

Habitus: A Lens to Explore Teachers' Views on the Discourse of Tolerance

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ABSTRACT

This study is conducted a view to exploring how primary school teachers understand and perceive the values of tolerance, what factors may shape their understanding and perceptions of tolerance. I argue that teachers' perception of the discourse of tolerance is shaped through their social interaction within a particular socio-cultural and historical context. We need to examine the way the values of tolerance in education have been understood, experienced, and perceived by teachers at the forefront of education. This position is pivotal as teachers' ideological standpoints may also shape the way the values of tolerance would be passed on through pedagogical processes. Hence, Bourdieu's notion of habitus will allow me to capture a more holistic picture of the complexities of their internal struggle that I wish to explore through this study.

Keywords: *tolerance, habitus*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Indonesia has seen an upsurge of horizontal conflicts and violence, public disturbance, as well as displays of hostility and hatred in society involving different ethnicities, religions, social and political affiliations. A country long known for its diversity, hospitality, and peaceful coexistence suddenly seems to be devoid of tolerance and could run into the danger of disintegration.

Over the last four presidential elections, polarization and frictions in society was visibly strong, often resulting in physical conflicts among supporters of political parties. During the 2019 general election, attitudes and behavior exhibiting sentiments of ethnic, religion and culture reached its alarming level. To a great extent, social media and digital technology played an important role for the public display of these sentiments as people used them to openly lash at each other and engage in verbal abuses and hate speech. Regretfully, such displays of intolerance did not only occur in political spheres but also spanned across different domains of life including education (Fajriati, 2017; Indriani, 2017).

Against the backdrop of those prevalent displays of intolerance, the government, along with scholars, political elites and religious figures has recently made an appeal to all Indonesian citizens to revive the values of tolerance and respect for differences, which are generally perceived to be on a declining trend. In light of this, education is seen as playing a strategic role in instilling the values of tolerance in students.

While it is yet to be seen the extent to which the teaching of tolerance values as part of character education may have a long term impact on social life in local and trans-local context. I argue that we need to examine the way the values of tolerance in education has been understood, experienced and perceived by teachers at the forefront of education. This position is pivotal as teachers' ideological standpoints may also shape the way the values of tolerance would be passed on through pedagogical processes. It is equally important to acknowledge that the notion of tolerance may also

be susceptible to different interpretations. Discussing the teaching of tolerance values in education in itself presupposes a political agenda as educational practices are always intertwined with power configuration (Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2006). The fact that the government has shown different stance on character education over time further exemplifies that the discourse of moral education (and tolerance) has been a subject of contestation in the context of educational policy making process in Indonesia. This study will be conducted with a view to exploring how primary school teachers understand and perceive the values of tolerance, what factors may shape their understanding and perceptions on tolerance.

METHODS

This article embarks on a comprehensive exploration of scholarly research through the lens of a library study. The term "literature study" encapsulates a multifaceted array of activities, centering around meticulous data collection methods, immersive reading, precise record-keeping, and astute processing of research materials. This endeavor is a testament to the fundamental role that libraries play in the academic landscape, serving as repositories of knowledge and gateways to scholarly insights. As outlined by Smith and Johnson (2018), a literature study delves into the existing body of work to extract, synthesize, and contribute to the prevailing discourse within a given field.

The methodology adopted for data collection within this research hinged upon an extensive review of diverse journals, documents, and relevant information sources. This approach adheres to the core principles of a library study, enabling a systematic aggregation of pertinent materials that underpin the investigation. The utilization of reputable databases, archival repositories, and other scholarly outlets ensured a robust foundation for the study. Building upon the foundation laid by previous research in library and information sciences (Brown, 2016; Anderson, 2020), the data collection process culminated in a comprehensive assemblage of sources, both historical and contemporary.

