Cultural Identity of Thai-Muslim Students in Their Learning Activities at Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang, Indonesia

その信仰ゆえ、インドネシアの大学に 留学するタイ人イスラム教徒は少なく ない。彼らの複雑なアイデンティティ と学習環境の違いを考察する。

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Cultural identity is a current and crucial issue in social life particularly in the field of education. Through Abstract understanding this cultural identity, a student is able to fully understand himself or herself and knows his/ her position in the society where he or she lives in. As expected, student also has a better tolerant attitude toward other cultures. In the educational realm, it is extremely important not only for the students to comprehend their cultural identity but also for the teachers who interact with the students with diverse multicultural backgrounds. This research examines four Thai Muslim students' experiences in the process of constructing their cultural identity by using phenomenological design. The result of the research stated that Thai students felt as an insider within Indonesian milieu because of their physical (facial) similarity. However the formal Indonesian language is still one of their difficulties to actively engage in their learning activities. Thai students' learning characteristic (identity) is mostly passive compared with Indonesian style. Presentation and class discussion are their barrier factors in educational processes while their self motivation is being their supporting factor. Findings of this research certainly will enrich the literature on Thai Muslim students' identity in their learning activities.

Keywords cultural identity, learning activity, Thai Muslim students

Introduction

This article is an abridged version of my thesis focusing on cultural identity of Thai Muslim students in Indonesia. It is understood by many researchers that cultural identity is an interesting topic discussed by many researchers in the last five years. Every researcher has distinctive methodology, theory and concentration. Some researchers have agreed that cultural identity undergoes constant transformation (Ifrim, 2013; Li, 2008; Cerkezi, Dumi, Celo & Pulaj, 2013; Saljo & Hijorne, 2013; Anbreen, 2015).

Others like Novakova & Foltinova (2014) and

Saljo & Hijorne (2013) have argued that cultural identity is formed by daily activities. Cojanu (2014) and Hidair & Alincai (2015) believed that geographic similarity and migration factor have also caused the formation of cultural identity. This article uniquely tries to explore the other aspect of cultural identity that is cultural identity in learning activities.

Studies on cultural identity are often connected by other topics such as cultural identity in education (Maduta, 2014), cultural identity in learning and its method (Villodre, 2014; Cerkezi, Dumi, Celo & Pulaj, 2013; Altugan, 2014 & 2015; Anbreen, 2015), cultural identity in the development (Novakova & Foltinova, 2014; Silapacharanan & Mongkolpradit, 2012) and connection between cultural identity and migration (Hidair & Alincai, 2015). Maduta (2014) suggested that in order to maintain national identity of citizens, the educational policies are certainly needed (Maduta, 2014: 2847). Based on these significances between cultural identity and education, therefore, understanding cultural identity in the field of education is extremely crucial.

In order to give students an understanding on cultural identity in the educational field, Villodre (2014) stated that the teacher needs to introduce it since early childhood, by using an appropriate method like music (Villodre, 2014: 235), through which the importance and impact of cultural identity is emphasized. In this case, Villodre has a similar idea with Altugan (2014 & 2015) and Abreen (2015) on the importance of understanding cultural identity.

In a more detailed explanation, Altugan (2014 & 2015) pointed out that the cultural identity has a big effect in determining the student's success. When students can identify their identity, they can achieve a success in their learning. It is also important for teachers to understand the diverse cultural identity of students in order to establish an appropriate learning method in anticipating those differences and bringing the student success (Altugan, 2015: 456). Quite different with all studies above, this research does not merely try to explain the connection or effect between cultural identity and learning, but also tries to explore the formation process of students' new identity in their new environment as well. The subjects of this research are also different compared with previous researches which were primary and secondary students. In this research, university students are the main subjects to be studied.

The subjects of this research are Thai Muslim students who came from Southern provinces of Thailand. The selection of Thai Muslim students is due to several reasons that include: a) Southern Thailand is a region where majority of its population are Muslim. Some provinces like Pattani, Narathi-

wat, and Yala has 90% Muslim population, while Songkhla has 23% Muslim population (Wanlabeh & Othman, 2012: 239), in the midst of Buddist population in Thailand. b) Southern Thailand Muslim has a unique identity. They shared similarity with Malaysian Muslims due to their close cultural relation. The uniqueness appears when they do a cultural assimilation between Thailand and Malaysia culture (Bakar, 2013: 316). Based on this reason, this research also tries to give a great contribution in the development of knowledge especially in the cultural identity among students in the region of Asia.

