



Does Indonesian Curriculum Studies Exist?

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In order to develop an appropriate curriculum design in which it is responsive to the uniqueness of the social context, its problems and challenges, curriculum studies should be well developed. Unfortunately, in the Indonesian context, curriculum studies seem stagnant because of many problems. In this article, I combine literature review and an ethnographic method to collect and analyse the information from numerous resources; primarily, several works on curriculum and teacher college as a site of the research. I briefly elucidate the presumption of the curriculum as a legal product — not an academic product — and the lack of intellectual tradition within teacher colleges have become the main factors of why curriculum studies cannot evolve optimally in the Indonesian context. These problems should be overcome by the government, the top management of the teacher colleges and the lecturers themselves — especially those concerned with curriculum studies.

Keywords: critical studies, curriculum studies, Indonesian context, teacher college



INTRODUCTION

Many scholars who are concerned with curriculum studies state that the curriculum is the heart of education (Khan & Law, 2015; Kranthi & College, 2017; Philippou & Priestley, 2019; Priestley & Philippou, 2019). Empirically, in the Indonesian context, curriculum has always become the main focus of its citizens. For instance, there were many discussions and public debates when the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) released a national curriculum. In 2004, 2006 and 2013 when the MoEC enacted a new curriculum there was always criticism from the scholars and the public; whether they were parents who felt responsible to ensure the quality of education for their children or as a ‘good’ citizen, who is concerned with education issues. Within the schooling system itself, the revision or renewal of the national curriculum always brings boisterousness among teachers (Awaliyah, 2013; Slameto, 2014; Zulkarnain, Setyowati, & Mahanal, 2014).

The amount of attention from people towards the renewal of the national curriculum seems to be based on the assumption that the curriculum will affect the future of the nation (Perdana, 2013). If we agree that the curriculum is at the heart of education, moreover in many places, including in Indonesia, in which the schooling system retains its dominance in the education system, it is reasonable to understand why the MoEC provides more attention to the curriculum’s evaluation and development. Moreover, it is reasonable to also understand why a majority of the public debates the curriculum, as well as the academicians who had done so in certain academics’ occasions. However, the scholars and academicians need to move forward towards a more ‘scientific’ or epistemological discourse to develop strong curriculum studies in the Indonesian context.

In the Western tradition, curriculum studies has been developed by many scholars since early in the birth of the field. Many popular names, such as Bobbit, Tyler, Taba, Wheeler, Pinar, Apple, Doll, Slattery, Grundy, Ornstein, Hunkins, Stenhouse, Kelly, and many more, are the main references for many students and practitioners who want to master curriculum studies (Au, 2012; Flinders & Thornton, 2004; Palupi, 2018; Slattery, 2006). However, if we look at our context in Indonesia, it seems that it was difficult to find the few scholars who are specifically concerned with curriculum studies and have already built a strong epistemological basis, reflected in their works. Most of them only publish additional works on the foundation of curriculum, curriculum evaluation, curriculum development, and curriculum and instruction. Moreover, few of them only publish some references as a curriculum manual for the teachers or teacher college students (Hamalik, 2006, 2017; Hasan, 2008; Mulyasa, 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2013; Nasution, 2010).

Until 2019, I could not find any references that were full of discourse on curriculum studies, ranging from its philosophical to practical dimension, and using numerous perspectives from



critical social theories. It is why I echo the following questions: does curriculum studies emerge in Indonesia? Do we have a unique and contextual curriculum studies? Does Indonesian curriculum studies exist? These questions are important, because the practices of curriculum evaluation and development need a strong epistemological foundation that comes from the scientific, rigorous and critical discourse on curriculum studies. Many social problems (i.e. terrorism, corruption, violence, hate speeches, trade war, social conflict, discrimination, global warming and etc.) cannot be solved by only employing some methodological approaches of the curriculum evaluation and development. Unfortunately, it has occurred in Indonesia, especially in our school context.

What I mean by curriculum studies, is more about a scientific effort to study the curriculum from many philosophical, ideological or even theoretical and political perspectives towards the wide-ranging of the curriculum dimensions, i.e. its levels, types of education, social contexts, issues, etc. Curriculum studies talks about the philosophical, ideological and epistemological dimension of the curriculum in response to the existing problems of human beings and social changes within the society. At this point, curriculum studies in Indonesia should respond to the uniqueness of Indonesia, such as its rich cultures, customs, traditions, social problems and characters of the people. By using several philosophical lenses, an ideological basis or theoretical perspectives, Indonesia should be the centre of the study in order to formulate an Indonesian curriculum studies. This type of study would be meaningful and useful as an epistemological foundation to conduct an evaluation or development of the curriculum at the national or local levels.

