

## Minimizing Traditional Approach In Indonesian Education

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### ABSTRACT

*This essay discusses the traditional approach in Indonesian education from different angle; cause and effect perspective. A traditional teaching approach employs a didactic flow of knowledge from the teacher, as a sage, to the student as a receptacle (Richmond, 2007) which more emphasizes the mastery of concept, with less stress on skills improvement. The common system of traditional education is teacher centred where the teacher focuses on delivering information about some contents (Liang, 2004). Teacher-centred class instruction and rote learning are deeply embedded; this type of instruction has become a part in the Indonesian school culture and unofficial standard of practice for years (USAID 2008; Bjork 2005). Shallow level of meaning found in school science (Aikenhead 2000). There are several explanations related to these problem; the institutional culture, the Indonesian school cultures; standardized and highly centralized examinations, and less emphasize on improving their teaching ability. Due to these causes, this paper proposes 4 solutions as follows; first, detaching the teachers from their dependence on and deference to the policies and regulations of the central government's education authorities, Second, finding other methods of teacher recruitment, third, empowering the teachers: enriching pedagogical knowledge-lesson study/action research, and prosperity, last, providing a fair system which is emphasized on teaching Standard for standardized test.*

*Key Words: Traditional approach, Indonesian education, Institutional culture.*

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## **Introduction**

A traditional teaching approach employs a didactic flow of knowledge from the teacher, as a sage, to the student as a receptacle. In the teaching-learning process, the approach emphasizes more the mastery of concept, with less stress on skills improvement (Richmond 2007). The common system of this approach is teacher centred where the teacher focuses on delivering information about some contents (Liang, 2004). Aikenhead (2000) categorised these features as a shallow level of meaning found in school science. In Indonesian school settings, teacher-centred class instruction and rote learning are deeply embedded; this type of instruction has become a part of the Indonesian school culture and unofficial standard of practice for years (USAID 2008; Bjork 2005; Bjork 2006). There is no suggestion that rote learning should be totally avoided in the Indonesian context because of this type of instruction. However, an excessive use of rote learning means there is less emphasis on student-centred, high-ordered thinking, and other important aspects of learning. As a solution for this problem, the essay recommends detaching the teachers from their deference to and dependence on the regulation of the central government's education through mandating the schools to self-recruit the teachers who are appropriate with the school's expectations, evaluating teachers through peer observation in an action research and self evaluation, and lastly, dividing the decision of the Indonesian

national examination, to the school and government in order to generate a better picture of student learning outcomes.

This article approaches the development of Indonesian education by the cause and effect perspective. Reasonably, minimizing the traditional teaching approach in a classroom is handled by enhancing pedagogy or learning strategy. This essay, however seeks the improvement of Indonesian education from a different angle, by considering the teachers and their teaching profession. The next chapter describes the problematic Indonesian teaching profession in relation to the traditional approach.

## ***The institutional culture in the Indonesian education***

The Indonesian teachers (*guru*) are classified both as educators and civil servants. As the government's employees, the state emphasizes teachers' loyalty and obedience to the nation above that to their profession (Bjork 2006). The nation's system of government has exerted a powerful influence on the work of teachers, rewarding educators for behaviours not typically stressed in school isolated in Western nations with solid democratic foundations. During his fieldwork, Bjork (2005) observed various managerial issues such as organising examinations, commitment to the flag ceremony every Sunday morning, and attending official meetings (the *Rapat Dinas*) and other bureaucratic requirements.

Instruction, in contrast, was not established as a high priority. In the *Rapat Dinas*, the discussion of teaching performance has no place. In the classroom, the teachers were rarely observed and their instructional abilities were not evaluated, constructively criticised or appreciated. They were evaluated using the same behavioural checklist used to rate all government employees (see appendix 1). According to Mahyidin (2011), a civil servant, the form will be filled by the principle, and then be sent to the chief of education office. Those records will be the one factor determining the future career of the teacher. Here, the only basis of evaluation is teachers' progress in transmitting and meeting the curriculum schedule.

Not surprisingly, many teachers hold behaviours that brought them security in the past rather than following the precarious, unproven plans the government has developed in its move to devolve control over the school schools. Socialized to respect the verticality of the system's hierarchy, they are refusing chances to improve their levels of responsibility. Instead, they continue to wait for direction from central officials, who assume that local actors have accepted the baton that has been passed to them. The product of this situation is a leadership vacuum that no one seems want to fill.

This phenomenon implies that as long as educators did not threaten the state, their jobs were secure Bjork (2006). These conditions are a "Trojan horse" which discourages the teachers from concentrating on their teaching performance. According to

Peterson and Spencer (1991 in Campbell & Hourigan 2008, pg.37), this phenomenon is called institutional culture. It is defined as "the deeply embedded patterns of organisational behaviour and the shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies that members have about their organisation or its work".