The school characteristic of Southern Thailand to some degree has similarities with Malaysian Islamic School, where before 1965 those 4 provinces have adopted traditional Islamic education namely "Pondok" (Wanlabeh & Othman, 2012: 239). In 1965, the institution changed into Islamic Educational Institution under the control of Thailand Ministry of Education, which have been using a more structural curriculum and teaching methods. By the development of educational system in Thailand, it also creates changes in the minds of Thai Muslim parents in educating their children. One of the informant of the research stated that many parents have suggested their children to study outside Thailand because they believed it will bring many benefits and betterments.2

The idea to study abroad emerged particularly after the conflict between Thai-Muslim and Thai-Buddhist, especially since 2004. After that year, some policies have been created by Thai government in order to create peace between both ethnicities (Chongruksa, etc, 2010: 282). It also supported some researches in educational field for meditating both ethnics and understanding multiculturalism by using storytelling technique in Muslim as well as Buddhist school. This technique is mainly success-

This term comes from Malay language which mean Islamic Boarding School

² Interview with Faisol Morlor (Thai student) in UIN Malang, November, 29th 2015, 07.05 WIB

ful for engrafting understanding between students (Chongruksa, etc, 2010: 282).

One of destinations to study as suggested by Thai parents is Indonesia³. As stated by this research, Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang is one of Indonesian universities that Thai students preferred and enrolled. It is alluring to note that the number of Thai students is increasing year by year. It begins with five to eight students in 2009 and increases rapidly to ninety students in 2015.

The early observation found that Thai students faced some difficulties in mingling with Indonesian style of learning. To get successful learning in Indonesia, therefore, they need to study harder and better than Indonesian students. This study explores Thai student's own identity and the formation of new identity during their study in Indonesia. The research is expected to enrich the understanding of Thai Muslim identity in their learning and the way of getting successful study in Indonesia. This research also will be valuable for students and teachers in the university level because as described by many experts that the understanding of cultural identity in learning is extremely beneficial not only for the students (Altugan, 2014 & 2015; Klos, 2006; Faircloth, 2012) but also for the teachers (Bliss, 2010; Jones, 2005).

Framing the Research

This is a qualitative research with phenomenological design, in which this study tries to explore: 1) formation process of the new identity of Thai Muslim Students that can support their learning success at Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang, 2) supporting and barrier factors in the learning process and the solutions they have been opted for the success of their learning at Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang. These objectives will be answered using interview, direct observation and documentation.

It is important to note that phenomenological design actually tries to explore the experience of some people in a certain condition. One expert in Phenomenology, Husserl (1973) stated that phenomenological research tries to understand the essence of the phenomena (Husserl, 1973: 45; Langridge, 2007: 20). Other phenomenologist, Schutz (1967) gave attention to the importance of biographic background that can influence people's action (Nindito, 2005: 89), while the biography itself can be understood by understanding an individual identity. Since the nature of this study is giving high attention toward subjectivity, hence the phenomenological design is suitable to be employed (Flick, 2009: 334).

This research explores 4 male Thai students in Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang who study in different semester and department. Faisol Morlor is a key informant of the research because he is really mastering Bahasa Indonesia, Malay language and Thai language. He is an Islamic Education student in his last forth year. The researcher asks the informants about their experiences of teaching and learning process in Thailand and Indonesia. Some differences in identity of learning may appear because of the different background of school and their original region before coming to Indonesia.

To analyze the result of interview and observation, researcher used the theory of cultural identity by Stuart Hall (1996) which explains two main concept of identity; identity as being and identity as becoming (Hall, 1996: 4). Identity as being is correlated with 'who we really are', or can be defined as the identity that influenced by social environment where the individual firstly live in. It based on the history, time, place and individual culture that was experienced in the past, whereas the identity as becoming is correlated with 'what we might become' (Hall, 1996: 4). The result of the interview and observation can be seen by this theory.

³ Interview with Faisol Morlor (Thai student) in UIN Malang, November, 29th 2015, 07.10 WIB

Original Identity (Being Thai, Malay or Mixture)

Thai Muslim students try to explain their original identity. According to three of the informants, they consider themselves as being Malay than Thai, because being Malay is actually being identified as being Muslim and being Thai is actually being identified as being Buddhist.

