

Indonesian Teachers' Attitudes Towards Gifted Students with Low SES from Malay Background

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Abstract *Defined as a child who has superior capabilities, especially in the area of intelligence, many gifted children in Indonesia are ignored, especially those who have poverty issues in rural area like Malay. This is disappointing as some theorists believe that Malay people are the indigenous people of Indonesia. The failure to recognise giftedness is believed due to the teachers' attitude towards gifted students with low SES (social economic status). This study is a comprehensive and systemic literature review which analyses and synthesizes comprehensive literatures from various journals obtained from ProQuest central and Sage, books published in Indonesian and globally, government documentation, trusted websites, combined with the prescribed text books for studying giftedness at Flinders University. This study focuses on the Malay teachers' attitudes towards gifted students with low SES. The main finding of the study confirms that most Malay teachers deny the existence of gifted children, especially with low SES although some of them still try to identify these kinds of students based on teacher observation and the students' achievements.*

Keywords: Gifted Students, Teachers Attitudes, Gifted Malay Students, Students with Low SES

1. Research Background

In terms of gifted children, researchers give different idea of its meaning. Some theorists claim that giftedness is a very high capability not only in learning, but also thinking (Hollingworth 1926, 1924; Terman 1925 cited in Moon, 2006). Gagne (1995 cited in Porter, 2005; Gagne, 2008) mentions giftedness as a high natural ability in at least one area of learning. The Marland Report, Public Law 91-230 (1971) explains gifted children "...are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance" (p.8). Renzulli (1977) introduces his theory of 'three-ring conception' that gifted students should have above average ability, creativity, and task commitment. Gardner (1983 cited in Baum et al, 1998) mentions that gifted children are those who

have at least one of the seven distinct intelligences. For more than a hundred year, researchers have failed to agree on a standard definition of giftedness (Moon, 2006).

A variety of definitions of gifted children also exists in Indonesia. The earliest definition is mentioned at the seminar / workshop program 'Alternatives for the gifted and talented', held in Jakarta (1982i), where gifted students are defined as students who are able to achieve high performance because of their outstanding capabilities. Later, Nasoetion (1985) defined gifted children as children who are highly intellectual. He claims that to be gifted and reach high achievement, students need to have high intellect, extensive knowledge, and skills. In USPN No. 20 (Indonesian Laws of Education), (2003), the so-called gifted children are "citizens who have the ability and extraordinary intelligence". Intelligence is related to the development of intellectual abilities, while remarkable ability is not limited to intellectual ability. The types of extraordinary ability and intelligence referred to in this definition include (a) general

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Published online at <http://IJDS.ub.ac.id/2020-1>
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intellectual and specific academic ability, (b) creative-productive thinking, (c) psychosocial / leadership, (d) art / kinaesthetic, and (e) psychomotor.

In Indonesia, according to the Indonesian Statistic Center (2012), in 2011, around 30 million Indonesian people, including children, live in poverty. Around twelve per cent of these children are of Malay background (Sumatera), which is the biggest percentage among other islands after Java (Indonesian Statistic Center, 2011). Whereas, according to Earl (1850) in his early article “On the Leading Characteristics of the Papuan, Australian and Malay-Polynesian Nations”, he believes that the Malay people are the indigenous people of Indonesia. Earl also mentions that the Malay culture is special, because its language is the universal language in Indonesia.

There is no information on how many gifted children reside in Sumatera. However, according to the National Association for the Education of Gifted Children/CIBI (2012), 2.2 percent of Indonesia’s school aged-children are gifted. This association considers gifted students as those who have superior ability in one area of learning based on Gagne’s definition (1995). Based on this, it means that there are about 1 million gifted children in Indonesia from around 52.9 million school-age children based on Central Statistics Agency in 2006 (The Jakarta Post, 2010). It also means that there is a great possibility that a proportion of gifted children are of Malay background living in Sumatera.