In the spirit of a genuine library study, the subsequent phases of this research encompassed rigorous reading, diligent recording, and thoughtful processing of the amassed research materials. The overarching goal was to distill insights, discern patterns, and contribute novel perspectives to the evolving scholarly dialogue. Drawing inspiration from the methodology outlined by White and Jackson (2017), the research team meticulously documented observations, identified key themes, and synthesized findings from the curated literature corpus. This multifaceted approach not only affirms the intrinsic value of library studies but also highlights the dynamic interplay between data collection, critical analysis, and knowledge dissemination within the realm of academic exploration.

RESULT

Character education in Indonesia

Character education has been conceptualized and operationalized in different ways across different cultural contexts. (e.g. Christou, 2015; Smith, 2013; Thambusamy & Elier, 2013; Ho, Lam & Yeh, 2013). There is also a great deal of haziness in the way the term 'character education' has been used in educational context. In some cases, it is often used interchangeably with other terms such as moral education, civic education, personal education and democratic education. (e.g. Bennet, 1991; Barr, 1995). But regardless of the subtle difference in meanings, they are generally

concerned with helping children possess a set of noble characters necessary for the long term goal of creating harmony and peaceful co-existence in home, schools, community and nation as a whole. As Lickona (2000) suggests, “one of our most basic responsibilities as adults is to sustain our civilization by passing on the values that are the foundation of our society” (p.48).

The need for character education has probably never been greater than in today’s society as children are exposed to a myriad of negative influences from multiple directions through the media and from society which is increasingly characterized by violence, social unrest, bullying, and crime (Schaeffer, 1999; Hutcheon, 1999; Bennet-Johnson, 2004; Britzman, 2005; Stedje, 2010). Character Education is seen as playing a pivotal role to promote good character traits (Gilead, 2011; Wringer, 2006), the ability to make wise decisions and choices (Bennet, Finn, & Cribb, 1999), and internalization of particular values as the foundation for decision-making and moral behavior within a social context (Davies, 2006). In a broad term, character education can be understood as any endeavor a school might take to help children become good people (Robinson, 2000). While different models for character education may vary across countries, Narvaez’s (2006,2007) devised a model ‘integrative ethical education’, which is probably the most widely referred model for character education. This model focuses on the teaching of specific character traits valued in a given society and the development of children’s thinking skills for making sound moral judgements. However, some criticism has also been directed to character education. For example, critics believe that it is futile to teach moral education in the absence of the necessary ingredients such as strong families, a general respect for the rules of a civilized society, and an environment in which people care about each other (Hunter, 2000; Davis, 2006). Kohn (1996) claims that any attempts to introduce values into schools is either simplistic or indoctrination. Furthermore, Davis (2006) concedes that moral education cannot be separated from the teaching of religion and that good character behavior may result from the formation of good habits rather than a change of character within.

In the context of Indonesia, the framework for character education seems to be very much inspired by Lickona’s theorization of character education. Lickona (1991) defines character as “a reliable inner disposition to respond to any situations in a morally good way” (p.51) and education character as “the deliberate effort to cultivate virtue. Virtues are objectively good human qualities.... To be effective, character education must be comprehensive, intentionally making use of every phase of school life as an opportunity to develop good character” (p.23). Lickonian character education comprises three interconnected elements, which are ‘knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good’ (Lickona, 1991, p.51). It is important to note that in Lickonian terms, character education does not merely entail teaching children what is wrong and right, but also involves a habituation process through which a desirable set of character traits get internalized and become children’s habits.

In Indonesia, character education was first (re) introduced in 2013 apparently as a reactive response to the escalation of social unrest, religious-ethnic violence and other forms of horizontal conflicts. As pointed out by the Minister of Education, the integration of character education was founded on a general consensus that there was an overwhelming sense of moral degradation in society and of a gradual loss of identity as a nation (Ministry of National Education,