Through this article I will examine the existing curriculum studies in the Indonesian context, if any. This study will contribute to the development of Indonesian curriculum studies by providing a preliminary analysis and theoretical and methodological reflection, in which it may provide potential as the research road map for further study (Pole & Morrison, 2003).

Research Methods

In this article, I use a qualitative approach to collect and analyse the information, especially by combining two traditions from text-based research (literature review) and ethnographic methods. The former is useful as a guidance to analyse several references on curriculum topics from some of the Indonesian scholars, and the next is important as a paradigm and method to reveal the hidden messages of the phenomenon within the site of the research. Revealing whether we have Indonesian curriculum studies or not needs more exploration based on several texts related to this topic, because the recent development of this study — if any — often comes in the form of academic publications (Hart, 1998).



Moreover, in order to elucidate how curriculum studies emerges or doesn't emerge and its consequences towards the practical dimension of the curriculum in the Indonesian context, ethnography is appropriate. Many ethnographic concepts, such as participant observation, interlocutors, first-hand information and lived experiences, really help me as a researcher come lecturer (Pole & Morrison, 2003).

I have been involved within the teacher college as a lecturer for years (since 2012), so I have a great deal of information and experiences, especially related to this topic — curriculum studies. For years I taught several subjects, such as sociology of curriculum, comparative curriculum studies — similar to comparative education studies — and contemporary curriculum studies. Previously, I also had a lot of experience as a bachelor and master's student in education who had been pushed by my supervisors to have an intimate interaction with a lot of references on curriculum. Besides, since 2014, I was the administrator of the Indonesian curriculum developer association (Hipkin) for the Central Java region, and in 2017, I became an academic staff member at the center of curriculum and learning innovation in my office. All of my experiences enable me to be more familiar with the development of the recent issues on curriculum studies. Furthermore, I also knew the various lecturers' mindset, their way of thinking, habits, beliefs and values in which inhibit the intellectual development within the campus.

Concerning this research, all of my experiences above were useful and meaningful as resources of the important information I need to collect and analyse.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, I will explore three main topics to answer the question I posed in the title of this article. First, the existence of curriculum studies in Indonesia. Second, I will explore how many politicians and scholars perceived curriculum — especially national curriculum policy — as a legal product, not an academic product, and why this happens and how it influences the development of curriculum studies in Indonesia. Third, I will illustrate how the poor intellectual climate and tradition within the teacher college leads the curriculum studies to appear stagnant, without any significant development. Furthermore, I will propose some of my thoughts on how to develop an Indonesian curriculum studies based on what we have right now.

The Existence of Curriculum Studies in Indonesia

In order to measure or identify whether Indonesian curriculum studies currently exists or not, we need to define certain indicators. Based on the curriculum studies development in the Western tradition, there are at least several indicators, i.e. are many scholars concerned with the field of studies, are many publications related to such topics (book references,



handbook and academic journal) and have a high quality as scientific publications, are there many conferences and symposiums with strong commitments to develop curriculum studies, and is the discourse on curriculum very lively, encompassing many themes ranging from the philosophy to the practical dimension of the curriculum implementation. I will briefly explain all of the indicators below.

First, we have several scholars who are focussed on curriculum studies and publish their works on several topics, i.e. Said Hamid Hasan, Din Wahyudin, Hamalik, Sukmadinata, Hidayat, Sanjaya, Mulyasa, Nasution, Arifin, Suyadi, Dahlia, Sutrisno, Idi, Rusman, Ansyar, and Alhamuddin (Alhamuddin, 2019; Ansyar, 2015; Arifin, 2011; Hamalik, 2006, 2017; Hasan, 2008; R. Hidayat, 2011; S. Hidayat, 2017; Idi, 2014; Mulyasa, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2002, 2006b, 2006a; Nasution, 2010; Rusman, 2018; Sanjaya, 2008; N.S. Sukmadinata, 2014; Nana Syaodih Sukmadinata, 2001; Sutrisno & Suyadi, 2016; Suyadi & Dahlia, 2017; Wahyudin, 2014, 2017). I generated all of these scholars based on their publications on curriculum from several publishers, i.e. Remaja Rosdakarya, Rajawali Press, and Prenada Media Group. However, if we look at the topics and the substance of their works, it seems that most of them only serve as an introduction or encounter for teacher candidate students who want to understand and master in several dimensions of curriculum studies, such as its foundations, implementation, management, and evaluation.