#### ***The Indonesian national examination***

The Indonesian national examination, called the *Ujian Nasional* (National Examination), popular with UN, has long been a significant part of the Indonesian education system. Syahril (2007) explained that an important feature of the UN is that the government compels the students to reach a minimum standard score (commonly called passing grade) in order to determine the students pass or fail in the examination. All students should take the UN at the end of each of the Indonesian school level; elementary, junior high school, and senior high school.

Failing in the UN means the students do not reach a passing grade standardized by the central government. Failure to achieve the passing grade will automatically result in failure to graduate high school, regardless of the student's overall performance during their school years. The teachers and schools are commonly blamed for this "failure" from parents and government. It is then reasonable if the teachers tend to be less innovative and creative in designing their teaching approach. What is perceived as necessary for them is to teach the answer skills of the multiple-choice tests. In short, the teaching-learning process leads to "teaching to the test". Consequently, many teachers perceive rote learning is useful

for students rather than inquiry approach, problem-based approach, or other contemporary learning approaches.

Aikenhead (2000, pg.2) stated that “a superficial level on meaning of school science focuses on language and content to pass standardized assessment...rote memorization of key terms and process is only achieved temporarily..I call playing “Fatima’s Rule”.

### **Discussion**

The first principle to minimize the influence of institutional culture in Indonesian education is to detach the teachers from their deference to and dependence on the central government’s education regulation. One plausible way to reduce them is by finding other systems of teacher recruitment. Currently, the recruitment is based on a test called the *Pegawai Negeri Tes* (the civil servant test) which commonly employs multiple-choice test to assess their content knowledge. Even though this test is important, it is not valid to judge the competence of the candidates for certain educational position. Moreover, the selected person is not necessarily fit the school’s expectations. Hence, the authority of the teachers’ recruitment should be mandated to school in order to recruit teachers who appropriate to the school’s needs. The test should be ranged from subject content to pedagogical skills.

In addition to strengthening the role of classroom practice in the Indonesian education system, an evaluation of the teachers’ pedagogy properly and regularly should be taken into account. Teaching evaluation is

indeed important. According to Hubberman (2004, pg.3), “the basic purpose of evaluating teachers is to improve instruction by promoting better performance. At the same time, evaluation encourages teachers to maintain their professional growth”. There are two ways which can engage the teachers in teaching evaluation and influence the development of the intern as a teaching professional. They are peer observation in an action research (Hopkins 2008; Wrag 1999; Kemmis, & McTaggart 1988) and self evaluation (Clark 1992; Schön, 1983). In Indonesia, this would be an innovative way of teachers’ evaluation. Nevertheless, such a new evaluation system needs to gain recognition of the education community. This is the part where the government need to mandate a regulation to the local actors where they can independently take actions in any situations which they think are important in their own context.

Regarding the Indonesian national examination, the Indonesian teachers should understand that learning is a process rather than a product; some students might master some contents more quickly and others might require a longer time. Therefore, judging students’ capability through a single standardized assessment does not create a convincing picture of their intellectual capability. In order to reduce an excessive rote learning and “learning to test” culture in Indonesia, it is important to find other alternatives. One way is by dividing the decision of the standardized test, to the school

and the government. In this strategy, the government will take a part in assessing the student's cognitive skills through the national examination and the school will gauge the student's learning process. Another alternative might be the Victorian education system in Australia. The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) is a state standardized test as well. However, the series of in-class and external assessments in the VCE give a better picture of students' intellectual ability. Moreover, while the UN result cannot be used to continue to the higher education, the VCA provides various pathways for students to study further at university or TAFE (Technical and Further Education) and to employment (see the VCA official website, 2011).

### Conclusion

The institutional culture in Indonesian education and the Indonesian national examination system has been featured the Indonesian education. The article has analysed that both factors have a strong correlation with the traditional learning approach application in Indonesia.

In order to minimize the application of this approach in the Indonesian classroom, this article suggests three ways; firstly, detaching the teachers from their deference to and dependence on the regulation of the central government's education through mandating the schools to self-recruit the teachers who are appropriate with the school's expectations, secondly, peer observation in an action research and self evaluation could be

integrated in teachers' evaluation system, Lastly, dividing the decision of the Indonesian National Examination, to the school and government would generate a better picture of student learning outcomes.

Those ways, off course, are not a panacea for every traditional approach occurred in the Indonesian education. This essay only views the approach from one perspective. What is needed for implementing this strategy is the collaboration amongst the Indonesian educators' community to cope this problem together from many aspects.

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