

# YOGYAKARTA AND DETERMINING FACTORS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION PREFERENCE

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Yogyakarta, 11 November 2017 – Perception tends to influence one's attitude and, in educational sphere, it may possibly shape one's study preference. At the tertiary level, we observed that 'where' to enrol recurrently became more important than 'what' to study. It is an example of how influential the perception is in study option.

There has been a widely shared perception in Indonesia that the City of Yogyakarta is connotative with education. The capital of the Yogyakarta Special Administrative Region is also called *Kota Pelajar* (The City of Students). For many Indonesian parents and secondary school children, it has been one of the most favourite destinations for tertiary study. In other words, Yogyakarta is like the eye – borrowing the notion of an American essayist, Henry David Thoreau – that is a jewel of most desired places to embark upon university studies.

Beside to Bandung, Jakarta or Bogor, some of our relatives – hailing from Sumatra – have preferred to send their children to various higher education institutions in Yogyakarta. When asked about where their children have gone for tertiary education they surely would answer Yogyakarta proudly. It is no longer relevant which university or polytechnic their children attended amid the hundreds of public and private higher education institutions mushrooming in the city. It seems Yogyakarta has not only become a quasi-symbol of future assurance for the young generation, but also as a source of pride for the families. Parallel perception has been also considerable amongst parents from outside Java or the outer islands. As an addition, based on our data from 2013 most of the Indonesian School of The Hague's graduates, who decided to pursue undergraduate programmes in Indonesia, have indeed studied in Yogyakarta. Undoubtedly, above all, they have gone to the University of Gajah Mada.

## Perception Determiners

The public perception of Yogyakarta as the City of Students has been nurtured by many aspects. The refinement of such perceptive understanding has naturally taken many decades, and in certain extent was inseparable from the nationalist struggle for Indonesian independence. From this perspective, we can identify at least six leading factors that we discuss further down. First, it is **Ki Hajar Dewantara Factor**. Ki Hajar Dewantara was himself an aristocrat of the

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Yogyakarta royal house. Later he changed his upper-class name Raden Mas Soewardi Soeryaningrat into what he is known today as a gesture to praise equality amongst peoples. He organised the first congress of Budi Utomo – one of earliest political societies during the Dutch colonialism – in Yogyakarta in 1908. In 1913, he wrote ‘If I were a Dutchman’ (*‘Als ik een Nederlander was’*) to protest Dutch East Indies Government’s policy to burden their native subjects in commemorating the centennial anniversary of The Netherlands liberation from the brief French occupation, and established the Taman Siswa in 1922 to cater education for the native masses. Moreover, a phrase of the slogan he created as the education philosophy of the Taman Siswa, *Tut Wuri Handayani*, has been used as the motto of Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture. The interplays between the roles of Ki Hajar Dewantara in the context of education and the struggle for Indonesian independence, as well as the nationalistic stride he adopted left a respected feature within Indonesian education. This fact therefore connotes Ki Hajar Dewantara and education with Yogyakarta.

The second drive is the **University of Gajah Mada (UGM) Factor**. Established in 1949, the UGM is one of the oldest, largest, best ranking, and most prestigious public research universities in Indonesia. The UGM enrolled about 55,000 students either as bachelors or as postgraduates, 1,187 international students, and 2,500 faculty members (Universitas Gajah Mada, 2013). Plentiful prominent and leading figures in various fields of profession and levels of authority graduated from the UGM. To name a few are the current Indonesian head of state, President Joko Widodo, cabinet ministers, and so forth. Like 28 other established universities in Yogyakarta, the UGM is located in Sleman, a regency northwest border of Yogyakarta Special Administrative Region. However, it remains denoting Yogyakarta. In the mind of the Indonesian public, the UGM has become synonymous and bestowed substantial weight to Yogyakarta.

Thirdly, it is the **Affordability Factor**. For many parents, funding university study of their offspring has not been a painless undertaking. Although the trend might change, however, Yogyakarta has been able to maintain its modest living expenses compared to other urbanised cities. According to an economic survey of the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics in 2016, Yogyakarta was ranked the ninth in term of per capita expenditure. However, it did not classify clearly the category of expenditures. Financially speaking it is still relatively affordable in terms of student housing, transportation and food. Even though the prices are mounting everywhere, nevertheless, if projected toward quality education it offers, Yogyakarta remains appealing to many. This affordability element has attracted students from all parts of Indonesia to study in Yogyakarta. This pattern of wide-ranging geographical student intakes has contributed to the

diverse ethnic and socio-economy backgrounds of the students who landed in Yogyakarta.

