

THE PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF CHILDREN FROM MULTICULTURAL FAMILIES IN SOUTH KOREA¹

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Abstrak

Dalam artikel ini, dideskripsikan mengenai masalah dan tantangan anak-anak dari keluarga multikultural di Korea Selatan. Subjek penelitian adalah anak-anak (usia prasekolah—sekolah dasar) dari keluarga multikultural (Korea dan Indonesia) yang menetap di Korea. Objek penelitian kualitatif ini adalah masalah dan tantangan yang mereka hadapi. Data yang didapatkan dideskripsikan dan dianalisis kemudian disampaikan dengan metode deksriptif. Permasalahan yang dihadapi oleh anak-anak dari keluarga multikultural tersebut umumnya lebih kepada budaya Indonesia. Mereka hampir tidak mendapatkan masalah dengan kehidupan sosial budaya Korea karena tumbuh dan berkembang dalam masyarakat sosial dan kebudayaan Korea. Beberapa perbedaan dan kesulitan dapat atasi dengan bantuan lembaga sosial yang disediakan oleh pemerintah Korea untuk keluarga multikultural. Dengan demikian, tantangan yang mereka hadapi adalah memahami dua budaya yang melatarbelakangi mereka, yaitu budaya Korea dan Indonesia secara seimbang.

Kata kunci: anak-anak keluarga multikultural, Korea, Indonesia

Abstract

In this article, the problems and challenges of children from multicultural families in South Korea are described. The research subjects were the children (preschool-elementary school ages) from multicultural families (Korean and Indonesian) who settled in Korea. The objects of this qualitative study are the problems and challenges that they face. The data obtained are described and analyzed and then presented with descriptive methods. The problems faced by the children of multicultural families are generally more to the Indonesian culture. They almost did not get the problems with the Korean social and culture life because they grow and develop in Korean social society and culture. They can overcome some of the differences and difficulties with the help of social institutions provided by the Korean government for multicultural families. Thus, the challenge that they face is to equally understand both of their background cultures, the Korean and Indonesian.

Keywords: *children of multicultural families, Korea, Indonesia*

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage among different ethnic groups (hereinafter referred to multicultural families) certainly has its own problems and challenges. This mixture can create the cultural assimilation and also the physical shapes that are different with other children in general. The children who are born in these multicultural families (especially from different race) certainly have a rich cultural experience.

In South Korea, the number of children from multicultural families is increased every year. Marriage among different ethnic groups is increasing in Korea today, especially marriages between Korean with other nations, either with Asian, European, or American. Korean natives are people who come from the same ethnic group, namely the Han. That marriage creates the multicultural in this ginseng country.

The increasing number of multicultural families in South Korea could not be separated from industrial development factors. After the end of the Korean War in the 1950s, industry in Korea was begin and continued to grow rapidly so that created the job opportunities very broadly for the Korean and Asian society, including Indonesia. Thus, Korea is one of the countries in Asia which has become the destination of the migrants to get jobs since the 1980s (Kim, 2013).

There are migrants who are married with the Koreans. The 84% of foreigners who are married to Korean citizens are female and 46% of them change their citizenship to be a Korean citizen (Kang, 2013). In addition, there are Korean citizens who are settled in other countries and get married to the local residents. Some of them end up choosing Korea as a residence.

There are also many migrants in Korea who come from Indonesia. Moreover, since the bilateral agreement between the Government of Indonesia and Korea in August 2005 was existed, the Indonesian labors were began to be deployed to Korea (Pudjiastuti, 2013)—although the cooperation between these two countries has been initiated 40 years ago. Indonesian citizens in Korea are not only workers, but also consist of professionals, businessmen, students, and others.

Based on data from the Korean Ministry of Justice in 2011, the number of Indonesian citizens who are lived in South Korea was as many as 36.971 persons, consisted of 30.760 men and 6.211 women. That number increased in 2012 as many as 38.018 persons. From that number, there were citizens who got married to the Korean citizens that were 506 persons in 2011 and 524 persons in 2012 increasingly.

Generally, those Indonesian and Korean couples chose to live in Korea. The children of these multicultural families grow and develop like the children of their age. However, sometimes they have physical and non-physical characteristics that are different from Korean children of non-multicultural families. These differences sometimes cause problems and challenges.

Therefore, the problems and challenges of children from multicultural families in South Korea are described in this article. The research subjects were the children (preschool-elementary school ages) from multicultural families (Korean

and Indonesian) who settled in Korea. The objects of this qualitative study are the problems and challenges that they face. The data collected by interviewing multicultural families. The data obtained are described and analyzed and then presented with descriptive methods.

