

## **Against All odds: Post World War II Liberal Arts in Germany and its comparison in Indonesia**

### **Abstract:**

Liberal-arts is very important for giving *studium generale* towards every students from different background. This paper is elaborating comparison between German and Indonesian teaching on liberal-arts. The essential pillars of German liberal-arts are humanism, ethics, and holocaust commemoration. It should be keep in mind, that nurturing pattern between Germany and Indonesia are very different, because it has a different cultural background. Applying German liberal-arts into our curriculum definitely need a comprehension toward our own culture.

Keyword: liberal-arts, humanism, holocaust, ethics, nurture

### **Introduction**

The Educational Curriculum in our country are desperately in needs for a general curriculum, which break down the barrier of 'epistemological arrogance'. Liberal arts teaching is one of the option. However, some Indonesian University, for example University of Indonesia, are already beginning to teach Liberal arts to each of its students. How is the implementation of Liberal arts in other country? We are going to elaborate, How Germany permeates its liberal arts values into its Educational system and possibly implement their advantages into out own.

### **Liberal Arts in German University: Humanism since pre-University.**

liberal arts denotes college or university curriculum, which aimed at imparting general knowledge and developing general intellectual capacities in contrast to a professional, vocational, or technical curriculum. The implementation in Germany is different from other Western country, because Germany don't have distinct college of Liberal arts until 1999. Until now, Liberal-arts college is a distinctive US-based concept, and its is considered foreign in Europe until 90s.

Liberal arts in German is called 'Sieben Freie Kuenste' or translated loosely as 'Seven Free Arts'. In the middle-ages, German University is teaching Liberal arts as a means of giving *studium generale* to the 4 available faculty (Philosophy, Theology, Law, and Medicine). However, after middle-ages until now, Liberal-arts in German University are not taught anymore. Based on writers own experience in attending lecture for Bachelor and Master level in Department of Computer Science, University of Leipzig, there was no any single lecture about liberal arts. At least there is no any of it in any Natural-Science based faculty. However, How could Germans grasp the very meaning of Humanism, which only be possible by learning Liberal-arts? The answer lies in their school teaching.

As a nation with strong humanism tradition, teaching in German school is always centered on Student. 'Tiger Mom' concept, which elaborated by Amy Chua, is considered foreign in German pedagogy. Different from Indonesian School, which emphasized on winning gold medal in Science Olympiad, German School never

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emphasized on any Olympic achievement. Its only considered optional, and it won't make much effect when German wants to pursue their career later on. Even working as a scientist in German University or Industry, winning Science Olympic is not considered obligatory. Society as a whole never giving pressure toward German student to be 'over-achiever', like 'Tiger Mom' ones. The irony is, Amy Chua's concept is very close to Nietzsche's overman (Ueberschensch). If we take a closer look on German society, Nietzsche's overman is definitely an alien concept, because German tends not to be an over-achiever.

One thing is also different, is attending religious subject is not obligatory. Students are free to choose attending Catholic, Protestant, or Ethics subject. A lot of German students choose to attend Ethics, because their parents (and themselves) are refrained for receiving subject in religion. Of course, this doesn't mean that Indonesia could simply imitate this rather secular outlook. I just giving explanation about education in German school. The Ethics subject in Germany were comprised of learning philosophy. It's basically philosophy for students, and a stream-lined version of different interpretation and application of Ethics. I won't elaborate more about it, because it needs a dedicated article to discuss it.

The horror of world war II has taught Germany a lot. The brutality of Nazi regime has left their country totally devastated, and millions of people died. Genocide/Holocaust toward the Jewish people were the most shameful trauma in German history. In order to prevent that for happening again, German school are teaching the lessons about Holocaust. One of the manifestation, is by visiting the deserted concentration camp. One important one is in Buchenwald, at the state of Thuringia. This visitation is very important to the student, in order to commemorate the brutality of Nazi regime. Just recently, some German school are having collaboration with Anne Frank foundation, by distributing comics about Holocaust. This is very important for them in telling how evil Holocaust is, and emphasizing them that the prominence of humanism.

One other important thing in German school curriculum is by creating a common history subject with Polish school. Why is it important? Because its related (again) with Nazi regime trauma. In 1945, Germany lost four of it important states to Poland. They are *Pommern*, *West Preussen*, *Ost Preussen*, and *Schlesien*. Based on agreement between USA, UK, France, and Soviet Union, those four states were given to Poland. However, this agreement definitely caused trouble. More than 10 million refugees were flooding to Germany (Vertreibung), and causing humanitarian difficulties. Because of these burden (Western) Germany refused to recognize the Oder-Neisse Line, which separate (Eastern) Germany and its former four States in Poland. However, (Eastern) Germany already recognized it as early as 1950. In a course of time, as a condition of German reunion in 1990, Now Germany has already recognized Oder-Neisse Line. After Germany and Poland signed the Schengen agreement, the border control between two countries were lifted in 2007. This caused the citizens of both countries to move freely to its neighbors, without visa or specific permission. Common history subject in German-Polish school is crucial, to emphasize the importance of perpetual peace between both nations. This improvement will give positive aspect of toleration between two nation. Peace and toleration are definitely two important pillars of

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Liberal-arts.

