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The perspectives of Indonesian students
in Australia on a better Indonesia



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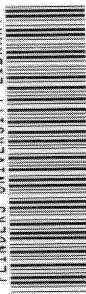
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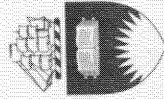


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IN TOUCH
The Perspectives of Indonesian Students in Australia
on a Better Indonesia



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FOREWORD

The publication of *In Touch: The Perspectives of Indonesian Students in Australia on a Better Indonesia* represents a new step in the activities of the Indonesian Students' Association (PIIA) at Flinders University. It is an initiative that the University has been pleased to support.

Flinders University has a long interest in teaching and research on South-east Asia, dating back to the opening of the University in 1966. The first Flinders Asia Lecture was held in 1970 and an academic specialization in Asian Studies was established in 1976, coinciding with the introduction of a major in Bahasa Indonesia. Flinders was the site of the first *pendopo* in Australia, opened in 1990 as "...a tangible symbol of the meeting between Australian and Indonesian people and cultures nurtured at Flinders ..."

Flinders has a range of collaborations with Indonesian universities. There are academic collaborations with the University of Indonesia, Gadjah Mada University, Nusa Cendana University and the Indonesian Institute of Sciences and exchange programs between Flinders University and Atma Jaya University, Parahyangan Catholic University, and Universitas Surabaya.

Around 770 Indonesian students have graduated from Flinders University. Our first Indonesian graduate commencing study in 1982 in a Master of Science, and returned to Flinders to complete a Doctor of Philosophy in 1994. An additional 190 or so Indonesian students are currently enrolled or are soon to graduate from the University.

We are proud that our Indonesian alumni conduct teaching and research in universities and schools across the Indonesian archipelago as well as working in all sectors and levels of government and industry. Many of our Indonesian alumni choose to return to Flinders to complete higher level qualifications, to further develop their professional skills and to contribute to the development of knowledge and skills that they apply in Indonesia, Australia and throughout the global community.

The articles in this book are based on student assignments and cover an eclectic range of subject matter broadly based around education, religion, film and socio-cultural practice. This includes reflections on improving teaching English as a Second Language, film as a means of promoting an Islamic cul-

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IN TOUCH: The Perspectives of Indonesian Students in Australia on a Better Indonesia

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Publication Coordinator:

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Publisher:

Persatuan Pelajar Indonesia Australia (PIIA), Flinders University

Flinders One Hub

Plaza Level, Main Campus

Flinders University

Sturt Road, Bedford Park, SA 5042

First Published :

February 2012

Cover Design:

Lenggi Sukarya

Layout & Printer:

CV. Primaprint

ISBN: 978-0-646-57338-0

Cataloguing-in-Publication entry is available from the National Library of Australia
<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/>

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NUR AZIZAH

Introduction

There are some issues that need to be addressed in curriculum in the Special Education Departments in Indonesian universities. However, for this purpose, one of the many aspects in curriculum that I would like to address is the option for specialization in the special education course in undergraduate schools in Indonesia in relation to its relevance to recent special education practice and to the development of knowledge about children with special needs.

In many universities in Indonesia, students who are enrolled in the Special Education Department have to choose one major stream once they enter the third semester. There are ten universities which offer special education courses and each university has different specializations. The main specializations in each university are visual impairment, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, physical disability and emotional disturbance. Some universities have autism, learning disability and gifted education as their options. Once students have decided their choice, they will then learn about these specific subjects until their final semesters.

The practice of choosing specializations has been applying for decades. Several philosophical issues underpin the practice. First, the special education course is categorized as a vocational course. Graduates from the course are prepared to be teachers in certain special schools (i.e. special schools for visual impairment, special schools for hearing impairment, special schools for intellectual disability, etc). Second, the practice of special education occurs mainly in special schools. So, the argument goes, the stakeholders need to employ persons with specific teaching qualifications. However, numerous problems have emerged from the practice.

Problems in the current practice

The current practice has some problems and challenges. First, a change in categorizations of disabilities or special needs has occurred. In the past, disability types fell into the five categories mentioned above (i.e. visual impair-

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ment, hearing impairment, mental retardation, physical disabilities, and emotional disturbance). However, like other knowledge, knowledge about children with disabilities or special needs is not static. As Groundwater-Smith, Ewing and Le Cornu (2001, p. 72) stated, "knowledge is sensitive to change and development over time rather than as a constant body of information".

Nowadays, many children that are diagnosed with disabilities cannot fit in into the five categories and the prevalence is significant. For example, autism has a prevalence of 0.2 % of the child population, learning disabilities has a prevalence of 5-6% of school age children, attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity (ADD/ADHD) accounts for 3-5 % of the school age population, communication disorder has a prevalence 0.2 % of the child population, and gifted and talented has a prevalence of 3-5% of the school age population (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003). Most of these types of disabilities are not represented in the choice of specializations in most special education courses.