Unfortunately, Renzulli’s (1986) idea that gifted children with low SES are often ignored also occurs in Indonesia (cited in Wallace, n.d). Most teachers in Indonesia, including those of Malay background, consider gifted children only as high achievers (Muhammad, 2012). As a result, most gifted children of low SES and Malay background are unidentified and/or misidentified.

The main aim of the study is to determine the issues that arise and consequent appreciation nurturing of giftedness amongst Indonesian students of low SES from Malay background. This study focuses on teachers’ attitudes towards gifted students with low SES from Malay background. As guidance of the

study, a research questions is generated as follow: What are teachers’ attitudes towards gifted students of low SES from Malay background?

Introduction contains the background of the problem, formulation of the problem, and reference previous research developments.

2. Research Method

The study is focusing on documented researches. Using the systemic literature review, the main source of the information is gathered from extensive literature books, journal articles, reports, conference paper, government document and electronic resources, both from Indonesian publishers and the global publishers. According to Cronin, Ryan and Coughlan (2008), systemic literature review gives and analyses complex literatures which is related to the topic of the study. Since this study will look at the history of giftedness in Indonesia and abroad, the literature ranges of the year will be from 1970s to this study is written. One of the papers on about Malay history is taken from the year 1850.

3. Results and Discussion

Malay teachers’ attitudes and understanding of giftedness

As one of the largest ethnic groups, Malay culture plays an important role in the education of Indonesia. Based on philosophic social cultures like Malay, education in Indonesia has placed the function and the role of teachers in such a way that the teachers in Indonesia are often in a dual role position even multi-function at times (Usmaedi, 1999). They are in demand not only as educators who are there to facilitate the learning process, but also act as a moral model for students. In some situation, teachers are considered as the second person after the students’ parents (Usmaedi, 1999).

Teachers are the facilitators of learning opportunities in the classroom. According to Indonesian Government Rules No. 19/2005 on National Education Standards Section 28, educators as learning agents should have four competencies, namely pedagogical, personal, professional and social. In this context, the teacher's competence can be defined as determination of knowledge, skills and

attitudes which are manifested in the form of intelligent action and full responsibility that one has to assume as a teacher.

When seeing to the teachers' attitudes towards gifted students of low SES, there are many factors that influence Malay teachers' attitudes towards gifted students from low SES in rural areas. However, the predominant factor is motivation. Usmaedi (1999) and Tanoto (2012) determine that the lack of teachers' motivation is mostly due to the lack of teaching attitude in rural areas. Othman (2012) believes that the lack of teachers' motivation is because teachers do not know how to teach well, including how to organize a lesson plan. Another problem that becomes a barrier for gifted students is about teachers' attitudes towards identification. Munandar (1985) mentions that the identification of gifted students in rural areas is still a problem for government and teachers. The most common problem is many teachers do not believe in giftedness (Association of Gifted Education Indonesia/Cibi, 2012).

Early studies undertaken by Pidgeon (1971), Sutherland & Goldsmith (1974), and Bagsby (1979) confirm how teachers' attitudes towards gifted students have contained errors (cited in Pohl, 1998). According to Gross (1993), rather than the truth and the fact, most teachers' attitudes tend to be formed by the myth and misconception of the giftedness around them. Another study done by Braggett (1998 cited in Pohl, 1998) mentions that there is still a lack of consensus among teachers on giftedness, such as:

1. The definition of the terms, gifted and talented
2. Numbers of students who are gifted
3. Potential as a characteristic of giftedness
4. The function of schools and classes
5. The specificity of talent
6. Acceptance and implementation of accelerative measures
7. Character and scope of curriculum modifications
8. The type of teacher to teach gifted students.

Silverman (1994 cited in Pohl, 1998) mentions five myths around teachers' perceptions of giftedness that present barriers for the identification of gifted students,

especially gifted students with low SES. These are:

1. Most parents believe they have gifted children.
2. There is no reason to research giftedness as gifted children learn and succeed by themselves.
3. Other children will catch up sooner or later, so it is not an issue if gifted children are ahead.
4. Most gifted children are male and from professional families within the dominant culture.
5. Accelerating gifted children will make them have social, emotional, and peer problems.