CHILDREN FROM MULTICULTURAL FAMILIES IN SOUTH KOREA

Basically, every child has different competencies based on the culture devices, communication systems, and values that they used to receive (Rogoff in McDevitt, 2010). Moreover, the children from multicultural families already have a fundamental cultural experiences and communication systems diversity in their daily life. They have systems and cultural more than children who are not from multicultural families.

As mentioned at the beginning, since the industry in Korea was increased, the number of foreigner in Korea is also increasing from year to year. As the implication, the number of multicultural families among Koreans with other citizens with significant different backgrounds is also increasing. One is the marriage with Indonesian citizens.

Then, since the bilateral agreement between the Government of Indonesia and Korea in August 2005 was existed, the Indonesian labors were began to be deployed to Korea (Pudjiastuti, 2013)—although the cooperation between these two countries has been initiated 40 years ago. Indonesian citizens in Korea are not only workers, but also consist of professionals, businessmen, students, and others. However, the number of workers or labors is more dominant.

Then, based on data from the Korean Ministry of Justice in 2011, the number of Indonesian citizens who are lived in South Korea was as many as 36.971 persons, consisted of 30.760 men and 6.211 women. That number increased in 2012 as many as 38.018 persons. There is a rapidly growing even when compared with the number of Indonesian migrants in 1991 that were only 128 people.

Although the number of Indonesian male workers is greater than the female workers, actually there are a lot of female workers who are married to Korean citizens. From 506 Indonesian workers in 2011, 55 of them were male workers and 451 of them were female workers. Likewise in 2012, there are 57 male workers and 467 female workers. This is of course motivated by the social phenomenon in Korea, such as Korean women's high demands and high work ethic of Korean men so they often too late to find a wife and eventually choose to marrying women from other countries who are more willing to accept them as they are (<http://www.korea4expats.com/>).

In general, these multicultural families choose to stay in Korea for several reasons, such the economical, education, and social facilities reasons. Moreover, Korea is one of the developed countries which counted as a country that has strong economical condition in Asia and Korea is also a donator country which is able to donate other developing countries.

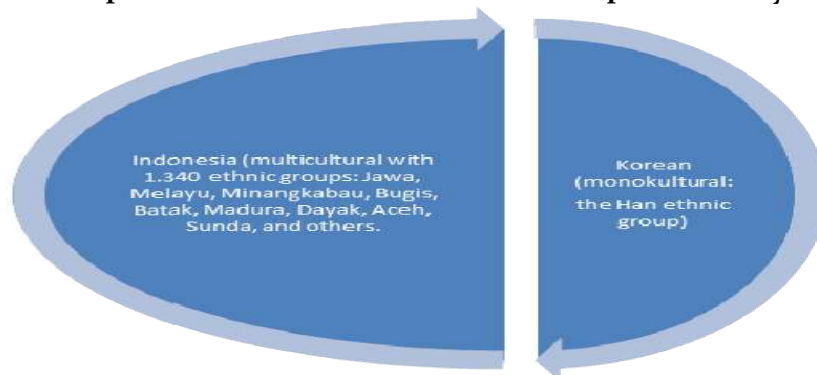
This assimilation would cause problems and challenges for them because of the different cultural backgrounds including inherent habits and sometimes accompanied by religious differences. Therefore, the Korean government issued a policy that regulates the multicultural marriage including its social problems. That policy is also supported by the existence of institutions that provide various types of services for various complaints and problems faced by multicultural families, especially from foreign women who are married to Korean citizens. These services are spread in various regions of Korea and the interactive services via the telephone and internet are also available.

The provided services start from the pre marriage, such as language, culture, and social life training for the bride and groom. The services are also available for complaints and domestic problems in the family. Even the services are also provided for Korean language and culture teaching for the mother and child with a door to door system. So, a volunteer will visit the multicultural family house to give free services.

At the kindergarten and elementary school, the Korean government also provides special services for multicultural families, especially for the mothers who are not Korean citizens. The guidance is expected to help the children from multicultural families to socialize with children from local non-multicultural Korean families (Korean parents).

A lot of children from Korean-Indonesian multicultural families have different physical characteristics compared with other children. This is because Korean and Indonesian come from a different race. Korean people come from same ethnic group, namely the Han and have races with yellow skin (http://world.kbs.co.kr/indonesian/korea/korea_aboutpeople.htm). Meanwhile, Indonesians consist of various ethnic groups with very different physical characteristics. Indonesia consists of 1,340 ethnic groups with physical characteristics that are also different.

Comparison of Indonesian and Korean Peoples Diversity



Many children of Korean-Indonesian multicultural families come from the Korean and Javanese (one of the ethnic groups in Indonesia) marriages. In addition, it is also found the marriage with the Sunda, Minang, Bali, and others ethnic groups. Then, it is also found the Chinese descent who had become an Indonesian

citizen married to a Korean. Of course their descendants do not have different physical characteristics.