Although students can learn about those types of disabilities as elective subjects, having children with those types of disabilities in the classrooms is not elective. Special education teachers cannot reject these children; therefore they must be prepared to teach children with any type of disabilities without exception. Moreover, the amount of time allocated to study these types of disabilities is unequal to those that are assigned to the specialization options. Furthermore, it is almost impossible to always introduce new specializations into the course every time new types of disabilities are diagnosed as they are constantly proliferating. Moreover, special education is not a popular course so it is limited in terms of the number of students who enrol in this course.

The second problem that arises from specialization is the shortage of special education teachers in certain specializations and the uneven distribution of special education teachers' specialty. This happens because the specializations have more places for what is seen as popular specializations. The number of students who enrol in each specialization is unbalanced. In many cases, the numbers of students who commence in some specializations may be double or triple those who enrol in other specializations. The most popular specialization in the most universities is hearing impairment and mental retardation and there have always been great numbers of students who prefer to take these specializations. The least popular speciality is physical disabilities.

From personal and professional experience, only one of the 29 students enrolled in 1995 in the Special Education Department in one popular university

in Bandung, West Java, preferred to choose the specialization of physical disabilities. In similar fashion, of about 40 students who commenced the Special Education course in one university in Yogyakarta in 2003, only five students undertook the specialization of physical disabilities. If this situation persists it is possible that one day, there will be a shortage of special education teachers who specialise in this disability. The elimination of specializations in special education courses could reduce the shortage of special education teachers in certain specialties because the graduates from special education courses would be trained in all the specializations.

The third problem arising from choosing specializations is related to recent special education practice, namely, inclusion. The most significant change in the field of special education is the way special education is perceived. Nowadays, special education is not longer considered as a place but as a service which can be delivered in both special and regular schools. Previously, students with disabilities were being educated in segregated settings. But now, the new trend is for students with disabilities no longer to be separated in special schools but also to have the option to be taught in regular schools. Once called 'integration into the mainstream,' the new trend in educating students with disabilities is termed 'inclusion'.

Even though Indonesia recognized inclusion in 1998 when participating in the Salamanca Statement, the implementation of inclusive schools in Indonesia only just began in 2000 with some private schools in big cities such as Jakarta and Bandung. Then, in 2003, the Indonesian government through the Director General of Primary and Secondary Education published a circular letter no 380/C.C6/MN/2003 on the pioneering of inclusion. The circular letter persuaded some heads of the provincial offices of the National Education Department to pilot inclusion in each municipality. Now, inclusion has become the agenda to be implemented widely across the nation.

The term inclusion has an extensive meaning and is not only about teaching students with disabilities in regular classrooms but also about giving equal opportunities to school age children to attend class without considering their background such as gender, ethnicity, poverty, and ability (Ballard, 1999; Corbett, 2001; Giorcelli, 1995 as cited in Foreman, 2005; Mitchell, 2005). However, for this purposes I will limit the definition of inclusion to the education of students with special needs in regular classrooms together with their peers.

Differing from segregation which is often categorized by the disabilities

experienced by the students (i.e. special school for the blind, special school for the deaf, special school for mentally retarded children, etc), inclusion does not discriminate by category (Bayliss & Lingham, 1998 as cited in Avramidis, Baylis & Burden, 2000). In inclusive schools, everyone is learning together without discrimination. There are no specific students with special needs taught by specifically qualified special education teachers. Special education teachers have the responsibility to meet the learning needs of every student without considering the type of disability and whether it is their specialty or not.

Let me share my professional experience when I was a special education teacher in a primary school in Bandung, West Java. I specialized in physical disability. Of approximately 150 students, 22 had special needs. Of all these special needs students, only one student had cerebral palsy, one student had visual impairment, one student had hearing impairment, two students were diagnosed with Down syndrome and the rest of the students were diagnosed with autism and ADHD.

Even though only one student had a physical disability, the student with cerebral palsy, which belonged to my specialization, I had to work with all of the special needs students. In order to understand the other type of disabilities so that I could meet the students' educational needs, I had to seek the information informally through workshops and seminars and often by trial and error. This situation is also experienced by other colleagues who serve as special education teachers in inclusive schools. That is to say, the particular specialization studied during the undergraduate years does not provide what is really needed in 'real practice' and what the stakeholder expects from special education teachers.

As a special education teacher, the imperfect or even complete lack of knowledge about other types of disabilities can lead to loss of self-confidence which then casts doubt on one's professionalism. If specialization in special education courses is eliminated, opportunities to gain more knowledge about all types of disabilities instead of one specialty would become available and improve the skills and competences of graduates to serve children with disabilities, not only in special schools but also in general schools. It will also provide opportunities for special education teachers to work and collaborate in the wider community instead of being limited to specific special schools.

