The State of Anthropology of Indonesian Education: Critical Reflections on Theories and Methods

Coordinators: Jessica Peng (University of Pennsylvania), Jenny Zhang (University of California, Berkeley), & Askuri Ibn Chamim (Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies)

This panel seeks to reflect on the state of educational anthropology in Indonesia and offer new theoretical and methodological approaches through the discussion of four projects focused on different facets of contemporary educational issues. Upon a brief discussion of the state of the field, Jenny Zhang (University of California-Berkeley) will first discuss her comparative study on the practices, developmental processes, and outcomes of an influential childhood literacy campaign, Literacy Boost, in Kabupaten Belu, NTT, and in Jakarta Utara, DKI Jakarta. Drawing on ethnographic research, discourse analysis, and language socialization frameworks, Zhang will share her findings on the intended and unintended outcomes of the literacy intervention, which include how literacy was framed and assessed in classroom practice; the power dynamics and democratic practices at participating schools; and discipline and constructions of authority, both in classrooms and among adult stakeholders of the program. Second, Askuri Ibn Chamim (Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies) and Joel Kuipers (George Washington University) will discuss their ongoing study on science education in Islamic schools at the junior high school level. Askuri and Kuipers will describe the unique ethnographic approaches they take to understand processes of student learning, and more specifically how religious motivation links to motivation in learning science. Third, Jessica Peng (University of Pennsylvania) will discuss her research on the “pedagogical labor” that goes into developing an outer island youth labor force under the current administration’s goal of “developing Indonesia from the margins” [membangun Indonesia dari pinggiran]. Through this presentation, Peng will offer ideas about how to approach a study on education outside of schools, drawing on theories of semiotics and social learning. Finally, Valentina Utari (SMERU Research Institute) will present on the RISE Indonesia’s ongoing study on pre-service teacher education program. Through engaging with teacher journaling, this team seeks to follow student teachers over the course of two years to understand what shapes teacher identities.

The Decline of Lecturers’ Critical Consciousness under Neo-Liberal and New Managerialism Regime in Campus

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The penetration of the neo-liberalization and New Managerialism in most of Indonesia’s higher education lead the institution to run a more market-driven policy. In this case, neoliberalism in higher education has been a major object of criticism for years by few scholars, e.g. Nugroho (2002), Darmaningtyas et al. (2009, 2014), Gaus (2015), Subkhan (2016), dan Sakhiyya (2018). But there is no serious attention given to the implementation of New Managerialism in Indonesia’s higher education despite of it blatant evidences that changed the vision of the higher education, especially state university to be more compatible with lot of neoliberal’s assumptions, e.g. emphasizing on austerity, efficiency, performance, productivity, and accountability.
Besides that, those penetrations might also affect the lecturers, especially their way of thinking to adjust with the new vision of the institution or to resist it. The researcher always meets with some opinion and discourse among lecturers on the campus in which have several tendencies to accept or resist the existing policies. But, it seems that they do not know very well about what the really happen in their institution. Only a few of them try to seek out and criticize the phenomenon and then realized that there was a big power from the inevitable insistence of neoliberalism that changed the campus’ vision, cultures, values and direction. So, it is important to identify how neoliberalization and New Managerialism in higher education shape the lecturers’ ways of thinking and its implication on the academic climate within the institution.

By employing phenomenological approach this article tries to describe and analyze critically the lecturers’ way of thinking on several issues, i.e. the campus orientations toward internationalization, privatization, standardization and others policies that affect the curriculum, learning process, the roles, rights, responsibilities and ideal types of lecturers and students. The context of this research is in one of the state-funded Teacher College in Central Java Province who has an intention to be recognized as a legal entity state university (PTN8H) and also pursuing an international recognition. The researcher has collected five informants from various departments in order to enrich the perspective and experiences of the lecturers related to the implementation of some neoliberal policies and New Managerialism within the campus.