Generally, children from Korean-Indonesian multicultural families have very different characteristics from Korean children, which have darker skin color and larger eyes. Genetically, the children are given birth with different physical characteristics with the children from the non-multicultural families. These children sometimes have darker skin color and larger eyes.

In terms of cultural and social system, sometimes they have differences with their peers. Moreover, these differences existed at children whose mothers are Indonesian and they are not living with their father's big family, as well as grow and develop closer to the mother's parenting style. Of course, mothers also have cultural and social system influences for children. However, based on the results of the study, the social environment influences are much higher in terms of language and habits.

Thus, these children have Korean language ability that is much better than their mother language. In fact, many of them who could not speak their mother native language that is Indonesian language (especially their mother regional languages such as Javanese, Sundanese, and others). So are the habits in terms of culture and food. The children from multicultural families are more familiar with Korean culture and food. However, for the issue of religion, they generally have the same religion as the mother.

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF CHILDREN FROM MULTICULTURAL FAMILIES (KOREAN-INDONESIAN) IN SOUTH KOREA

The rapidly increasing number of foreigners in South Korea as much as twice over the past 10 years makes multicultural trends in this country rapidly developing (http://world.kbs.co.kr/indonesian/news/news_Dm_detail.htm?lang=i&id=dm&No=31047¤t_page=21). Thus, the problems faced by children from multicultural families were also less than the previous time.

Until 2010, South Korea was still strong as the "Hermit Kingdom" and the parents opposed the marriage with other nations to retain Korean pure blood. (http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/n_feature/2010/11/19/23/4901000000AEN20101119007100315F.HTML?33463680). It certainly has an impact on the treatment to children from multicultural families. The children from multicultural families are often faced with social problems such as social intercourse with friends at school and their social environment.

At that time, multicultural children have physical problems because they are different from Korean children in general. The absence of the multicultural curriculum at that time added their problems because the pure-blooded Korean children have an anxiety because of these differences (<http://buahatikusurgaku.blogspot.kr/2013/01/fenomena-mixmarried-di-korea-selatan.html>). The rejections are often occurred that manifested by the unpleasant actions such as "bullying" from the non-multicultural children to the multicultural children.

However, the Korean government continues to improve the situation by issuing some policies to protect the rights of those children from multicultural families. Korean government provides services to the various complaints and problems that faced by multicultural families, especially from foreign women who are married to Korean citizens. These services are spread in various regions of Korea and the interactive services via the telephone and internet are also available as already explained in Section 2.

In fact, the Korean government has issued the latest rules regarding multicultural wedding by adding some requirements for Korean citizens who wants to marry other countries citizens and want to live in Korea. Some of these requirements are the grooms (Korean citizens) must have a minimum income of 14,79 million Won per year and the brides (others countries citizens) must be able to speak Korean more than the beginner level (http://world.kbs.co.kr/Indonesian/news/news_Dm_detail.htm?No=31186).

Economic income and better language skills are expected to reduce social problems. In addition, the Korean society also continued to improve the understanding of multiculturalism. Moreover, the number of foreigners in Korea is increasing from time to time. Tolerance for diversity has become a daily matter for most Koreans. The ability of English as an international language is also higher in Korea thus simplifying the communication.

Along with that, based on the results of study on children and parents of Korean-Indonesian multicultural families that lived in Korea, the problems of their children in terms of physical and social characteristics hardly found anymore at this time. These children do not feel discriminated, but they feel getting more attention by the special guidance from the government. That special guidance is in the form of a personal Korean language and culture course at the home by the government volunteers.

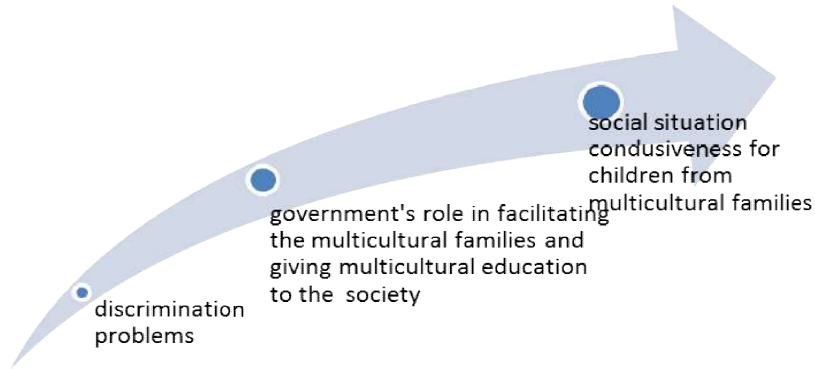
The problem they face is just about religious issue. The multicultural children who become the subject of this study particularly are Korean-Indonesian multicultural children which many of them are Moslems. The problem they face is in terms of getting formal Islamic education at schools because schools in Korea do not include religious education into the formal curriculum. So, they have to learn that at the center of Islamic studies such as mosques, one of which is in the I Tae Won, Seoul City. Meanwhile, no such study centers throughout the region as Moslems in Korea less than 1 %. Therefore, religious education is very dependent on their parents.