The problems continue as the recruitment of public servants (*Pegawai*

Negeri Sipil/PNS) as special education teachers tends not to consider the specific specialization qualification. Any teacher that is trained in a specialty may be placed in a special school that caters to a type of disability that is different from his/her specialty. Moreover, the current practice in special education allows special schools to take children with different types of disability, despite being specialists in only one specific type of disability.

The practice of Teacher Professional Education (*Pendidikan Profesi Guru/PPG*) that has just been implemented gives more room for beginning teachers to explore their specialty interest after they graduate from the university. The special education departments can then focus on providing broad knowledge about different types of disabilities via the non-specialty curriculum.

How can we change?

Change is "the process of transformation of phenomena. It refers to a general concept which describes what has happened, particularly as the result of the dissemination of an innovation" (Print, 1993, p. 222). Marsh and Willis (2007) maintain that the word 'change' not only refers to innovation, but also refers to development and adoption.

Print (1993, p. 222) defines curriculum change as "a generic term used in education to incorporate a number of associated concepts (innovation and adoption) in order to analyse and explain curricula phenomena". According to Marsh and Willis (2007) curriculum change can either be intended or unintended. It also can happen at the local stage (classroom or school level) or at the national level.

In the process of innovation, development and adoption in curriculum areas, there are several dynamic issues that need to be considered carefully. These factors are what Skilbeck (1984, as cited in Brady, 1995, p. 45) point out as external and internal factors.

External factors include:

1. Cultural and social changes and expectations, including parental expectations, employer requirements, community assumptions, and values, changing relationships (e.g. between adults and children) and ideology.
2. Educational system requirements and challenges (e.g. policy statements, examinations, local authority expectations or demands or pressure, curriculum project, educational research).

3. The changing nature of the subject matter to be taught.
4. The potential contribution of the teacher support system (e.g. teacher-training colleges, research institutes).
5. Flow of resources into the school.

Internal factors include:

1. Pupils: aptitudes, abilities and defined educational needs.
2. Teachers: values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, experience, special strengths and weaknesses, roles.
3. School ethos and political structures: common assumptions and expectations including tradition, power distribution, authority relationships, method of achieving conformity to norms and dealing with deviance.
4. Material resources including plant, equipment and the potential for enhancing these.
5. Perceived and felt problems and shortcomings in the existing curriculum.

The general purpose of curriculum change is related to the goals of education. These objectives are value-oriented, that is, based on philosophical or ideological beliefs. It can be philosophy or ideology at the national or institutional level. At the institutional level, the curriculum in a special education course links up to the vision, mission and purposes of the course.

Specifically, the purposes of curriculum change, in this case the purpose of eliminating the specializations in special education courses, are:

1. Giving adequate and equal knowledge to students who are enrolling in special education courses so they can provide educational services to various types of disabilities.
2. Preventing the shortage of special education teachers in certain specialties.
3. Inhibiting imbalanced distribution of specialty and special education teachers.
4. Increasing skills and competences of special education teachers.
5. Providing opportunities for special education teachers to work and collaborate in the wider community instead of being limited to working in special schools.

The new curriculum that is proposed eliminates specialization in special education courses. With this new curriculum, students who enrol in a special education course no longer have to choose a specialty in one specific type of disability. The reasons for this proposal are clearly discussed in the 'Problem of current practice' section above. The changing of the pathways will also require change in the curriculum contents or subjects.

Graduates from special education courses should at least have two basic competencies. The first competence refers to the main competencies, that is, they must retain competence as special education teachers that have skills in planning, implementing, evaluating and developing a special education program. The second competence is categorized as supporting competencies. These include skills in technology, management and curriculum development. The curriculum content should be developed to achieve both competencies. The existing subjects need to be analysed for their relevance to the achievement of both the main and supporting competencies. Subjects that are not relevant need to be eliminated and new subjects should be added.

Currently, the curriculum adopted in the special education course is grouped into four categories, namely: educational, psychological, medical, and social. The suggestion is that the subjects should be heavily focused on educational matters of teaching special needs children. The proportion of the other groups of subjects should be less and if any are not relevant they should be eliminated.

Conclusion

Factors that drive curriculum change in the Special Education Department are not only limited to internal but also external factors. Besides the problems described above, external factors such as policy and regulation about inclusive schools also play a significant role in restructuring the special education curriculum and eliminating the practice of specialization in the special education course. The demand for inclusion has increased and as a consequence schools are pushed to fulfil this demand with special education teachers being forced to have skills and competencies in educating children with various types of disabilities.

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