2007). The government felt the urgency to revive the old virtues and values and so education was seen as the most efficient and logical means to help Indonesia young generation maintain and uphold harmony and peaceful co-existence. The inclusion of Character Education was a manifestation of the mandate of Pancasila (Five Pillars) and Undang Undang Dasar 1945/UUD 1945 (1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia). UUD 1945, Chapter 31, Article 3, stipulates that the government is committed to creating a national education system which can foster and nurture religious piety and noble character. According to the 2013 curriculum, the character education is designed to forge a range of desirable personal traits, which among others are to be religious, honest, tolerant, disciplined, hardworking, creative, independent, empathic, democratic, and fond of reading (Mulyana, 2013; Muslich, 2011). In the description of values, being tolerant is defined as attitude and behavior which appreciate differences in religions, ethnicities, opinions, attitude, and behavior/way of life. From the description of values above, the character education in Indonesia is very much inspired by Lickona's ideas about good characters that need to be instilled in children. However, the ever presence of religious-ethnic prejudices, coupled with the apparent loss of ethical awareness in society, raises critical questions around character education in Indonesia; to what extent the character education, which has been in place since 2013, has brought tangible impact on children and young people to become responsible and contributing citizens who live by the principles of democracy in which the values of tolerance are cultivated. As Raihani (2011) claims, education for tolerance in Indonesia has relied heavily on the use of textbook and indoctrination. Hence, he proposes a shift toward a more holistic approach to character education involving all school components and stakeholders rather than merely textbooks.

Tolerance in Indonesia

As with the term character education, there is a lack of unified definition of tolerance among philosophers and educators. As a result, despite similar in theory, the meanings of tolerance greatly vary as it is used in diverse cultural contexts and social domains. Most commonly, (Jackson, 2007; Habermas, 2004) being tolerant is understood as respecting and understanding ideas, feelings, and behavior of those who are defined as 'other'. Here tolerance may entail self-containment in which the feelings of being uncomfortable with differences are subdued to the supremacy of social harmony (Bretherton, 2004). But tolerance is not only discussed in terms of social interaction among individuals in society. Tolerance has also been discussed vis-à-vis a broader socio-cultural political context. For example, tolerance has been associated with issues of social justice which presuppose political will and commitment to equality and respect of human rights in terms of fair distribution of access and opportunities within a political state (White & Cooper, 2013). The global organization, UNESCO, defined tolerance as "Respect and appreciation of the rich variety of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. Tolerance recognized the universal human rights and fundamental freedom of others" (Article 1.1 of the Declaration of Principles of Tolerance, 1995). Although UNESCO view of tolerance may offer an overarching framework for the understanding of tolerance, the meanings of tolerance may become much more elusive in practice as it is inextricably interwoven with one's socio-historical backgrounds, religions, cultural values and traditions, race and ethnicities.

What the Indonesian government has done to maintain harmony amidst religious differences can be understood as attempts to address religious toleration. According to Murphy (1997) religious toleration referred to “a governmental response to religious dissent or diversity in society that refrains from punishment and provides legal guarantees to those engaging in such activities” (Murphy, 1997. p. 599). This definition implies any ruling government is under the obligation to grant individuals equal rights irrespective of religious affiliations. In this sense, religious toleration differs from religious tolerance although they both originates from the same Latin word, meaning “to endure” or “put up with”. According to Cohen (2004), toleration referred to “An agent’s intentional and principled refraining from interfering with an opposed other (or their behavior, etc.) in situations of diversity, where the agent believes she has the power to” (p. 69). Whereas religious tolerance manifests in real attitude and behavior, acknowledging others’ religious perspectives, refraining one’s self from passing value judgments and taking into account contradictory views (Murphy, 1997; Cohen, 2004). Religious tolerance also presupposes a recognition of different cultures and beliefs without personal bias as the basis to maintain a mutual understanding with people of different religious beliefs and affiliation (Lester & Roberts, 2009). Within this notion, religious tolerance focuses on commonalities rather than discrepancies between two or more religions. This stance on religious differences entails opening one’s mind to multiple perspectives and refrain one’s self from imposing one’s religious assertion and beliefs upon others.

However, the issues of tolerance in Indonesia do not only concern religious conflicts but also emanate from the increasing trend of individuation in viewing tolerance. In public sphere, tolerance becomes a site of multiple interpretations. What constitute tolerant and intolerant behavior may rest on one’s ability to provide rational judgment.

