

Controversial Issues in Historical Learning: Problem or Challenge?

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Abstract—History is a unique phenomenon of human civilization. History helps to discover the past, besides history may also lead to a controversy and a long debate. The relativism problem which then often trigger the controversy in historiography cannot be separated from the element of subjectivity in history. Historiography as a work of history has a subjective nature, because of the interpretation and imagination that has been done by historians to compile the work of history. Controversy as part of historical work is natural, but it often gets constrained if controversial material is included in the praxis of learning in school. The role of educators is central to the controversial history class. Historical teachers should be able to act as historians of educators, with a vast mastery of historical material. Need a learning method that encourages the creation of critical learning, learners can take positive values in controversial historical learning.

Keywords: *learning history of controversial issues, controversial history, historical relativity*

I. INTRODUCTION

*When history awakens us about differences,
It actually teaches tolerance and freedom.*

- (Francois Caron) -

Basically, History is an event or condition that actually happened. Von Ranke defined history as *wieeseigentlich*, an absolute event; really happening.² Then history will become relative when it is viewed from different point of views. The incidence is absolute, but after being captured and arriving at humanity it becomes relative. Hence the truth of history is a relative truth. Finally, it stimulates a variety of debates and controversy.

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² See Gottschalk, Louis. 2006. *Understanding History*. Jakarta: University of Indonesia Press, p. 39

The problem of relativism which then often trigger the emergence of controversy in historiography cannot be separated from the element of subjectivity in history. Historiography, as a work of history, has a subjective nature, because of the interpretation and imagination that has been done by historians to compile a historical work. An objective history is an event itself or a *historicalierealite*. Therefore, the controversy in historiography becomes "normal" when it is started from the subjective nature, approach, and methodology.

Subjectivity in history becomes a serious matter when it comes to a political interest. If historiography has been dragged into the realm of interest, it become a dilemma for history. And history is often directed by the authorities or created by the majority to support its interests. History is always used as a means to legitimize interests, especially the political interests of the ruler and the majority.³

II. CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN HISTORICAL LEARNING

The historical journey of historiography in Indonesia demonstrates that the openness of the information in the reform era was marked by the fall of the New Order government, shows to a version or interpretation of "official history".⁴ In the teaching-learning praxis, these materials are controversial and polemical regarding to the truth of fact-analysis of

events. These conditions force the students to be more critical thinking, while the teacher as the most important contributor in the learning process is required to answer the acceleration of information culture especially to the historical controversy of learning materials.

The perceptions of some of the controversial historical events today are varied based on limitations in the individual's opinion, and influenced by specific cultural backgrounds. Individual interpretation is inseparable from text, context, interpreter and context. The diversity of interpretations arises when individuals read, hear, see or observe something eventually accumulates and offers a possibility to the world for the individual concerned. Or in the other words, the individual meets the world discover the text, which is seen, heard and observed. Here then comes the renewal of the horizon or the insight of the individual that ultimately establish a perception. Therefore, it is not surprising if the individual's perception of an event is dynamic, changing depends on the organization of the individual in receiving the stimulus.⁵The interpretation can be broad and its appearance cannot be separated from the environment concerning political, social, and cultural conditions.

The emergence of various interpretations or historical versions, in the Movement of 30 September 1965 for example as an example, allegedly has emerged since the reign of the New Order under the leadership of Suharto. The indication of Soeharto's involvement with the September 30th, 1965⁶ Movement caused various interpretations of the September 30, 1965 Movement which are not heard, especially with the various political indoctrinations of the time. Those interpretations only appear during the reform era. However, the truth the September 30th, 1965 Movement is something that has not been discovered its facts and we conclude that the mastermind of the September 30th, 1965 Movement has not been found.

When an individual experiences, receives, reads or hears an event transmitted through text, television or speech, it confronts the world advocated by the existing stimulus with its concrete world. Here then comes the interpretation that determines attitudes and actions. The interpretation means giving the impression, opinion or theoretical view of something. The teacher's perception will eventually create an interpretation. This interpretation will then affect the impression, attitude and delivery of the other individuals.

The interpretation of educators created from perception will have implications for the learning process. Although in certain situation, the interpretation is limited by circumstances, such as the existence of time constraints and the amount of conveyed material. The external stimulus or necessity

of external factors can lead to miss-interpretation to individuals. Time constraints require teachers to condense the material, which determines the teaching method and the teaching process.

III. UNDERSTANDING OF CONTROVERSY ISSUES AND OPTIMIZING THE LEARNING RESOURCES

The history lesson on the controversial topics is mostly appropriate with the discussion method. Controversial historical materials that are still in many interpretations should use learning methods which sharpen the brain and train the critical thinking of students. In addition, the main factor in controversial learning material is educators (teachers) who must be dynamic and actively innovative, educators (teachers) who should have a dialogue and objective attitude so that learners will have an optimum understanding of the material.

