education/STOVIA [1], teacher schools/HIK [2, 3],

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Muhammadiyah and Taman Siswa [4]. However, there is a vacuum in studies regarding senior high school education during the colonial period. The Dutch colonial government established public senior high schools (AMS) to accommodate junior high school graduates (MULO). As for the division, namely the AMS BI prioritizing mathematics and physics was opened in Jakarta (1919) and Yogyakarta (1920), while the AMS AII majored in Western classics in Bandung (1920) and the AMS AI majored in Eastern classics in Surakarta (1926) [5].

So far, many researchers have highlighted the actions of the educated people in the world of national movements. For example, activists who studied at the tertiary level fueled anti-colonial sentiment [6]. This reality seems to forget the strategic position of the teachers who forged indigenous students who later became national figures. Without teacher participation, these students certainly would not have the knowledge to enter the world of political movements or have vertical social mobility.

In this regard, it is important to examine the existence of the teachers at AMS AI. Knowledge of Eastern Literature, a curriculum that was not "imported" from the West, was taught by European and native teachers at these educational institutions. Indologists were often portrayed as "bad people" and "accomplices" of the colonial government, for example J.H. Boeke, J.S. Furnivall, and C. Snouck Hurgronje [7]. These scientists were used by the Dutch government to formulate state policy, uphold the status quo, and perpetuate power in the colony. The question arises, were the academics who were also foreign teachers at AMS AI part of the indologists who are labeled negatively? Also, what were the teacher's teaching models for AMS AI students which resulted in supporting anti-colonial spirits?

The aim of this study is to examine the actions of the teachers at AMS AI which gave birth to a number of radical activists and Indonesian national figures in the early period. The theoretical benefit of this study is to refute historical generalizations regarding the position of the ranks of Indologists in the Dutch East Indies. Apart from that, this study is useful for looking at the very effective and creative teaching models of the teachers at AMS AI which can later be tested in high schools in Indonesia today.

2 Literature Review

Teaching has always been regarded highly as an art and as science. The former because of the imaginative and artistic skills needed to create a conducive and interesting classroom. [8].

The concept of smart teaching is similar to current teaching practice. It can provide conceptual support for both theoretical and practical studies on smart teaching. The significance of this all lies in its ability to clarify concepts, construct theories, promote education and reform teaching practices. [9].

The art of teaching is an important concept which is needed desperately for education. According to Biesta, the traditional concept of teaching has lost the spotlight because of greater emphasis on learning discourse, like learning environment, learner, etc. [10].

Efficient teaching strategies involve both students in learning and promote the teacher's concept about teaching itself [11].

Critical thinking is needed for the learner as it gives him the ability to comprehend and evaluate new information. This is also connected to various extrinsic factors like academic self-concept and classroom organization [12].

3 Method

The method used is the historical method which includes: (1) searching for sources. Contemporary data such as *De Indische courant*, *De locomotief*, and *De koerier* which reported much on the dynamics of education, as well as students graduating and cultural thought. Also, testimonies from former AMS students in biographical books are used. (2) Source criticism or verification to examine the authenticity of the source and review its credibility. (3) Interpretation, namely analyzing historical facts. The final step is (4) historiography, writing down the research results by paying attention to chronological aspects and historical logic [13].

4 Result and Discussion

AMS AI in the field of Eastern Literature was successfully established in Surakarta in early July 1926. A journalist of the newspaper *De Locomotief* (06 July 1926) wrote the title "De Nieuwe A. M. S.-Afdeling Te Solo" [14]. The journalist explained that the inauguration event was attended by 200 guests at the house of a Chinese major in Surakarta. The number of students enrolled exceeded the expectations both of the initiators and the colonial government. There were 94 students recorded for the first year, divided into 3 parallel classes. Of the 94 students, there was only 1 European student. Of the 140 students who registered, one of them was the son of Sultan Hamengku Buwana VII named BRM Jartobitoe (*De Indische courant*, 12 June 1926) [15].

Before the school was founded, the Dutch colonial government appointed Dr. Stutterheim as the first leader of the AMS AI which was opened in 1926. At that time, he worked as an indigenous language official, with the position of head of the history/archaeology service in *Weltevreden* (*De locomotief*, 26 August 1925) [16]. Those appointed as teachers, namely Stutterheim (director) taught the history of culture and art of the Dutch East Indies; Dr. Pigeaud taught Javanese language/literature; Dr. Bakker taught Malay and sports; Kaptijn taught English; Ir. Clignett taught mathematics; and Raden Katamsi was in charge of drawing lessons. Other teachers had not been appointed yet. The school was opened officially on 5 July 1926 by the director of educational institutions (*De Indische courant*, 12 July 1926) [15].

Later, other AMS AI teachers were added. R.L. Mellema, who was originally an administrator in the colonial bureaucracy in Sidoarjo, was withdrawn to become a teacher at AMS Solo on the orders of the director of education with a trial period of one year (*De Indische Courant*, 06 August 1928) [17]. Th. W. Nannings was appointed as a teacher at AMS AI by the governor general (*De koerier*, 17 June 1927) [18]. Javanese history expert, Dr. C.C. Berg was also appointed as a teacher at AMS AI (*De koerier*,

03 October 1927) [19]. Another teacher with a doctorate who was in charge of forming students at this institution is M. Polak. He was a legal expert from the Netherlands who was asked to help prepare AMS AI graduates to continue their studies at law universities (*Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 27 July 1928) [20].