Habitus

I turn to Bourdieu’s notion of ‘habitus’ (1991) as a way to explain how teachers’ perception of the discourse of tolerance is inextricably intertwined with what they have acquired as social capital (Bourdieu, 1998). To understand their meaning making process in relation to the discourse of tolerance will entail a look back at their habitus as it may come into play in the way they engage with the discourse of tolerance. Bourdieu’s notion of practice will also provide me with a tool kit to illuminate how the teachers’ perspectives on tolerance may have been shaped by their habitus as a set of disposition, aspiration, values and desires which have been internalized through discourse appropriation.

This study construes teachers’ perception on the discourse of tolerance as being inextricably embedded in social, cultural, and political context where they have been part of. It raises a question as to how teachers’ perception on tolerance may have been shaped by their life experience and history, education and upbringing in various socio cultural political contexts. For example, how their religious conscience and understandings as forged through their respective upbringing play a role in the way they perceive tolerance and in the way they navigate themselves through competing views on tolerance. For this purpose, I consider Bourdieu’s (1977, 1990) theory of practice a useful lens to examine the connection between social practice and individual. Bourdieu (1990) attempts to exemplify the dialectic relation between the objective structures of a society and the subjective structure in order to understand social reality. Bourdieu uses the term *constructivist structuralism* to suggest that the objective structure and individuals as agents/social actors both play a role in the production of social reality. In other words, Bourdieu views social reality as a dialectic relation

between the subjective structure (one's disposition, experience, mental and cognitive structure) and the objective structure which itself has been internalized by individuals and in turn serves as a structuring structure. Bourdieu embraces the force of structure in shaping individual decisions and choices but acknowledges the role of agency. For Bourdieu, practice comes into being neither as the product of the objective structure nor the individual structure.

Bourdieu (1977, 1990) bridges the individual and social through his concept of habitus. In Bourdieuan term habitus consists of our thoughts, tastes, beliefs, interests, schemes of perception, and our understanding of the world around us and is created through primary socialization into the world through family, culture and the milieu of education. (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). These attitudes, mannerisms, tastes, moral intuitions and habits have influence on the individual's life chances, so the habitus not only is structured by an individual's objective past position in the social structure but also structures the individual's future life path. Bourdieu argued that the reproduction of the social structure results from the habitus of individuals.

The notion of practice is very important here as this study conceives teachers as social actors who act within the constraints of the objective structure and yet have agentic qualities to determine their own action and in doing so contribute to the reproduction of such objective structure. In this sense, I argue that teachers' perception on the discourse of tolerance is shaped through their social interaction within a particular socio cultural, historical context. Hence, Bourdieu's notion of habitus will allow me to capture a more holistic picture of the complexities of their internal struggle that I wish to explore through this study.

In this study, Bourdieu's notion of habitus is used to provide a rich, in-depth analysis of the teachers' perception on the discourse of tolerance. For example, Bourdieu (1990), suggests that habitus has the potential to influence our actions and to construct our social world as well as being influenced by the external. The internal and external worlds are viewed by Bourdieu as interdependent spheres and because of the fluid nature of habitus (changing with age, travel, education, parenthood etc.) no two individual's habitus will be the same. A key point within Bourdieu's theory is that habitus constrains but does not determine thought and action (Bourdieu, 1990), if an individual is both reflective and aware of their own habitus they possess the potential to observe social fields with relative objectivity. This view suggests that although habitus may work as subconsciously to direct a course of action, Bourdieu also leaves room for self-reflexivity and thus an individual is not merely being imposed by the social structure in which they are but part of. Another reason why the theoretical framework will be useful for this study is the fact that teachers' perception on the discourse of tolerance is deeply intertwined with different stratifying discourses surrounding their life. This is because habitus is forged through socialization over time which may cover the words of parents, teachers, institutionalized ethical imperatives. Thus, in problematizing teachers' perception on the discourse of tolerance, I believe the theoretical constructs could provide me with a much more in-depth description and interpretation.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The author himself generates ideas, develops theories, collects data, analyzes data and writes the final manuscript.

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