The fourth issue is the **Cultural Factor**. A Lonely Planet writer, Stuart Butler (2014) dubbed Yogyakarta as the cultural and spiritual capital of Java. It is a proper appreciation of how refined Yogyakarta is as the centre of Javanese culture and spirituality. I am not a Javanese spectator although a limited *ngoko* version of the language seems comprehensible to me; yet I sensed that the Javanese language spoken in Yogyakarta is the refined versions and could be heard widely in the public. From the cultural relativity viewpoint, the way the Yogyakartaans behave and the nonverbal gestures they use in daily life is amazing. Another cultural feat of Yogyakarta is its ability to mesmerise the diverse cultural background of the newcomers to grow as Yogyakartaans culturally. However, a parent of our alumnae who is himself a professor of Economics at the UGM told me such cultural factor has played a part in nurturing a habit that his students to become less assertive or outspoken although they were in fact very capable and grasp superbly the substance of the topics being discussed. In Dutch this humble inclination and uneasiness to stand taller than the rest is usually called the *bescheidenheid*.

It was true that the release of a virginity survey report by the Institute of Love and Humanity Studies and the Training Center for Business and Humanities caused a wide outcry in 2002 as they claimed 97.5% of female students in Yogyakarta had lost their virginity (T. Sudiarno, *The Jakarta Post*, 14/08/2002). However, the publication received complaints from many eminent and prominent figures as containing error and methodologically weak up to a deliberate act to entice a sort of social tremor or distrust of Yogyakarta image of the City of Students. Shortly it did shake the reputation, but in due course, it failed toppling it.

The next reason is the **Sultan Factor**. Along the historical line of Indonesian formation, the Yogyakarta Sultanate deserves the highest respect. Immediately after the proclamation of independence, Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX wrote to Sukarno of his support and conceding Yogyakarta Sultanate as part of the new republic. This special relationship with the Yogyakarta Palace has cemented the trust of the republican leaders to move the capital of the Republic of Indonesia from Jakarta to Yogyakarta in 1946-1948. Although administratively Yogyakarta is equivalent to a province, nonetheless, the Sultan remains as the informal and formal leader; he is highly honoured by its people more than a governor is. A society with functioning patronage and respected leadership tends to flourish orderly. A place where social order prevailing would give a peaceful mind to the inhabitants, thus an ideal place to carry out any scholarship activities.

Finally, it is the **Environment Factor**. Situated in the southern coast of Java and to the north toward the slope of Mount Merapi and the island's chain of mountains, Yogyakarta has a temperate climate. It is relatively warm in the low-level topography although not as tepid as similar geographical spots in Sumatra for instance, and mild and pleasant temperature if you move farther north. The surroundings are still fresh, green, clean, functioning sewerage system, and the landscape is splendid. As many of the campuses are located in Sleman, the environment is graciously accommodating for studying.

### **Latest Developments**

I visited Yogyakarta as a freshman in 1992. Since then I have never revisited the place. Fortunately, selected as a finalist of the National Pop-science Writing Competition organised by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, November 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>, 2017, has allowed me to visit Yogyakarta for the second time. In more than a quarter of century, I noticed many changes. Modernity seemed to have taken tighter grip along those many years.

Among the changes was that congestions occurred more frequently especially at certain roads and junctions, and at certain times: working rush hours, picking-up schoolchildren, and weekends. A go-car driver told me the trend of congested roads in the weekends had taken place since 2015 as Yogyakarta becoming a more tempting holiday's destination for tourists from other cities.

I spotted as well that many of the cars drivers were young. I suspected, they might be students in Yogyakarta. If it is the case, it suggested there had been a departure from the past in which Yogyakarta's students preferred to live modestly. An informant also reported that the arrangement of student housing in Yogyakarta has also changed. In the past, students used to rent rooms in family houses. They became part of the families. In this context, the interactions were not like between the tenants and proprietors, but rather like between parents and children or between the relatives. Through this kind of interactions, the acquisition of Yogyakarta version of Javanese proceeded much smoother and naturally better.

In general, as luck would have it, the traditional – physical and social – features stayed in place and blended peacefully with the avant-gardism. This exceptional combination of two adverse realities seemed to gleam as a branding for Yogyakarta. How long it could sustain its position as the City of Students in the public perception would depend on its resilience to evolve seeking the steadiness between offering quality education, managing the affordability, and the future

challenges. In other words, how could it stand its preceding success in raising humble yet talented *ambtenaren* who are in service across the country and beyond would rest on Yogyakarta's competence to strike the balance between the 'old' and the 'now'. At the end, the outcome of Yogyakarta's endeavour to find the middle ground would dictate whether it goes feasible to generate the fragrant educational 'nectar' to keep on attractive to tertiary 'honeybees', or not.