So, Humanism, Ethics, Holocaust Commemoration are three pillar which taught to the German students from the very beginning (pre-University). German School curriculum considered these pillars are equal to liberal-arts teaching. This condition made teaching Liberal-arts in German University not obligatory. In this respect, is there any German University which has anything to do with liberal-arts?

### **German Liberal Art in Practice**

As I already mentioned before, there is no special Liberal arts course in Department of Computer Science, University of Leipzig, Germany ,nor in any other Natural Science based faculty. However, Germany do have Liberal-arts college. It is called 'European College of Liberal Arts' (ECLA), and it's located in Berlin.

The **European College of Liberal Arts (ECLA)** is a private, non-profit institution of higher education in Berlin,Germany. The college is one of the rare educational institutions in Europe that makes the liberal arts idea into reality. In October 2009 a new 4-year programme was introduced at the European College of Liberal Arts leading to the Bachelor of Arts degree. Students completing the programme receive a B.A. in Value Studies and concentrate in two of the following three areas: Art and Aesthetics, Ethics and Political Theory, Literature and Rhetoric. It is the first degree programme structured around the concept of value. However, beside its regular program, ECLA do have some special program. It has extension course in Liberal-arts, a one year course program, and guest lecturer program. Although its curriculum are definitely interesting and prospective, it is still to early to evaluate the extend of ECLA contribution in Education and Society. We are still waiting for the completeness of its Bachelor Program, before we can make any meaningful assessment.

### **Quo Vadis Indonesia: Is it possible just to 'copy-paste' from the west?**

We should immediately realize, that there is Difference of Nurturing Pattern between 'Eastern Collectivism' and 'Western Individualism'. What does it means? Of course, its a generalization, albeit a useful one. The difference of nurturing pattern could not be confused, because they are very specific to each culture.

Possible application: Integrate German Humanism (Luther, Nietzsche, and Bonhoeffer), Ethics (Kant), and Historical Commemoration (Holocaust) into our liberal arts curriculum. This only made possible after major modification, because not every one of them is compatible with our cultural heritage. Iqbal is one humanist example, graduated from Germany, but a devout Muslim and spiritualist. He learnt the best from both worlds, the east and the west. In my

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opinion, the most viable application in Indonesian University curriculum is to give a modification of 'Introduction of Philosophy' course towards the students in every major, and rebranding it as 'liberal-arts course'. This course is already taught in humanistic, language, or social sciences based major. However, its surely still lacking in the natural-science based ones. Of course, the course it self should be different than ordinary philosophy introduction, because one of the essential goals is to uphold the appreciation among students with different major.

We cannot make 'apple-to-apple' comparison between German and Indonesian University, because in German University, Liberal Arts is not considered obligatory, and expected to be taught in pre-University level (at School). Moreover, It is impossible to evaluate the extend of Liberal-arts teaching in Indonesian University, because it is still to early to make any conclusion on its effectivity.

Liberal-arts teaching is not wasting time. Being a worker in a corporation is not just about having skill related to his/her jobs, but also to gain wisdom and wishful thinking on how to cope with 'cull-de-sac' dilemma. Being pragmatic in our jobs, doesn't mean we can't be a wise person. Wise person is expected to help each other, care with his/her surroundings, and having sympathy or even empathy toward his colleague's problems. This kind of wisdom could be gained by liberal Arts teaching.

Liberal Arts is totally different with religious teaching, because it could be attended by anybody, regardless of its religious background. As an example, Kantian Ethics doesn't need any religious background. However, it doesn't mean that Liberal Arts replace religious teaching. It is here to promote religious tolerance, and pluralism. It is possible, to incorporate some elements of 'comparative religious studies' in Liberal Arts curriculum, so we could comprehend the different religious expression of each religion. This is definitely not formulated to degenerate the students' faith, it is even to promote it and make it even stronger by appreciating plurality.

## **Conclusion**

Liberal-arts in Germany has been taught as early as in their school years. It is primarily based on three pillars: humanism, ethics, and Holocaust commemoration. Only one established liberal-arts college in Germany, ECLA. Applying German's experience with liberal-arts to our own without any modification it is not wise, and a modification of 'introduction of philosophy' course could be rebranded as liberal arts. Comprehending liberal-arts could support the students to be wise workers. Liberal-arts teaching could supplement religious teaching.

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