Moreover, most of those works could also be classified as 'how to books' because they emphasised more on elucidating how to develop or implement certain curriculum theories or the recent and existing national curriculum policy in Indonesia, without adequate critiques from the authors (Mulyasa, 2002, 2006b, 2006a, 2013, 2014, 2017). Only a few of the publications try to analyse and offer a brief introduction about the discourse and the development of curriculum studies from the Western tradition or in Indonesian context (Alhamuddin, 2019; R. Hidayat, 2011). Of course, it is not enough to look at the history of the development of the Indonesian national curriculum policy for the schooling system (since the 1950s) and the establishment of many teacher colleges concerned with education studies. I think the discourse of curriculum studies should go beyond this very poor condition compared to its rich development in the Western tradition — see Pinar, Flinders, Thornton (Flinders & Thornton, 2004; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008).

It is also hard to determine how far curriculum studies in the Indonesian context has been developed by early scholars because the academic tradition within several teacher colleges, since the 1950s, is not well developed. For example, until the early 2000s, there were only a few academic publications, including scientific or academic journals, that had been published seriously and continuously, and the content was still poor of information, data, critical analysis and some novelties. I suppose, the main values and tradition within the



teacher colleges — in which most of the lecturers prefer to teach rather than conduct some research or focus on knowledge development — is the cause of why the development of curriculum studies as well as education studies within teacher colleges has remained stagnant for years.

The growth of the curriculum developer as a profession was also stuck on the ideas of many scholars within the association (Indonesian association of curriculum developer, Hipkin). Many conferences, seminars or symposiums have been held by the association or many departments in teacher colleges and seem only as a ceremonial or gathering event to share the problems they faced, especially their institutional problems, i.e. how to meet with the school and industrial demand, how to get international recognition, or evaluating the implementation of the national curriculum. In 2017 for instance, in a national meeting of the education faculty association, there was an international conference and intensive dialogue among the members of my campus. I was in charge as one of the committee members. However, there was no discussion on some of the epistemological issues in education or curriculum studies, as well as no attention on how to make a research road map and collaboration among them.

Thus, curriculum studies does exist in Indonesia, but remains stuck on its methodological dimension. It is certainly not beneficial for the future development of curriculum studies in Indonesia. I did not see any serious movement until 2019 to formulate some breakthrough for development, such as Indonesian curriculum studies by any factions of curriculum scholars by combining many critical perspectives towards several important topics, i.e. social conflict, terrorism, corruption, climate changes, discrimination, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism. Most of the discussion in this field seems only to focus on the official policy enacted by the government or that is endorsed by the corporations, i.e. industrial revolution 4.0, society 5.0, digital literacy, etc.

Curriculum as a Legal Product, Not Academic Product

Education in Indonesia is one of the most restricted fields, because almost all of the education policies have been legitimised by the law or government regulation, including the curriculum. For instance, the national curriculum of 2013 has several regulations including: the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 34 of 2018, concerning the national standard of education for senior high school; the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 35 of 2018, concerning revision of the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 58 of 2014, concerning the 2013 curriculum for junior high school; the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 36 of 2018, concerning revision of the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 59 of 2014, concerning the 2013 curriculum for senior high school; and the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation



No. 37 of 2018, concerning revision of the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 24 of 2013, concerning core competency and basic competency of the subjects in the 2013 curriculum for elementary and secondary education.

Many people may ask: Why does the government always release and enact many laws or regulations for education? The answer is quite simple. First, the government, as the representation of the country, has a responsibility to ensure the legal certainty of certain education affairs, such as the interest to make sure that teachers conduct their teaching practices within the classroom, as well as how the regulation has stated (Apple, 1981). Therefore, such law and regulation are part of the education and learning controlling system. Second, many teachers and lecturers require a fixed definition and practical guide to do their jobs as a part of the educational practices. For instance, how to approach the learning process, how to assess student learning results, and how to develop a contextual curriculum for certain school's levels and regions. To meet these, it requires an appropriate need for the language of the law because it is more instructive and rigid, is very different to academic language, especially in social studies and the humanities which are very interpretative, it contains many perspectives and in many cases, is always debatable.