Besides, the factor of understanding put a very important role in the learning process. Knowledge will be useless without the support of understanding. Understanding is often understood as the ability to express from what is presented, the ability to translate from one form to another in words as well as other forms of explanation. Understanding becomes very important in learning, understanding becomes one of the benchmarks of success in learning. Learning is said to be successful if learners understand the material taught, and fail if learners do not understand about the material that has been delivered.

According to Anderson and Karthwohl, understanding in the process is divided into seven: interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, and explaining.⁷ In controversial history lessons, at least students' understanding must be guided to the explaining stage. In case of controversy both events and figures, students should be able to explain "why" and "how" which refer to references or teacher explanations as their learning resources.

In other cases, it happens such as the controversy of the 30 September 1965 Movement. The unbreakable event, the student must be able to respond critically. It happens since the student understands the main problem so that the G30S Event and finally it becomes controversial. The available understanding of the event is also proved by the criticisms that the students have made over the historical reference circulating and discussing the G30S 1965 Event.

Sources of information or learning resources role in building students' understanding of the controversial historical material. Educators (teachers) are still the main source of information, then some other media such as books, newspapers, internet, and some of them are discussion groups. These sources of information will contribute to a profound effect on

students' perceptions and understanding. In the teaching learning process, teachers and students need a textbook as a reference material. Learning is a systemic process that includes many components, one of which is the source of learning. Learning resources have a function in the process as well as directly or indirect teaching activities, the learners will add from the environment and facilitate themselves at the time of teaching exist.

Through planned and unplanned learning resources, learning activities that occur become more effective and efficient to achieve instructional goals. Learning resources contribute a great benefit. Students experience the learning directly and concretely. Learning properties are able to add and expand the existing exposure in the classroom. Students are also able to capture accurate and up-to-date information through their learning resources. The information then helps them in solving learning problems. If the problem in learning is solved, then positive motivation will automatically appear and can stimulate to think and develop further.

The limited information that students get from their teachers in the classroom will be overcome through varied learning resources. Through the learning resources they use, students are able to reduce the control of educators (teachers) who deliver their learning rigidly and traditionally, and are able to provide opportunities for students to develop according to their abilities. The learning resources can reduce one of the problems in learning history, such as the verbal and abstract learning gap with concrete reality.

Student obstacles in understanding the controversy history material is caused by the inappropriateness of learning with the conditions that developed in the community. Basically, education is part of a culture that always faces the challenges of the times. Education will be a never-ending process and it will affect to every individual development and social development of its society.

Regarding to the problem of historiography in Indonesia, such as the controversy in some history materials, Bambang Purwanto divided into 11 main problems. Some of which relate to controversial history and its learning praxis in that there is no fundamental change in the curriculum, the material being taught, and the method of learning in education for the historian.⁸ Curriculum, materials, and methods become important aspects to train students to be aware of the philosophy and reality of historiography problems.

The feeling of afraid and confusion faced in historical learning to the controversial historiography becomes a serious matter. According to Bambang Purwanto, the situation will not happen if academic historians in universities and professional organizations

historians in general provide adequate response when the community experiencing historiography disorientation.⁹ The disorientation that occurs in society in general are the campus community, against the controversial historiography shows an acute problem in historical understanding, more than philosophical-methodological in historical understanding.

The influences of practical politics in Indonesian historiography should be minimized, especially when it interferes with historical objectivity. The process of education should be avoided from interest of momentary practical politics. The existence of political interests in education is clearly on the contrary to the philosophy and essence of historical learning. The teaching of history is not merely the transfer of cognitive and memorizing events, but the teaching of history must be meaningful for the actualization of social life.

History education in Higher Education should be prepared to conduct analysis as a scientist. Principally, controversial historical themes may lead the students to think creatively and critically. Furthermore, the learning should be democratic, pluralistic, open and explorative towards studies.

IV. CONCLUSION

A complex educational issues require educators to be more creative, dynamic in dealing with educational issues. Moreover, educators are in strategic positions who role as a history teacher should have extensive knowledge of the field of science being taught and able to choose appropriate teaching and learning strategies.¹⁰ Furthermore, a teacher should have a broad knowledge of humanity and cultural issues as well as devotion to change and truth.

Learning history viewed from the purpose and its function is divided into two, namely empirical history and normative history. Empirical history presents an academic historical substance (for scientific purposes). Normatively presents the history selected according to the value and meaning in accordance with the normative objectives and national education objectives. Therefore, history lesson should at least contain two missions, namely; (1) for intellectual education, and (2), values education, humanitarian education, education of morality, identity, nationalism and national identity. This is also emphasized in the book by Tsabit Azinar Ahmad entitled "Controversial History in Indonesia viewed from Educational Perspective", that the controversy of a historical material in the teaching praxis should cover two of the historical missions. The difference in history is not without a reason, as stated by Sorbonne University historian Francois Caron, he says, "When

history awakens us to differences, it actually teaches tolerance and freedom."¹¹

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