

A Short Comparison of Teacher Education in Indonesia and in the US*

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Education nowadays has become one of the basic needs of humans that they have to fulfill after the others: clothes, foods, and shelters. It plays a significant role in creating high quality generation by serving itself as an effective way of transmitting knowledge and leading people to proper and right behaviors. Instilling moral values and enhancing people to survival and enlightenment are also vital points in which education serves on its basic view.

Considering its significances, education across the globe has become a high concern for many countries to deal with. The United States and Indonesia are countries within two different continents which keep moving forward to bring their education into a more advanced situation. Realizing that quality education has many things to do with teacher education, these two countries pay more concern on how to produce quality teachers who serve as educators of nation's generation.

This paper is a response paper which describes a short comparison of teacher education in Indonesia and in the US in terms of their early development, education structure, and overwhelming teacher tasks. Some book references, class discussion, motion pictures, experiences and current situation observation are the subjects involved in the accomplishment of this paper.

The early development of teacher education in the US has always become an interesting topic to discuss for teachers across the globe. Traditionally, there was no particular school that produced teachers who served as public educators. The teacher education was initiated by the normal school which was the primary means of providing teachers. High demands of teachers for new classrooms became the consideration that led public to organize a teacher education institution. Female teachers at this time dominated the teaching as racialism and sexism still existed in the US. Though females were considered better in teaching, they were still paid less than that of male. Strict

limitations on female teachers such as being forbidden to go out with other guys except family/relatives and get married as long as becoming teacher also colored the history of American teacher education. This was figured out not only in books but also in video entitled ‘A Teacher effects Eternity’ – a series of 3 videos that chronicle American school teacher from 1780 to present. The demands of highly quality and certified teachers had led the American normal schools to turn into college of teachers and universities in the 19th century.

In Indonesia, the teacher education was not separable with the emergence of public education which began long time ago before the occupation of European countries including the Dutch. At that time, there was no school serving as public education. Teaching could happen everywhere particularly in mosques and Islamic boarding schools. Quran verses, reading, writing and simple mathematics were the subjects which students learnt. During the occupation of Dutch in 1600's, due to the need of better quality personals who could serve as government workers, public education got more attention. At this time, Holland priests or high privileged local people (males or females) were assigned to teach students particularly from high classes individually instead of classically. This ran for years before new development and reforms in education occurred. The establishment of *SGA* (teacher school type A), *SGB* (teacher education type B), *SPG* (teacher education school) in 1945 – 1950 had initiated the better education and teacher education in Indonesia. These three schools were equal to that of senior high school in present time. As time passed, teacher education in the nation had turned into a better arranged education like institute of education (*IKIP*) and universities as nowadays. The demand of needs and vision of providing well-arranged teacher have been high motives that drive government to design better teacher education system in the country.

Another interesting matter to compare between Indonesia and the US is the teacher education structure existing in both countries. In the US, teacher education requires students to gain more knowledge and skills as well as adaptation through school observation and experiences from the early period of education. In this context, students should take the early field placement on the first / second year by direct visits and observation in schools. This really benefits students as they may get much exposure

of the nature of teaching before determining which subject or program they will take later. Middle placement on the third year that may form in micro teaching or videotaping really helps students to meet the real practice of teaching. In addition, the student teaching which lasts for 8 – 15 weeks on the fourth year also plays significant role in instilling the teaching values, knowledge and skills for them to experience real teacher world.

In the American teacher education system, students will learn more knowledge and skills of teaching on the on a very particular subject or program that he chooses. After graduated, he will only have right to teach on the subject and particular grade of his background. During a class discussion on 21st June 2011 with an American teacher (Adrian Rodger), it was exposed that this legacy – teaching on the basis of major and grade taken, is applied in all teachers in the US. That is why, taken for an example, a science teacher who takes the grade of 7 – 9 for his major, will only have teaching license on these grades. He will have no right to teach the grade lower or upper than of his major. To my understanding, this is a good example of how a teacher will commit to high expertise to perform himself in quality teaching. However, this limitation may effects teachers to have limited access to job opportunity he may be willing to apply.

In Indonesia, the structure of teacher education is almost similar with that in the US. What makes it different is that there is no early field experience that students should take on the first / second year. In this situation, Indonesian students will learn the theories and skills of teaching since the first until the third year of the program. No direct visit or observation to schools is compulsory for them on the first and second year. As my experience in 2001 when I was still a student of teacher education department, there was no specific observation time that the department assigned to its students neither on the first nor the second year. What we did have was learning the theories and skills of teaching as well as the subject matters of our major. The middle placement, likewise the American system names, occurred mostly on the third year of the program. Here, students were assigned to do micro teaching with their friends in class to prepare them for their student teaching that would take place on the fourth year. Videotaping the teaching was also done to evaluate the teaching performance of students. All these were done continually particularly in the preparation of student

teaching which was, in Indonesian language, known as PPL (practice of field experience). In most teacher programs in Indonesia, students teaching runs for 3 months (12 weeks) in public or private schools, and some even more. This period is longer than that in the US which requires at least 8 weeks of student teaching. If in the US, only public schools are used for students' practice, in Indonesia both public and private are used to provide students various environments to learn from. To my concern, the longer the students' teaching practice and the more varied the schools used for practice will provide more opportunity for students to gain as much knowledge and skills as possible and learn from different resources that assist them a lot on becoming a good teacher.

Another phenomenon that may occur both in the US and Indonesia from the past time till the current time is that teachers are sometimes assigned to handle classes for which they have had no training. For instance is a social studies teacher might be assigned a science or mathematics course, which means endless hours of preparation (Joel Spring: 2008, p.254). I have already provided a short discussion about this on the previous part of this paper. This overwhelming situation occurring in the US also happens in Indonesia for many occasions, even today. When I was a junior high school student in 1996, I found my teacher, the Indonesian major graduate, had to teach the Javanese language class. Thus, at the same week, she came to class both for Indonesian and Javanese language classes. Very few numbers of Javanese teachers which were contra with the large number of classes was perceived by the headmaster to assign her teaching Javanese class. The same case also happened in 1998 when I was a senior high student in my city. My teacher who was a France major graduate had to teach English subject due to limited numbers of English teacher. And it happened for years till all thought that he was a real English graduate. Laskar Pelangi, a popular Indonesian film also figures out how a teacher named Muslimah has to teach the students so many subjects in class. Mathematics, science, arts and many others were the subjects that she had to deal with regardless that she was not majoring on those different subjects. All these situations definitely break the rule that a teacher should only be assigned to teach classes of his expertise or background. However, difficult situations such as limited number of teachers, sudden teacher mutation and leave sometimes become considerations that lead school officials to take this decision.

In short, comparing education particularly teacher education in Indonesia and in the US figures out that there is some similarities and slight differences occur in both. However, all have high commitment to improve their quality and system to produce high quality teachers for nation's generation educators.

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