Third, there are some of psycho-social or mentality problems regarding Indonesians in which they may often appear as slothful, indolent, lazy, corrupt, lack motivation and courage to initiate some activities, and in some notions, try to break the rules but in negative terms (Riyadi, 2017; Saroni & Ag, 2015). In my everyday conversation, I often hear many lecturers admit that they underestimate their tasks to teach students and conduct some research or giving of any community services — in Indonesia, it is called Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi (three responsibilities of higher education, including lecturers' responsibility). The presence of law or government regulation, of course, is an effort from the government to remind them and push them to consider and stay on the right track.

Furthermore, we should also note that there was a mentality that arose from the lecturers and their spirit as civil servants, especially senior lecturers, in which it also shaped their mindset to a more government-centred way of thinking. Combined with notions of being nationalistic, it would bring a view that government should intervene in many citizen's lives (Apple, 1999, 2013). Thus, the government and citizen relationship has always been viewed as a top-down relationship and the citizen as the object of the law. Seeing and perceiving curriculum, in this case 'national curriculum' as a legal product and not academic product — even though in each legal product it should have an academic document — it brings several consequences. These include that the curriculum is always perceived as a government policy for the sake of the people; there is a dominant perspective in the public realm that curriculum is an official document from the government; and many students refer to the law



or the government regulation as if it was an academic literature to accomplish their academic tasks, especially when they look for some academic concepts such as ‘curriculum’, ‘school’, ‘assessment’, ‘scientific approach’, and so on.

When most of the lecturers, especially within the teacher college, perceived the curriculum as a government education policy, and also perceived themselves as civil servants and the teacher college institution as the ‘government institution’, especially for state-funded teacher colleges, they would conduct research on curriculum as an educational policy and not as a field of study. On many academic occasions, I found that a substantial amount of the research topic which focussed on curriculum was evaluative research combined with a research and development (R & D) model on learning or instruction topics to produce learning models or equipment. Only a few research studies and publications gave attention to the philosophical, ideological, or even political sides of the curriculum. Unfortunately, several new publications are not well written scientifically with depth and critical discussion by referring to the recent philosophical, ideological and political debates in the education realm.

This tendency only produces analysis and recommendations for the government and other stakeholders on how to handle the problem of the curriculum’s implementation in schools. There were almost no research projects that were directed to discuss the curriculum as a field of study. The lecturers’ intellectual capacity to generate philosophical explanation or theoretical formulation was also limited. I will further discuss this notion in the following section.

Lack of Intellectual Tradition

When I entered the teacher college as a young lecturer in 2012, I felt that the academics climate and intellectual tradition did not change much compared to my experience as a student in the early 2000s. There were no clear pathways on how to be a good and high qualified lecturer with expertise in a certain field. Moreover, in some ‘government’s teacher colleges’, the lecturers’ career paths have been determined by their civil servant achievements and performance, i.e. become expert assistant and lector, III/b, III/c, IV/a and etc. Recently, under the Scopus regime, the management of the teacher college (a.k.a the government) defines the lecturers’ capacity through their ability to publish articles in international journals indexed by Scopus, Thomson Reuters and the like. There is no depth discussion about how to formulate a clear vision and build a strong academic foundation in the field of studies related to education, i.e. educational technology, curriculum studies, pedagogy, assessment, and learning theories.



So, it is reasonable to understand why curriculum studies didn't emerge significantly, even within the teacher colleges, which are full of lecturers who are focussed in education, including curriculum. Moreover, I will argue that the poor condition of the intellectual tradition within the campus will bring a bad effect on the development of curriculum studies in Indonesia. Because, basically, only lecturers who perceive themselves as an intellectual who gives attention not only to teaching students but also to developing the knowledge and provision of community services or advocacy to disadvantaged people, will have the potential to develop curriculum studies. Many fields of study, including curriculum, need significant research and critical discourse to evolve, and if lecturers only focussed on teaching, they will not be able to catch up with the recent development of curriculum studies from many areas, topics and perspectives.

Briefly, I would explain why the intellectual tradition within the teacher college seems stagnant for years. There are several main factors here.

First, the lecturers' commitment to be an intellectual who doesn't merely focus on teaching but also research and advocates for the community, is poor. I guess this happens because many lecturers still hold a strong vision and mentality as civil servants, as has been noted by Bjork and the old fashioned tradition of the teacher college, in which focus is only on preparing the student to be a good teacher by giving them many lectures (Bjork, 2005). A good and high qualified intellectual should demonstrate their commitment to the knowledge evolvement by having a clear research road map and field of expertise, being eager to publish their works in academic communities and popular publication, possessing a huge curiosity to the problems, both theoretical and empirical, and in this case, education problems, and also be involved in social, cultural, or political activities to offer some contribution to the society.