There was also a AMS AI lecturer who was a doctor of anthropology, namely J.P. Duyvendak. He studied social geography in Amsterdam and received his doctorate in 1926. In 1929 he sailed to the Dutch East Indies to become a teacher at AMS AI. It is interesting that a prominent Siyah figure, Maulana Mirza Wali Ahmad Baig, also taught Islam and Arabic at the institution (*De Indische courant*, 19 April 1928) [21]. Apart from Katamsi, there were also informal indigenous teachers who taught students about national character, namely Yasawidagda. He also served as the head of the Hapsara dormitory which was occupied by AMS AI students.

While studying at AMS AI, students gained valuable knowledge and experience thanks to being trained by a group of mostly indologist teachers. They were not just educators and lecturers, but also qualified researchers and writers recognized in the intellectual world. There was an emphasis on subjects in the AMS AI curriculum that other AMS did not have, namely Malay literature, Javanese literature, Indonesian cultural history, and Indonesian art history (*Tijdschrift van het Aardrijkskundig Genootschap*, 01 January 1930)[22]. The material was prepared by the instructor as best as possible, as an example of the cultural history of the Dutch East Indies taught by Stutterheim. He compiled the handbook according to the spirit and breath of local culture.

The book *History of Indonesian Culture*, which is still used as a reference by various universities in Indonesia, is considered successful in awakening a sense of love and expanding AMS AI students' knowledge regarding cultural heritage. It bolstered a sense of pride about the riches left by the ancestors of the Indonesian nation in students. In his conclusion, Stutterheim explained that Hinduism brought culture to the archipelago, and Islam brought religion. This is considered the most prominent aspect (*De locomotief*, 23 February 1935) [23].

Apart from that, creative learning methods were applied, namely excursions. A year after the founding of AMS AI, a journalist of the *De locomotief* (11 August 1927) reported on a unique phenomenon that occurred at the Eastern Literature school. With the news title "De eerste studiereis van de A. M. S. van Solo", the journalist explained the first study trip of AMS AI [24]. On August 5 1927 the 2 highest classes went to Prambanan by train. Not only once, the students carried out this activity again accompanied by their teacher. In 1928, AMS AI intended to hold a study trip to Borobudur Temple with the director of Stutterheim. The event was held before Easter (*De Indische courant*, 16 January 1928) [25].

The seeds of nationalism through culture were getting stronger in the AMS AI environment with various activities involving students. Apart from being taught knowledge of the history and culture of the archipelago, they were given space for artistic expression by utilizing works of Eastern literature and local cultural diversity as a source of inspiration. In 1928 a number of AMS AI students held an annual party. The event took place on Friday evening in the Schouwburg building not far from the AMS school in Mesen. They staged the play *Erlangga*, which was inspired by a work discussing part

of Javanese history written by S. Pane in Dutch poetry (*De Indische courant*, 27 December 1928) [26].

Cultural performances were a place to demonstrate students' skills in mastering the stage and understanding material filled with local culture. In his book *Tjatan-tjatan About Amir Hamzah* (1955), Armijn Pane said that students staged the romance *Siti Nurbaja* written by Marah Rusli [27]. Observed from an ideological perspective, the novel in the view of Maman S. Mahayana (2004) contained charges against Dutch colonial power and local (Minangkabau) shackling customs [28].

Apart from practicing on stage, they also watched performances presented by youth organizations outside the school. In 1927 *Jong Java* held performances of various dances and dramas. Stutterheim along with other teachers and all AMS AI students attended the event (*De Indische courant*, 12 November 1927) [29]. This historical reality implies that teachers accompanied AMS A I students outside the classroom to practice appreciating art on stage.

Malay literature lessons, including basic language, were also provided as main material at AMS AI. It is known that language is an element of nationalism. Achdiat K. Mihadja said that when a Dutch teacher was explaining Dutch literature, one of the students asked: Sir, why do you never mention the name Notosuroto? Didn't that Javanese poet write a lot of poetry in Dutch? The teacher answered: yes, but if I were Notosuroto, I would not write in a foreign language. Notosuroto would be of more service to his nation if he wrote poetry in his own language [30].

5 Conclusion

From this study it is proven that in relation to knowledge, AMS AI teachers were provocateurs for their students. The teachers, the majority of whom were indologists, were actually at the forefront of encouraging Indonesian youth groups to understand and promote Indonesia's ancestral heritage. They did not shackle their students' thinking through power structures as teachers. By using creative learning models and providing freedom of artistic expression, the teachers supported these teenagers in bringing back and raising the level of ancestral culture that once triumphed in the archipelago. Meanwhile, in relation to the politics of nationalism, teaching staff encouraged students to practice Malay as an embryo of Indonesian. This socio-historical reality shows that the group of Indonesian youth at AMS AI were made aware of how important Malay is for the foundation of Indonesian nationalism and the expression of love for their nation.

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