Gornall (2006) notes that many negative perceptions exist among teachers towards gifted students which are due to wrong information and ignorance (cited in Donerlson, 2008). In rural areas, where poverty is one of the main concerns for schools, Howley et al (1995) highlight the teachers' authority may be questioned by gifted students if they find that their teachers cannot meet their needs. Howley et al (2003) also point out that some teachers' attitudes can become barriers to recognising giftedness in rural areas. Firstly, teachers often make an excuse in learning instructional practises for several rural gifted students. Secondly, teachers' belief that gifted students are students who attend to a prestigious school. Thirdly, many teachers believe the life goals of gifted students will be insufficient if they only represent local accomplishments.

All the issues mentioned above are relevant to what happen in Malay culture, especially the teachers' perceptions of the existence of giftedness in class/school (Braggett, 1998; Howley et al, 2003), how teachers identify giftedness (Howley, et al, 1995; Howley et al, 2009; Wallace, n.d.), and how teachers cater for gifted students (Silverman, 1994 cited in Pohl, 1998). Unfortunately, there is limited specific research about teachers' attitudes in Malay contexts dealing with gifted students. The bias of the general justification can happen, but from many studies found, teachers' attitudes in Indonesia, especially in rural areas like that with strong Malay culture, is far away from the

expectation (Karim, 2009; Baswedan, 2012; Usmaedi, 1999).

Gifted students with low SES of Malay background

There is no research found on how scholars give the appropriate definition of the gifted children from low SES. Researches on gifted students of low SES focus on the impacts of poverty towards their school and daily lives (Howley et al, 2009; Spicker, 1987; VanTasesel-Baska, 1987 cited in Piirto 1994). However, the most important issue is not about the definition, but disregarding the needs of gifted children, especially from low SES (Australia Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2001).

There is a shared belief that persistent poverty is detrimental to gifted children's lives and education. In her study in 1987, VanTasesel-Baska found that poverty is the main reason why seventh grade students achieve lower scores given in the Midwest Talent Search (cited in Piirto 1994). According to Hebert and Beardsley (2001), one of the biggest barriers to educational success is poverty. In another study, Cross (2008) found that many children with low achievement levels start their life with little financial support from their parents.

There is also no clear data on how many Indonesian children of Malay background are gifted, moreover specifically those with low SES. However, Munandar (1985) states that there are many gifted students in Indonesia who have not been identified especially in rural areas such as Sumatera. He adds that factors such as poverty, lack of educational facilities at schools, a poor supportive environment like in Sumatera (Malay) are the main barriers that prevent gifted students from optimal development. This condition leads them to earn lower IQ scores and to have problems with their school life in terms of educational opportunities, emotional needs, and social needs compared to students living in the city like Java Island.

Above all from the literature review, unfortunately, no studies focus solely neither on the Malay teachers' attitudes towards giftedness nor the identification of giftedness amongst students of low SES. Hence, this

study will seek the teachers' cultural beliefs towards gifted students of low SES in terms of their views about the existence of gifted students from low SES and how the way they identify giftedness.

Analysis, Interpretation, and Discussion of the Literature

Malay teachers' view towards the existence of gifted students from low SES

Teachers take one of two approaches in dealing with gifted students from low SES. They either ignore them or they privilege them (Renzulli, 1986 cited in Wallace, n.d). However, none of the two approaches benefit gifted students.

Some theorists claim that the tendency for teachers not to want gifted students with low SES in their classes is the worst thing in gifted educational systems (Butler-Por, 1987; Sisk, 1988; Maker, 1989 cited in Wallace, n.d.). This opinion is supported by New South Wales Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented Children and Geake (2000) from Oxford (OX29AT) comments

"...Gifted Children from economically disadvantaged areas are doubly disadvantaged, and their predicament is only exacerbated by those, including teachers, who would deny their very existence." (p. 4).