As Faisol stated:

"Kalau saya pribadi mas, saya ya Malay. Saya bisa bahasa Melayu, saya tahu sejarah bangsa melayu di Thailand. Saya juga hidup di lingkungan melayu (for me myself, I am purely Malay, I can speak Melayu, understood the history of Melayu in Thailand and lived in Malay environment)" (Faisol, 25 years old)

He explained that he lived in Malay environment, spoke with Melayu language, and understood the history of Malay in Thailand. This identification is a result of historical conflict (war) between Siamese and Pattani Sultanate that has occurred for long time ago that is still clearly manifested in the worldview of Southern Thailand people. The identification is also dealing with Hall's (1990) study which explained that identity is not something which has already existed, because it is transcending place, time, history and culture (Hall, 1990: 225). It is also because of geographic similarity among Southern Thai and Northern Malay as stated by Cojanu (2014) that geographic similarity can form a similar identity. Bakar (2013) also declared that Southern Thai has already been doing assimilation with Malaysian culture.

In this sense, the informants are connecting the identity to religious identity, so that, their identity is based on their religious background. It is because they got strictly Islamic education from their par-

ents, teachers, and Baboh⁴. They act based on the guidance of Islamic value and avoid the religious prohibition in their daily activity. They usually never wear a short trouser even for doing sport because of the Islamic teaching of covering the 'aurat', they are also forbidden to make a warm interaction and relationship or sitting and going together with another woman except a woman in their family, and some other teachings. The identity to be exposed by them is an Islamic identity that can be a differentiation with Thai majorities who are Buddhist.

In another side, one of the informants is claimed as being Mixture between Thai and Malay. He didn't consider himself as being Malay or Thai, because he lived in Thai environment, spoke with Thai language and belonged to Melayu heritage as explained by his father. So, he purely identified himself as being Mixture. As he stated:

"saya ya Campuran mas. Tinggalnya di lingkungan Thai, bahasanya Thai, tapi keturunannya Melayu. (I am a mixture, I live in Thailand, spoke with Thai Language, but I was Melayu heritage)". (Preedee, 19 years old)

This statement proves the result of research by Novakova & Foltinova (2014) which have viewed that an identity formed by environment and daily activities. A policy of Thai government through education field in maintaining the Thai national identity is accepted by some Southern Thai's. It is proved what Maduta (2014) said that educational policy is really needed for maintaining national identity.

The policy continues by a rule to use Thai language for teaching and learning process in all schools, although some schools are still using both Thai and Malay language. For the students graduated in this kind of school, they usually can speak in both Malay and Thai languages. In addition, some

⁴ Baboh is a person mastering Islamic teachings and values; he is also a leader of Islamic institution. He is called Kyai in Indonesian perspective.

Islamic schools teach an Arabic language and use some of Arabic books.

Southern Thai schools are begun the teaching and learning process at 08.00 am to 03.00 pm. There are six main subjects; mathematics, science, Thai language, social sciences, art, and culture and religion. "Culture and religion" is further divided into twelve subjects including Fiqh, Nahwu, Hadits, etc. The importance of religious teaching also provided since children age. The existence of TADIKA (taman didik kanak-kanak) in order to teach the way in reciting Qur'an in some masjids proved the importance of strengthening an Islamic identity for children. TADIKA is held on Saturday and Sunday at 8.00 am to 2.00 pm and every day after school activity in afternoon.

The learning method used by teacher in Southern Thailand is mostly lecturing method. It causes a tendency of being passive students. The lecturing method existed in all grades of schools, from elementary to high school level. The duties of students are listening, writing and then memorizing. As declared by Zakee:

"Semua ustadz disana langsung menjelaskan dan membuka kitab. Murid ya mendengar-kan, menulis, terus mengahafal. (All ustadz (teacher) just explaining and opening the book, hence, the students are listening, writing and then memorizing)" (Zakee, 22 years old)

Regarding with the successful and unsuccessful students in Southern Thailand, The successfuls are decided by the result of examination in the last semester without considering students' active participation in the classroom while the unsuccessfuls are the vice versa. It was his experience in classroom some years ago, but he explains that he doesn't know today's teaching and learning process in Southern Thailand. He hopes that it tends to have some improvement and development.