The researcher found that most of the lecturers agree with the new campus orientation taken for granted, it seems that they lack of critical consciousness on analyzing the issues influenced by neoliberalization and the hegemony of New Managerialism around them. For instances, certain informants said that they agree with the government policy to compel all of the lecturers to publish their research in an international journal indexed by Scopus. They didn’t see any negative side of the policy and didn’t know about some criticism from many scholars toward this policy. Most of the informant also said that the obsession of their campus to be labeled as “legal entity state university” is an appropriate strategy to pursue a high-level class of higher education in Indonesia. They didn’t know that this orientation is based on some basic assumptions of neoliberalism in which could allow the government to reduce their responsibility to finance public education, including state university.

Moreover, several policies such as the orientation toward research commercialization, teacher training professional program (PPG), the implementation of ISO 9001:2008, international accreditation (i.e. AUN-QA), and the recent issues like the industrial revolution 4.0 and 21st century skills also responded by the informant in various perspectives. The system also has a tendency to weaken the critical and political notions of student movement within the institution. Some informants said that the campus doesn’t really have good academic and political climate. In the other hand, there were several lecturers whose way of thinking could not be shaped by the existing and dominating power of the system. Few lecturers also feel that there is something wrong with the campus policies, but they lack of language to describe it appropriately and finally, they didn’t have any courage to make a change within the system due to their mindset, cultural and political barriers.

Most of the lecturers have been bounded by ageism mindset and culture in which always made them feel uncomfortable if they want to make a radical change or some political action against the existing and dominating power within the campus. This research found that the decline of the lecturer’s critical consciousness wasn’t only influenced by the penetration of neoliberal and New
Managerialism discourses and policies enacted by the government and university’s top management, but also by the old existing culture and values in which tend to preserve the order and seek for harmony than changes.

The lack of critical tradition, the old mindset of the institution as a government’s institution, feeling comfortable and safe as lecturers, feeling already having enough knowledge and being a professional lecturer, and also undemocratic controlling system lead by the top management of the university could be the main factors that lead to the decline of the lecturer’s critical consciousness. Most of the lecturer’s opinion who agreed with some neoliberal and New Managerialism policies on the campus because they didn’t know what is neoliberalism and New Managerialism. Moreover, they didn’t know because they didn’t read about it and they didn’t read because they feel already having enough knowledge as a professional lecturer to teach their student, conducting some research and giving some public service to the society.

Keywords: critical pedagogy; lecturer perspective; neo-liberalism, New Managerialism; Teacher College

CLOSING THE GAP: EDUCATING MUSLIM GIRLS TO BRING ABOUT SOCIAL CHANGE- LESSONS LEARNT FROM INDONESIA

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The benefits of girls’ education are endless as women have the knowledge, capabilities and potential to drive real solutions to the problems facing today’s world. Education equips girls not only to become self-reliant and financially independent, but it unlocks their potential to bring about social and global change. Yet, developing countries exhibit considerable gender disparities in education; girls’ education has been given little to no attention in almost all developing countries and a wide gap exists in enrolment rates for girls and boys. While this thesis acknowledges that almost all girls of the developing countries are excluded from earning an education, it illustrates how Islamic rhetoric has been used in Muslim majority developing countries to normalize gender disparity in education for Muslim girls of the developing countries. To argue that gender disparity is not a by-product of Islam, this thesis focuses on Indonesia (the largest Muslim dominant country in South East Asia) and how it has made exemplary progress in reducing gender disparity in education within its Islamic context. After its independence, Indonesia focused on building a literate and knowledgeable nation to emerge as a developed nation. Girls’ education was recognised and appreciated as a crucial indicator of development. Therefore, Indonesia adopted policies to eliminate gender disparity in education. I highlight and discuss legal frameworks and educational policy reforms as the main drivers of social change in Indonesia. Even though this thesis aims to build a theoretical framework based on lessons learned from Indonesia to reduce gender inequalities in education for Muslim girls, its findings will benefit non-Muslim girls as well.

Keywords: Indonesia, Gender disparity, Muslim girls, Developing countries.