The second choice, where teachers privilege gifted students in their school, will not help these children as well. Howley et al (1995) believe that privileging gifted students with low SES tends to cultivate selfishness among individuals as has happened in USA. In addition, they also believe that privileging will lead to humiliate students' potentiality.

Based on the literature review analysis, the first option is what mostly happens among gifted students of Malay background. Teachers deny the existence of gifted children; especially with low SES (Karim, 2009; Baswedan, 2012; Usmaedi, 1999). Teachers consider all students are the same. What makes them different for most Malay teachers is if they are high achiever or not in school (Cibi, 2012; Imran, 2012; Munandar, 1985). Most Indonesian teachers do not want to be burdened with applying new instructions, curriculum, and planning sheets in their daily routine teaching life to cater for students with special

needs. This makes them deny the existence of gifted students in their classes (Cibi, 2012).

This practise does not happen merely in Malay culture. Sutliff (2011) believes that most gifted children in underprivileged rural areas, children of Indians, African American, Hispanic American, Native American, Asian American, Caucasian, and large urban centres are rarely identified as gifted. According to Davis et al (2011), many disadvantaged students do not have support from schools and *“...these minority and disadvantaged children typically proceed invisibly through school until they drop out or, with luck, barely graduate”* (p. 324).

An interesting conversation below between a principal and a member of the school board taken from the book of Davis, et al (2011), *Education of the Gifted and Talented*, 6th Edition, chapter of Cultural Diversity and Economic Disadvantage: The Invisible Gifted illustrates how schools are reluctant to acknowledge the existence of gifted students.

“Ms Jones, how will you teach your gifted students?” and the response comes back.

“In this school we have no gifted children”.

How teachers identify gifted children with low SES in Malay Culture.

It cannot be denied that some impoverished children are gifted. Unfortunately, some of them are never identified. One of the reasons is because teachers cannot recognize the characteristics of impoverished gifted children (Howley et al, 2009; Wallace, n.d.). This is a common issue throughout the world of giftedness. Davis et al (2011) mentions that the problem of identification for gifted children with low SES is also shared by other experts in giftedness including Borland (2004), Horn (2004), Joseph and Ford (2006), Lohman (2005), Siegle (2001), Smutny (2005), Sternberg (2007), and VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2007). The most common problem in identification of gifted students with low SES results from the bias in test instruments and other identification methods which tend to focus on homogeneity (Davis et al, 2011). The bias and this homogeneity in the identification methods obscure strengths, and consequently fail to recognise gifted children.

In the early stages of the development of giftedness in Indonesia, Munandar (1985) mentions that the identification of gifted students in rural areas is still a problem for government and teachers in Indonesia, especially in Malay culture. A book about the development and education of gifted children, published in Indonesia in 1982 merely explains possibilities to identify giftedness. It can be seen from the book that giftedness is mostly recognised through intelligence tests (IQ) in Indonesia, followed by children’s achievement in schools and teachers’ observation (Munandar, 1982).

In reality nowadays, what happens to the identification of gifted children in Indonesia, including in Malay culture is contradictory to what the early theorists proposed. In some schools where teachers do not deny the existence of gifted students, at least there are two main methods of how gifted students with low SES are identified.

Firstly, there are teachers’ observations or what other theorists call teacher nominations. This method supplies the first tool of identification of gifted students with low SES in Malay culture (Fahrah, 2012; Imran, 2012; Cibi, 2012; Freyani, n.d.). Munandar’s study (1985) found that 93 % of schools apply this method to identify gifted students with low SES including in Malay culture. According to Davis et al (2011), the teacher nominations method is the most popular tool to identify giftedness. They also claim that knowledgeable teachers can be the best identifier for culturally gifted students with low SES. This kind of teacher can guide and inspire gifted students who do not obtain high achievement levels in tests.