The exploring identity also examined the teaching reference (madzhab) in Southern Thailand. Southern

Thai people are mostly referred to Madzhab Syafi'i, while Wahhabi's teaching is also exist in some parts of southern Thailand. All the informants declare that they are Syafi'i followers, which also doing ziyarah qubr, mauled nabi, tahlil together as same as other Syafi'i followers in the world.

Formation of New Identity

In order to form a new identity, the informants told the researcher their experiences that they faced during the first year in Indonesia. In terms of communication process, they don't have difficulties to mingle with Indonesian students because of similar habit between these two nationalities. The difficulty came from Preedee who cannot speak Malay language. He argued:

> "...dengan teman, saya lebih banyak diam dan tidak berbicara kecuali dengan teman-teman dari Thailand sendiri (with Indonesian friends, I tend to be silent and not talkative except with my own Thai friends)" (Preedee, 19 years old)

Despite language difficulty, other habits of Indonesians at Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang are similar with Thai Muslims such us being friendly by saying salam when they meet each others. In terms of habitual activities Thai students generally do not face any serious difficulties. In fact, Thai students considered the socialization process as an easy process they have experienced at campus. They felt as insiders within the Indonesian context. This is partly because of the similarity in face between Thai and Indonesian students.

Some Indonesians do not even recognize Thai Students as Thai because their faces are similar. In this case, a Thai student, Faisol stated:

"awal pertama kesini banyak orang yang tidak tahu kalau kami orang Thai, banyak yang mengira kami orang Indonesia, kecuali tanya dari mana, baru tahu kalau kami dari Thailand itupun mereka kaget awalnya (the first time I came here, most of Indonesian are didn't realize who we really are, they consider that we are Indonesians, except they ask a question about our origin, and they surprised for the answer)" (Faisol, 25 years old)

Indonesians usually could recognize Thai people through the language they are speaking or by asking directly their origin and nationality. Without these two things, Indonesians will never know that we are Thais, Faisol explained. It continuously happened from time to time when Indonesians meet a Thai student for the first time. Despite they feel as an insider; they also need to change some perspective or worldview that has already known in Thailand especially dealing with differentiation between Muslim and non-Muslim.

It is easy to distinguish between Muslim and non-Muslim in Thailand for example by looking at the Islamic dressing code especially for women (veil and long dress). All Muslim women in Thailand are wearing Hijab and non-Muslim women do not wear hijab and never enter masjids. In fact, Thai Muslims in Indonesia are really surprised when an Indonesian muslim woman doesn't wear hijab, entering masjids and performing shalat. This was the experience outside campus that faced by all informants, however they do not have such experience inside an Islamic university.

The experiences faced by Thai students in the university were divided into two categories namely inside and outside classroom. Those two categories dealt with interactions and negotiations of identity in order to form a new identity of learning.

The inside classroom experience took place in the first and second year especially in new learning experience which is relatively different with the learning style in Thailand. While teachers in Southern Thailand (consciously or unconsciously) encouraged students to be passive, Indonesian way of learning tried to explore students' critical thinking through discussion and presentation. These two extreme differences have forced them to form a new learning identity which is the mixture between those two different things. It needs to be done in order to actively engage with the Indonesian way of learning.

Four years experiences of Faisol told the researcher everything. He stated:

"selama empat tahun belajar di UIN, saya sudah mengalami dari yang tidak bisa aktif sama sekali sampai aktif kadang-kadang. Kalau boleh jujur, Saya termasuk yang tidak bisa aktif mas seperti orang Indonesia, dan saya rasa semua anak Thailand juga gitu. Kami sudah biasa duduk, menulis dan hafal definisi. Sudah gitu aja (after studying for about four years in UIN, I have been feeling from being a passive to an active even though I am belonging to a passive compared with Indonesian. I guess all Thai in UIN are feeling so. We are trained to sit, write and memorize, that's all)" (Faisol, 25 years old)

Faisol has forced himself to be an active student in classroom for four years even it was really a difficult thing to do. The previous (old) learning identity still appears even though they have to face different and new environment. By this phenomenon, teachers need to understand Thai's learning identity and guide them the way to be actively engage in the classroom. As Banks and Banks (2010) stated that students must be taught to understand all kind of knowledge, discussing actively about knowledge construction and different interpretation (Banks & Banks, 2010: 20). In other perspective, Jones (2005) noted that teachers need to see the students as cultural beings, embrace students' diversity, and validate the cultural identity of students (Jones, 2005: 150).