In addition, they generally have problems in terms of food in the school cafeteria menu. There is not available kosher food in the school cafeteria. So, they have to provide their own kosher food. According to their parents, this is not a crucial problem because they can handle it.

The crucial problem for children's development is the discrimination of their physical and cultural backgrounds. However, this problem has vanished along with the increasing number of expatriates in South Korea and the Koreans have better

understanding about multiculturalism. Even if there are problems, it is not in an alarming number.

Social Conditions Scheme of Children from Multicultural Families in South Korea



Social phenomena are not always predictable and are not stable. Therefore, this condition will be maintained uncertainly. To maintain stable social conditions, it needs preventive actions against the unwanted conflict. These preventive actions should be done together by all society elements, starting from the family, educational institutions, to the government.

Although the Korean government continues to improve facing the increasing number of multicultural marriage—such as the launching of the annual handbook for multicultural families who lived in South Korea by the Seoul City Government printed in 10 languages, namely English, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog (Philippines), Mongolian, Khmer (Cambodia), Russian and Thailand (http://world.kbs.co.kr/indonesian/news/news_Dm_detail.htm?lang=i&id=Dm&N0=32229¤t_page=2), the parent role in guiding children is much more important. Conducive social environment could not fully handle the problems and challenges of children from multicultural families, but the parentrole in directing and guiding children in quality time is more important (Amini, 2011).

In line with Thompson’s opinion, a strong knowledge of the culture is a basic tool in solving the problems that arise due to cultural differences (1992:237). Thus, cultural knowledge is really needed by children from multicultural families in facing their social environment. That knowledge certainly must be obtained starting from the smallest social environment that is family. Every parent must tell their children about their culture and gives understanding about the differences of theirboth cultures.

Not only the children from multicultural families who should have knowledge about multiculturalism. Other children who do not come from multicultural families should also be given the multicultural education so they do not have the wrong perception about the differences. Moreover, Korea is a developed country whichits number of expatriates is increasing from year to year.

These children from multicultural families have their own challenges. One of the biggest challenges is to preserveboth of their parent cultures. They were born

from two different cultures, although raised in a particular cultural community. However, the cultural background of their parents would be part of their life.

One of their biggest challenges is to maintain the knowledge and ability to apply elements from their cultural background, both Korean and Indonesian culture (either one of the cultures that exist in Indonesia). These two cultures is clearly a different culture.

One of the culture elements that are very important is language. The challenge for children from multicultural families is in terms of mastering the languages behind them. Good skills in multilingual certainly will become an added value for them in the future. Moreover, cooperation relationship between Korea and Indonesia continues to increase every year. The job market at Korea and Indonesia needs workers who have skill in these both languages.

Meanwhile, most of the children from multicultural families are grown and developed in a non-multicultural social environment. Their multicultural social environment is just on a family environment because they study and socialize at one of their parents environments, such as at Korea (except for those who do not settle in one of parent origin country). So, the challenge for the children from multicultural families is to understand the both parent culture equally in order to be able to socialize well in both parent family environments.

Proper handling of problems and challenges of children from multicultural families is by creating conducive social situations. Conducive social situations will arise in the presence of mutual understanding and tolerance from all society elements in that social environment. The existence of South Korea government efforts in accommodating and facilitating multicultural families nowadays is one of the key of multicultural family harmonies (especially Korea-Indonesia) in Korea. In addition, community awareness gained from an understanding of the culture diversity existence is also an important factor. Particularly, the parent efforts in guiding children based on strong culture knowledge can reduce social conflict on children from multicultural families.

CONCLUSION

The children from multicultural families basically already have cultural experiences diversity and communication systems diversity in their daily life. Children from multicultural families (Korea-Indonesia) tend to have different physical characteristics from other children because of Korean and Indonesian come from different races. Korean people come from same ethnic group, namely the Han and have races with a yellow skin. Meanwhile, Indonesians consist of various ethnic groups with very different physical characteristics. Indonesia consists of 1,340 ethnic groups with physical characteristics that are also different. These children often have darker skin color and larger eyes.

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