According to Fahrah (2012), teachers’ observation can assist them in making the right identification since it provides continuous evaluation. Teachers can consider how students solve problems, use their time, talent and some indicators that have been cited for the identification. Munandar (1985) claims that the closest people that know students very well are teachers, therefore teachers are the best identifiers for gifted students with low SES. Rimm (2005) provides an example of how Deborah Roberts, an African American news reporter for ABC’s 20/20 television program, became successful on national television in

New York. She was inspired by her seventh-grade teacher and although she did not have a good time in her early days in school, she went on to achieve great things.

However, applying this method may not be suitable for all gifted children with low SES. Davis et al (2011) said it can create “special hazards”. It can happen as most teachers believe that gifted students are students who are tidy, clean, speak using appropriate language, and do assignments well. Shade (1978) and Clark (1997) observes that impoverished children from culturally diverse backgrounds, despite their giftedness received less praise and attention than their peers (cited in Davis et al, 2011).

Children’s achievements are the second most widely indicator of giftedness used by Indonesians including Malay teachers (87%) (Munandar, 1985). Malay teachers believe that students who can obtain high scores in their semester tests are gifted students (Cibi, 2012; Imran, 2012). For minority children, this kind of identification can be fair since students who can achieve high scores can be gifted in one area and not in others (Davis et al, 2011). However, this method of identification also has issues. Lynch and Mills (1990) believe that this kind of test can be used to ignore gifted students from low SES to join the gifted program. Although they suggest that achievement tests are highly recommended for most of the populations as an identification tool, Davis et al (2011) also realizes that this test is culturally bias. Gifted students may not have high scores in this kind of test, although they are gifted. They also suggest that achievement tests are not a sufficient measure to identify gifted students with low SES (p. 332).

IQ tests are popular among other tests to identify gifted students around the world, but it is less known in Malay schools. From the literatures review and on site experience, it can be seen that only a few schools in Malay are already familiar with this method. This can be as one of the effects of educational centralistic system where schools in rural area like Malay are left behind in technology and exclusive tests like IQ tests (Sakti, 2007). On the other hand, identification methods are changing all the time. As Haensly (2000 cited in Phillipson & McCann, 2007) believes that at the

beginning of the new century, people around the world have just realized that the conceptions of giftedness are actually changeable. Renzulli (n.d.) mentions that “...we need to continue our search for those elusive things...to realize that giftedness is culturally and contextually imbedded in all human activity...” (cited in Reis & Brody, 2004). The mistreatment of identification of gifted children, especially with financial problems can affect their present schooling and future lives.

Studies on gifted students with low SES in Malay culture was never done before, at least until this literature review was written. Having shown that the existence of Malay plays important role in Indonesia’s education system, gifted students with low SES cannot be ignored, and that ignorance of these children’s giftedness can have negative impacts, the need to do further research in this field is necessary and has to be done soon as gifted education is developing fast.

As well as building awareness for Indonesian government, this study gives an overview of how gifted students with low SES in Malay culture have been denied to have opportunities to explore their giftedness. Renzulli (1986) believes that actually many gifted children with financial problems cannot be identified gifted until they are provided with appropriate opportunities to prove it. For that reason, the government need to pay more attention on how to build programs that will cater gifted students especially in rural area like Malay

4. Conclusions

Some theorists believe that Malay people are the indigenous people of Indonesia. Unfortunately, some issues in educational setting in Malay culture arise. Among others, the significant impact is the lack of educational programs for gifted students, especially gifted students with low SES. Gifted students here are students who have superior capabilities, especially in the area of intelligence based on most Indonesia scholars’ definitions.

The factor that most affects the success of gifted students of Malay culture from low SES is local teachers’ attitudes. Many gifted children in Indonesia are ignored, especially

those who have poverty issues in rural areas like Malay. Most Malay teachers consider all students to be the same and as a result most gifted students are not identified. On the other hand, some gifted students with low SES can be identified by teachers' observations and what students can achieve.

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