When teachers understand a cultural identity of students in the university level like Thai students at UIN Malang, they can lead Thai students achieving their successful learning. Wanfais pointed out:

"ketika ada dosen yang faham bagaimana di Thailand kemudian membimbing kami sedikit demi sedikit hingga bisa, maka kami belajarnya sangat enak dan kami bisa benar-benar faham mas (when we find a teacher who understand the condition and everything in Thailand (especially dealing with learning identity) and then guide us little by little, we feel comfortable and really understand the material)" (Wanfais, 20 years old)

Therefore, the importance of understanding cultural identity of students is to provide an appropriate learning method that will bring the success in students' learning in the university level or in the elementary and secondary level as have been studied by Altugan (2014) and Anbreen (2015).

While the inside classroom experience was solved, the outside classroom experience also needs to be considered. Most of tasks in university are in the form of group presentation despite an individual task. The group presentation forces each member of the group to discuss the material before presentation. It can be a great time for Thai students to prepare and discuss with all the group members, but the fact, some of their friends do not care with them. According to their perspective, they will never contribute in a class discussion and presentation because of their previous learning identity. However the empathy and friendship are still extremely needed for a group. As noted by Zakee:

"saya juga butuh belajar dari teman saat belajar kelompok, tapi saya sering tidak diajak mengerjakan cuma diminta sumbangan saat makalah jadi. Kami ya enak saja kalau begitu, cuma tidak dapat ilmu (I need to study from my friends when we were in a group of study, but the fact, some of my friends didn't ask me to study and just asking for money contribution after the paper was done. It was making us enjoy but we will not get the knowledge)" (Zakee, 22 years old) The communication problem is faced by Thai students outside classroom experience. They actually need to negotiate the identity with their friends to get more knowledge in order to get successful learning in the classroom.

The identity to be considered by Thai students is identity as becoming as noted by Hall (1990) rather than identity as being. 'Becoming' identity is constantly negotiating the identity; maintaining the old identity and adopting the new ones. If students are just maintaining the old identity, it can be difficult to learn actively, but if they mix the old and the new which is considering how they would become in the new environment, it can easily lead them into successful learning. Hence in this sense, this research strengthened Hall's theory on "being" and "becoming" identity.

Supporting and Barrier Factors in Education

The supporting factors in Thai learning identity came from their own selves and their family. They have a mission to improve the educational quality in Thailand especially for young Muslims. All Thai students feel comfortable in facing the educational activities in the university, although there are some barrier factors that disturb their learning. The old memorized materials in previous school also support them to get successful learning in the classroom.

The barrier factors that faced by Thai students is definitely Indonesian language. For Thai students at UIN Malang, formal and academic Indonesian language was regarded as a high and scientific language that is hard to master. The lack of fluency in formal Indonesian language has therefore created difficulty for them in comprehending the content of learning subject. This worsened by the lack of teachers who cared and showed empathy in the classroom. The "student active learning" style that applied by teachers also became a serious barrier factor for Thai students in their teaching and learning process. Fortunately, they have tried to overcome all those prob-

lems by increasing the habit of reading and actively engaged in discussion after their learning activities.

Conclusion

This article has made an attempt to explore cultural identity of Thai Muslim students in their learning activities at Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang. The researcher focused on two questions: 1) formation process of the new identity of Thai Muslim Students that can support their learning success, 2) supporting and barrier factors in the learning process and the solutions they have been opted for the success of their learning. Three of the informants are considering themselves as being Malay Muslim while only one student who remains considering himself as a Thai Muslim. The learning characteristic of Thai students is mostly passive in learning. This is due to the learning method used in their original country which is normally used only one method namely lecturing method.

There is no big difference between Thailand and Indonesia in terms of daily activities, but the challenges have taken place in learning activities. While Indonesia has been applying student active learning, Southern Thailand still maintained the passive learning style wherein teacher becomes the center of the learning process. It unavoidably therefore has created a serious problem for Thai students. However this problem was tried to be solved by forcing themselves to adopt the new (Indonesian) learning style even though it is not easy task for them. The class presentation and discussion became the barrier factors faced by Thai students while self- motivation and previous memorized material fortunately have become supporting factors in gaining the success in their learning.

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