However, in our teacher colleges, most of the lecturers, even the professors, didn't show any ideal type of the lecturer as an intellectual, as I have mentioned above. According to my interaction with many colleagues as interlocutors of my ethnographic method to gather the information in this research, I found many professors and the top management of the college were always involved in many research projects, but the result was a lack of theoretical contribution to the certain field of studies. Including, several scholars who have an academic background in curriculum studies, who are trapped in many research projects that have lot of budget or grants from the campus or government — through the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education — in which do not align with their 'focus' on curriculum. Therefore, I could state that curriculum studies are lacking scholars who are genuinely focused in this field, who also have a strong commitment to evolving curriculum studies and are not easily tempted by other research schemes.



Second, I believe that the political climate of the campus always influences the academic and intellectual climate. Many stories, including from what I've seen in my lived experiences within the teacher college and much of the information gained from my many interlocutors, indicates that once the campus is entrapped in politics, there will be a decrease in the intellectual climate. In many cases, the top management of the colleges or universities are not the best lecturers' who have a good academic capacity and visions to lead and run the institution. In the Indonesian context, the political identity and relation, ethnic group, race and religious belief group play an important consideration in this issue. Maybe it is why corruption, collusion and nepotism still exist in several campuses nowadays. Focussing on political positions within the campus as a rector, vice-rectors, dean, vice deans and the like, bring the campus — in this case is teacher college — to run without a strong and clear vision of scientific and knowledge development. It is why only a few teacher colleges have a centre of curriculum studies that exists and is prolific.

Third, teacher colleges in Indonesia in historical trajectories (since 1950s) could be seen as educational institutions with a strong commitment to producing teachers for the schooling system. As I have mentioned previously, this position shapes the intellectual and academic climate of the campus. In my interaction with several pieces of literature on the curriculum, I cannot find any academic journals on curriculum studies within the teacher colleges in which have a strong academic standard. I only found several periodical publications, but it seems that the content only reflects the personal contemplation of the author, with lack of empirical data or theoretical analysis. Many books on curriculum also merely summarise the main theories or topics on curriculum studies from the Western tradition, without any adequate critical analysis from the authors.

Recently, when many state-funded teacher colleges changed their status into universities at the end of the nineteen-nineties, several critical scholars concerned in the teacher preparation program criticised this policy. Buchori, for instance, said that the policy would bring the teacher colleges confusion and ambivalence (Buchori, 2007). Moreover, my interaction with several senior lecturers also shows that they feel the recent condition of the campus does not reflect the ideal condition, climate and character as an institution concerned in education and producing teachers. I also reflect that the orientation of many teacher colleges to be a legal entity (Badan Hukum Pendidikan) burdens the management and the lecturers with many tasks which keep them away from seriously focussing on the development of curriculum studies, as well as the other fields of study related to education or pedagogy within the campus (Subkhan, 2016).



Further Discussion

According to the discussion previously, I will propose some related topics that hopefully will be useful for the development of curriculum studies in Indonesia, in the future. First, according to the history of Indonesian education, we already have many pioneers in education, which could be the rich resources to conduct and develop Indonesian curriculum studies. Several figures such as Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Tan Malaka, M. Sjafei, Romo Mangunwijaya, have proven their capacity as great educational thinkers. We also have several figures like Tilaar and Soedijarto, in which their insight is useful for the development of the curriculum studies in the Indonesian context.

Second, we should bring more reconceptualist ideas and critical tradition or postmodern issues into our discussion about the idea and practice of curriculum in the Indonesian context. Many scholars such as Apple, Au, Pinar, Slattery, McKernan and Doll, would be worthy as figures who use a critical perspective in curriculum studies. Third, the academicians and government should try to consider from the different views that the curriculum and learning practices shouldn't be legitimised by the law or government regulation, because it would decrease the intellectual discourse and is counterproductive with the notion to enable the teacher to be more intellectual. Fourth, the teacher college top management should be encouraged to build many centres of study, including the centre of curriculum studies.

Furthermore, I also propose some methodological reflection according to this research project. First, lecturers who have many experiences within the campus, have many opportunities to meet with certain problems related to education. The campus also has the potential to be a research site to reveal some of the hidden values, ideology or political interest related to educational issues. Second, qualitative research, like what I have completed, is quite appropriate as an approach to collect the data and information from the first-hand informants by employing an ethnographic method. Lecturers could be the participant-observers who can easily collect and analyse the information from the field of study — the campus — and the rich experiences of the lecturers are valuable and meaningful resources when the topics of the research are about or related to the campus issues.



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